



**Department of Political and Social Sciences**

# **A Political Bond in Europe**

**Jonathan White**

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to obtaining the degree of  
Doctor of Political and Social Sciences of the European University Institute

Florence, November 2007

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# Abstract

This thesis explores a new way to conceptualise political community in the contemporary European context. Its point of departure is the normative debate concerning the type of collective bond feasible and desirable as an underpinning for the European Union, a debate centred on the older political-philosophical question of what must be common to a set of people such that they may be ruled through the same institutions. The thesis argues that many of the existing approaches, which conceive a bond in terms of shared interests, cultural attributes, values, or practices of trust and solidarity, are liable either to underplay or to overplay how much the citizens of a polity must have in common, tending either to empty public life of the pursuit of shared ends or conversely to downgrade the importance of adversarialism. Both may be seen as depoliticising moves. Instead, drawing on agonistic theories of democracy and certain strands of political sociology, a more explicitly political conception of the collective bond is explored, based on the appraisal of substantive problems. Political community, it is suggested, should be sought in the common-sense assumptions and taken-for-granted reference-points people invoke when discussing matters of political relevance. The concept of a 'political bond', whereby members of the collective are tied by a sense of shared predicament before common problems, is proposed as a normative ideal. This raises questions for empirical study to do with what problems people hold to exist, whom these are assumed to affect, and what possibilities of collective action are recognised for their address. These issues are explored in depth using group discussions with taxi-drivers in Britain, Germany and the Czech Republic. Under scrutiny is the extent to which commonplace ways of speaking about the political serve to strengthen a European political bond, and in what respects they run counter to it and would need challenging if a European polity were to have everyday resonance. The analysis indicates that while substantive problems of common concern are readily and richly articulated, and many of them placed in a transnational context, there is notable scepticism about the possibility of their remedy, and unevenness in the degree to which opponents are positioned as legitimate. The thesis argues that only by tackling these wider patterns, which link to the health of contemporary democracy more generally, is it likely to prove possible to build a desirable political community at the European level.



# Acknowledgements

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# Introduction

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The years around the turn of the millennium witnessed great interest amongst scholars of the European Union in the democratic basis of this new political arrangement. Questions such as ‘Does Europe need a Constitution?’ and ‘Is there, or can there be, a European society?’ were being asked, and proposals put forward on ‘How to democratise the European Union and why bother’. In some ways this was remarkable, since for most of the period of post-War integration, issues of democracy had been rather marginal. Integration was widely conceived to be an elite-driven process in which broader societal concerns played a limited role, and the degree to which institutions were insulated from direct popular pressure seemed justifiable due to the control enjoyed by the representatives of national government. Yet from the early 1990s onwards, it seemed, neither the descriptive-explanatory nor the normative argument could so readily be accepted. ‘Non-elites’ were clearly liable to have a strong influence on the course of the integration process, as the referenda results on the Maastricht Treaty in France and Denmark seemed to demonstrate, while the terms of this treaty, widening the scope of integration and introducing majoritarian voting mechanisms, suggested the emergence of something considerably more than just an intergovernmental forum for solving problems of a technical kind. Hence the scholarship on the EU developed a new concern for questions of democracy: the responsiveness of institutions on the one hand, and the significance of culture, ideas and notions of peoplehood as preconditions for the acceptance of these institutions on the other. A debate emerged concerning the existence or possibility of a European ‘demos’, with this latter often understood in terms of socio-cultural regularities.

At the same time as scholars of the EU were discovering democracy, scholars of democracy were going through a period of reevaluation themselves. In Anglo-Saxon political science and theory, it had become common to conceptualise the legitimacy of political association according to two, perhaps competing, principles: the ‘principle of democracy’ (or popular sovereignty) and the ‘principle of constitutionalism’ (or the rule of law). While such a distinction is traceable in much of modern political thought, where the need to balance the expression of popular will with safeguards against a tyranny of the majority has been a familiar theme, what was perhaps new was the tendency to emphasise the latter at the

expense of the former. The rule of law, it seemed, was being treated as more fundamental to democracy than the principle of democracy itself. A redefinition seemed to be taking place, such that certain changes in the world of practice could be more easily accommodated and legitimised. Processes of juridification, of the weakening of political power, and the decline of democratic deliberation in the representative institutions of the nation-state and amongst the broader public, were coming to be seen not as deviations from democracy but as patterns which could be accepted and even celebrated.<sup>1</sup> The study and theorising of democracy was evolving rather rapidly.

Today, both of these trends continue. In EU studies, the 2005 referenda defeats for the proposed EU constitution or ‘constitutional treaty’ in France and the Netherlands have slowed somewhat the flow of scholarship on ‘constitutional moments’ and the active founding of a polity, but questions to do with the viability of the EU and with its democratic credentials have if anything become more salient. In political science and thought, a small literature has begun to emerge on the dangers of depoliticisation, and global events such as the turmoil in Iraq have weakened the credibility of a predominantly constitutionalist understanding of democracy, but the subordination of questions to do with ‘the people’ and the democratic principle has continued. Indeed, some of this has fed back into the debate concerning the democratic status of the EU: these redefinitions of democracy have been used to argue that the EU already satisfies the criteria of democratic legitimacy, regardless of issues to do with the demos and the principle of democratic control.<sup>2</sup>

It may be possible to set these two bodies of concerns, to do with the EU and with the nature of democracy, side by side with one another without concluding that the EU must subordinate the principle of democracy to the rule of law. One way to read the debate in EU studies about the possibility of a European demos is to see it as expressing a renewed concern about the conditions under which the idea of popular sovereignty can be meaningfully realised. Yet to focus on socio-cultural regularities and treat these as the prerequisites of a viable democratic polity, as much of this literature does, is to claim strong limits to the options available for a collective political arrangement. While it may well be that individuals must hold something ‘in common’ if they are to regulate their lives through the same institutions, it may be necessary to conceptualise this in ways which are less prone to

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<sup>1</sup> On some of these trends, see James Tully, 'The Unfreedom of the Moderns in Comparison to Their Ideals of Constitutional Democracy', *The Modern Law Review*, 65/2 (2002). Also Peter Mair, 'Ruling the Void? The Hollowing of Western Democracy', *New Left Review*, 42/Nov/Dec (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Amongst the bigger names, see e.g. Andrew Moravcsik, 'In Defence of the "Democratic Deficit": Reassessing Legitimacy in the European Union', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40/4 (2002).

determinism and to the devaluing of political adversarialism. The challenge would be to develop a less restrictive understanding of the possibility of creative political action and the exercise of popular sovereignty, *without* falling into the kind of voluntarism which blinds one to the existence of very real obstacles to democratic action in the European context and which prevents one acknowledging the weakness with which it is currently pursued.

Conversely, regarding the significance of EU democracy for democracy more generally, it may be that the EU experience encourages us to rethink the nature of political community, not so as to reduce it to a bare constitutionalism but so as to find ways of uncoupling it from the nationality principle which has been its underpinning in the context of the nation-state. If one understands the period of 'organised modernity' as being characterised by a fairly high degree of congruence between 'social practices', 'social identities' and the boundaries of the polity, and if one understands by contrast the contemporary world as one in which such closure can no longer be taken for granted (and on this there seems to be some consensus), then it may be that new concepts are needed that can better render conditions of plurality, complexity and dissonance.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it may be that there are normative reasons to welcome these changed conditions. But even if there were not, the political constellation of contemporary Europe, characterised by a high degree of plurality, would seem to be a good place in which to explore the kinds of concept with which one might try to substitute older, problematic notions such as 'identity'.

If this reasoning is secure, two things seem to follow. It seems that one may want ways of continuing the discussion about democracy and the nature of the common in the EU context with a particular sensitivity to the idea that the principle of democratic control is being subordinated to the principle of constitutionalism. Likewise, it seems one may want ways of continuing the discussion about the nature of democracy more generally in ways that alert one to the possibility of a multiplication in points of reference and sources of identification, and of a diminishing coherence between these. These are the points of departure for the following project, which seeks to elaborate the concept of a 'political bond' so as to address both concerns. A political bond is presented both as a normative ideal for that which might be put in common by the citizens of a European polity, and as a critical-descriptive tool by which to make some observations concerning the condition of democracy in contemporary Europe.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Wagner, 'Crises of Modernity: Political Sociology in Historical Contexts', in Stephen Turner (ed.), *Social Theory and Sociology: The Classics and Beyond* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

Our focus is in some ways prosaic: on the shared political problems which people describe themselves as facing, and the discursive resources which they routinely invoke for talking about them. It is suggested that the sense of shared predicament before common problems may be a promising way to conceptualise the collective bond necessary to a political community. Our study tries to open out how such problems are routinely perceived amongst contemporary populations, the patterns of alliance and opposition which they inspire, and the assumptions one finds to do with whether and how they might be susceptible to organised address. By taking this problem-oriented approach, the intention is to tie ourselves closely to some of the basic issues to do with political association and the exercise of democratic voice. It is an approach which differs from much of what one finds in the field of EU studies, where a common technique for studying the foundations of the EU polity amongst ‘the people’ is to ask a sample of people what they think of it. This is an expression of what one might call the ‘EU-centrism’ of EU studies: those who wish to study the EU have a natural tendency to put it centre-stage in their research design, leading to the collection of data which, while undeniably tied closely to the research topic, may rather inflate the EU’s significance for respondents. The approach taken here, as will become clear, consists not in polling ‘opinions’ about the institutional architecture of contemporary Europe, nor in discerning the strength of ‘loyalties’ to one set of institutions or one cultural world over another, but in examining the reference-points which are invoked spontaneously when people talk about the problems which they see themselves, and people like themselves, as facing. The contours of political community should be sought, it is suggested, not at the level of conscious beliefs, attitudes and opinions but in the taken-for-granted, common-sense understandings which people express when talking about substantive issues. This approach allows one both to avoid an embedded EU-centrism and to comment more generally on questions to do with the health of democracy.

While this thesis begins in the mode of theoretical reasoning, it soon takes a strongly empirical turn by looking at the material generated in ten group discussions held with taxi-drivers in Britain, Germany and the Czech Republic. Even work which is theoretically-oriented must, it is argued, pay close attention to the particularity of the context to which it is applied. If it is to have any critical purchase then it must form an understanding of the ‘way things are’ as well as the way they might be. Theoretical ideas, unless one wishes to shelter them from all criticism except that to do with their internal logic, must be explored and developed outdoors. In this sense there is a political-sociological move in this work. But our purpose, it will be understood, is not that of the natural scientist: the empirical work is guided

by the goals of concept-formation and critical diagnosis rather than the ideal of detached observation. Of course, even a strongly interpretative study would undermine its purpose if it were not rigorous in its methods and methodology. While we do not wish to be judged according to the research standards of natural science, obviously a claim is made to careful attention in research design, and precision in the assembly, presentation and analysis of findings. But the guiding concerns are those of the applied theorist, not those of the collector of facts.

A project such as this has a clearly cross-disciplinary character. It draws on normative political theory, social theory, political sociology and (more ambivalently) political psychology, as well as on the relevant debates in EU studies and political science. It also involves the use of a relatively new qualitative research method – the ‘focus group’, or group discussion. While this breadth of resources should be a positive feature, multidisciplinary should not be the cause of easy celebration, for there are genuine tensions involved. Perhaps the most notable and most general is that between normative political theory and sociology. Simplifying a little, one may say that the role of the sociologist has traditionally been to look for the rules which govern the behaviour of a collective and its elements, seeking uniformity and order so as to explain and to predict. A political philosopher, on the other hand, concerned with the possibility of human freedom and the renewal of political life, has often been sceptical of such rules, or has wanted to insist that any such rules are limited in scope and leave aspects of life undetermined. Perhaps these two perspectives are not in pure contradiction, but it is evident that a project which seeks to combine them must tread carefully. In this work, we shall be drawn towards political theory which is especially sensitive to the importance of historical context, and which does not pursue abstract and universal truths. At the same time, inspiration is taken not from classical sociology of the Durkheimian kind, but from more recent approaches which combine attention to patterns with an emphasis on interpretation, choices, and the possibility of change.

There are six chapters to the work that follows. Chapter 1 sets out the basic problem, which concerns how best to conceptualise the collective bond that may be necessary for a viable democratic polity. This is explored first as it has been discussed in political theory generally, and then specifically in the debate about a European demos. Arguing that many of the existing approaches are adverse in their implications for contestatory politics and the possibility of collective self-rule, and therefore of a depoliticising tendency, this chapter lays out the contours of an alternative conceptualisation referred to as a ‘political bond’. This is

presented as an ideal to be developed further in empirical study, and a sensitising concept with which to orient the empirical analysis. Chapter 2 looks at the epistemological and methodological basis on which such a bond may be studied. It assesses some of the empirical approaches which have been taken to the study of mass politics, and discusses the kinds of social theory appropriate to the concerns of this work, gravitating towards those which place an emphasis on routinised discursive practice. It then presents the strategy and specifics of the exploratory study that follows (on which further details and reflections are provided in the Methodological Appendix). From this point onwards, the narrative voice is enriched by the voices of taxi-drivers. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 each explore in theoretical-empirical mode one of the three key ideas associated with a ‘political bond’: the existence and nature of shared political problems constituting a *political common*, the *collective positioning* one finds with regard to the problems of the common, and the plausibility of a *political project* designed to address these. Chapter 3 identifies three bodies of salient problems: *Economics, Society and the Law*, and *Relations between Peoples*, and these act as the units of analysis in Chapters 4 and 5. Participants are given considerable scope to foreground whichever political problems they wish to, and the task is then to map out and evaluate the discursive patterns of political significance which accompany these. Chapter 6 then connects these observations directly to the question of a European polity. It looks at the extent to which existing discursive practices are consistent with a political bond in Europe, and then – more critically – in what respects they would need to change and how such change might come about. There follows after this a Conclusion.



*The ten locations of interview*

# Chapter 1

## Collective Bonds and a European Polity

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### 'The People'

What must be common to a set of people such that they may be ruled through the same institutions? While there may be no 'eternal' or 'inescapable' problems in (political) philosophy, there are questions of enduring relevance which seem to reappear in one form or another. Historical situations are unique and the purposes of interpreters are specific: there is no progressive accumulation of answers to identical questions. But it may be possible to speak of recurrent questions, at least 'if sufficiently abstractly framed',<sup>1</sup> and to suppose that they recur under certain conditions. The question raised here, which has been central to recent debates about the European Union, has not been a permanently central one in the history of political thought. Few authors have made it the main focus of their attention. But their more general concern for issues of democracy and order has quite often led them to indicate a position on it. Wherever the foundations, the functioning or the composition of a political community have been matters of interest or doubt, a position on this question seems discernible.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, with some caution, one may suggest that the current debate about the EU has been revisiting an older question.

What it is that must be common to a set of people is likely to be considered important under two conditions in particular. The first is if the authority to which they are subject relies on a principle of legitimacy grounded in a concept of 'the people'. Where this is the case, the theoretical question 'who are the people?' naturally arises as a basic constitutional matter. The second is if that set of people, as individuals, have the power to

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Quentin Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas', in James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988), p.66.

<sup>2</sup> A note on terminology: both 'political community' and 'polity' are terms which can be used in multiple ways, from which derives some of their usefulness. Generally, the latter will be used as an umbrella term to refer to an organised arrangement of political power, avoiding related terms such as 'state' or 'political system' because these are laden with historical and disciplinary associations one may wish to avoid. The former term, 'political community', will be used when intending to emphasise the human and hermeneutic dimensions of the polity, whilst recognising that the term 'polity' is by no means disconnected from these.

make themselves heard by the institutions which rule them, and to engage or challenge their coercive authority. Where this is the case, it becomes of some practical importance what kind of institutions ‘make sense’ to them, and with whom they are willing to engage in government. One sees immediately that the word ‘people’ can be used in at least two ways: to refer to an abstraction, the sovereign ‘people in reserve’ as it has been called, and to refer more empirically to a collective agent or series of agents, ‘the people in action’. One can trace the dual sense of the term back to ancient Rome, where the notion of the ‘populus’ was used on the one hand to refer to the citizenry and sovereign body of the Roman Empire, and on the other hand to the common masses engaged in popular government, to the ‘plebs’ who made their political voice heard in the context of the Roman Republic.<sup>3</sup>

In the Middle Ages by contrast, with the principal exception of certain city-states on the Italian peninsula, this double aspect of ‘the people’ was less prominent. Dynastic rule was the norm, and while kings – if pushed – might claim to have been authorised by ‘the people’ (as an abstraction) to rule over them, the set of people who happened to be alive at any given moment generally had minimal control over the institutions which governed them. They constituted rather a resource to be used for economic and military purposes, that over which the king was rightfully ruler. The authority of the power-centre was little challenged, and could be strengthened in moments of crisis by reference to the principle of divine legitimacy. If the king was king, he was probably rightfully so, success being the evidence of divine support. While this argument came under some strain during the sixteenth century, when the religious division between Protestantism and Catholicism meant that rebels against the king’s authority could invoke divine support for themselves, and could claim to be acting for the spiritual good of ‘the people’, the model of dynastic rule survived for some time longer. In these circumstances, the question of what must be common to a set of people such that they may be ruled together generally did not arise.

It came to the fore, one may argue, with the English Civil War and the French and American Revolutions. With the problematisation and then the renunciation of monarchical rule, the concept of the people as sovereign was recoupled with the idea of popular rule and the practical ability of the masses to affect the course of government. The French Declaration of the Rights of Man asserted that ‘the principle of all sovereignty resides in the Nation. No body or individual may exercise any power other than that expressly emanating

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<sup>3</sup> Margaret Canovan, *The People* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005).

from the Nation.’<sup>4</sup> The US Constitution declared itself in the name of ‘We the People of the United States’. These were assertions of the principle of self-government, and they reopened the question of the identity of ‘the people’ (the self) who/which were/was constituting the polity and then ruling and being ruled together. As Claude Lefort has put it, before the revolutions ‘power was embodied in the prince, and it therefore gave society a body. Because of this, a latent but effective knowledge of what *one* meant to the *other* existed throughout the social.’ With the arrival of democracy, ‘the locus of power becomes *an empty place*.’<sup>5</sup> The commonality of the people, what it is that defines them and holds them together as a political community, is now something no longer obvious, something which needs answering and to which all answers are contestable. ‘The meaning of the transformation can be summarised as follows: democratic society is instituted as a society without a body, as a society which undermines the representation of an organic totality. [...] [N]either the state, the people nor the nation represent substantial entities. Their representation is itself, in its dependence upon a political discourse and upon a sociological and historical elaboration, always bound up with ideological debate.’<sup>6</sup>

Some of the classic texts of political theory constitute a central part of this ideological debate, of the attempt to come to terms with the uncertainty that follows the assertion of rule by ‘the people’ and their engagement in the processes of self-government. In the pages which follow we shall be considering some of the responses they contain to what will henceforth be called the ‘question of the common’. A reason for which this question became important theoretically in this period was that the principle of self-government had been established under conditions which, unlike the classical context, did not permit the direct participation of all citizens in the mechanisms of decision-making – even when full citizenship was restricted to a limited number of males. Organs of representation were required, and this meant conceptualising who it was that the representatives represented. Majority voting was necessary, and this required a sense of who constituted the universe of voters. More generally, self-government without direct participation required giving a sense of normative purpose to the polity, justification for obedience to state authority, to the suppression of immediate interests, and to the acts of redistribution which the state might engage in. These issues acquired further urgency as a result of the socio-economic developments associated with the Industrial Revolution: as capitalism advanced, wealth

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<sup>4</sup> Article III.

<sup>5</sup> Claude Lefort, ‘The Question of Democracy’, *Democracy and Political Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p.17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p.18.

inequalities increased, as did functional specialisation. More diversity and fragmentation heightened the concern with common bonds, the investigation of which would become the task of the emerging social sciences.<sup>7</sup> There were also a considerable number of practical issues to do with political association which arose once the unifying figure of the monarch was removed. In the case of territorial disputes, principles would be needed by which to decide whether a certain group of people belonged to one polity or to another. As will be seen, a third conception of 'the people' would soon arise, that of the people as a transgenerational unity or 'nation'. Individual entitlements to political and welfare rights would also need to be granted or withheld. As people started to cross borders more freely, these boundary problems increased in urgency.

It is useful at this point to distinguish between two different ways in which the question of the common can be formulated. One is to pose it as a *membership* or *boundary* question, a question of who is to be included in the political community and who may be properly excluded. Both the territorial extension of the polity and the granting of citizenship rights to temporary and long-term residents are matters which are here to the fore. A second way to treat it is as a question of the cohesiveness of a unit which one takes as given. In this perspective, the precise extension of polity boundaries is always an unsettled matter, but it is assumed that – wherever it happens that they are located – they are in need of the support of some kind of integrative force so as to ensure the stability of the polity and the endorsement of its citizens. A *collective bond* is required in order to conjure the unity of 'the people' such that they are suited to rule through the same institutions, and such that those institutions are democratically viable.

Despite the salience of all such issues from the later eighteenth century onwards, few theorists have made the *boundary* question their systematic problem.<sup>8</sup> Many of the major debates in twentieth-century political philosophy took existing political communities as given, preferring to focus on the questions of justice which emerge within these units. There is a normative reason why this may be so: to accept that there may be legitimate reasons to

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Wagner, *A History and Theory of the Social Sciences: Not All That is Solid Melts into Air* (London: Sage, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> With some observations on the literature see: Margaret Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edwin Elgar, 1996); Robert Dahl, *After the Revolution? Authority in a Good Society* (Revised edition edn.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Brian C. J. Singer, 'Cultural Versus Contractual Nations: Rethinking Their Opposition', *History and Theory*, 35/3 (1996); Friedrich V. Kratochwil, 'The Politics of Place and Origin: An Enquiry into the Changing Boundaries of Representation, Citizenship and Legitimacy', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 1/1 (2001); Bernard Yack, 'Popular Sovereignty and Nationalism', *Political Theory*, 29/4 (2001); Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000a); Rogers M. Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

draw boundaries of membership to a political community is always close to adopting a position of ethical particularism. Universalistic perspectives in all periods, from contemporary liberal cosmopolitanism back to Marxism, the humanism of Erasmus or the Christianity of St. Augustine, have all been inclined to see the drawing of political boundaries as morally arbitrary, and have therefore had little reason to place emphasis on the kinds of principle one might invoke to do so. There is also a theoretical reason why the problem of boundaries and inclusion has been avoided: it is rather resistant to logical reasoning. Clearly it cannot be resolved by a straightforward appeal to democratic decision-making, to an aggregation of individual votes, since as Robert Goodin puts it, ‘that is like saying the winning lottery ticket will be pulled out of the hat by the winner of that selfsame lottery.’<sup>9</sup> Nor do appeals to the principle of ‘all affected interests’, or ‘all probably affected interests’, suggest a solution, since then there are problems of who can authoritatively judge such questions. Appeals to cultural markers or geographical features simply beg the question of which should properly be invoked.

The difficulty with formulating the question of the common as a boundary question is that it may imply that membership is something to be settled definitively rather than a matter of ongoing interpretation. It may suggest that ‘the people’ can be captured in a single representation, and that this representation can correspond neatly with the material world. On the contrary, as Lefort’s notion that power in a democracy is an ‘empty place’ makes clear, ‘the people’ will always be the site of contested representations.<sup>10</sup> If rules, as Wittgenstein reminds, do not contain the rules for their own application, then there is an inescapably practical basis to all moves to create, extend and withhold the rights of citizenship.<sup>11</sup> The move from representations to practices of inclusion and exclusion is one which depends on practical decisions and ongoing reappraisal, which is no doubt why the few political philosophers who have tackled this formulation of the question have generally concluded that it is a matter more for historians than theorists and philosophers.<sup>12</sup> Thus while

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<sup>9</sup> Robert E. Goodin, ‘Enfranchising All Affected Interests, and Its Alternatives’, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 15/1 (2007), p.43.

<sup>10</sup> This point is developed further by Ernesto Laclau in his discussion of the concept of ‘the people’ as it is employed in the politics of populism: cf. Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. David Bloor, ‘Wittgenstein and the Priority of Practice’, in Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny (eds.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001); Barry Barnes, ‘Practice as Collective Action’, in Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny (eds.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Robert Dahl declares that ‘having puzzled over the problem for years, with astonishingly little help from the legacy of great writings about democracy, I have become persuaded that there is no theoretical solution to the puzzle, but only pragmatic ones.’ (Dahl, *After the Revolution?*, p.45.) Frederick Whelan agrees that ‘boundaries comprise a problem ... that is insoluble within the framework of democratic theory, and it may be

both formulations of the question of the common raise issues of political importance, clearly any answer to the second question (concerning the collective bond) need not depend for its validity on the clarity of answer it provides to the first (concerning membership). The membership question is never fully resolved, and for this reason one may find value in conceptualisations of the collective bond which remain open on the question of boundaries.

How best to characterise the *collective bond* that may be necessary for a viable democratic polity is the question that will be pursued in this chapter and beyond. It is by no means simply a descriptive problem. That multiple representations of ‘the people’ are possible means that this collective bond can be conceptualised in different ways, and the best way to do so can be a matter for extensive debate. Importantly, different conceptualisations, as well as varying in the degree to which they are theoretically coherent and empirically plausible, vary in their normative implications. They are laden with consequences for how one understands the purpose of the polity and the nature of citizenship, and how one understands the challenges which a particular polity or polities in general may face. Different conceptualisations of the common may suggest different positions on why citizens should obey the law when they would rather not, and accept decision-making when it runs counter to their perceptions of self-interest. They may shape what citizens understand by the common good, or whether they doubt the existence of such a thing, and the extent to which they seek participation in the political process. Towards whom solidarity should be shown will depend substantially on how one makes sense of the collective. Also, while no conceptualisation of the common can provide a settled answer to the question of boundaries, nonetheless some can serve to naturalise certain boundaries while problematising others. Why it is logical for ‘us’ to share a certain political arrangement depends crucially on how that ‘we’ is elaborated.

Before looking at how these matters have been discussed in relation to a European polity, we shall look first at some of the resources in political and social theory upon which this debate has drawn. The bonds identified refer to a range of features: interests, material social structures, cultural attributes (whether or not given an ethical status), values and principles (both universal and particularist), reciprocal trust and solidarity, and substantive problems. Each should be seen as involving claims which are normative, theoretical and empirical, the awkwardness of such distinctions notwithstanding. In assessing them we shall

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that democracy is practicable only when a historically given solution to this issue (justifiable or not, by some theory other than democratic theory) is acceptable.’ (Frederick G. Whelan, ‘Democratic Theory and the Boundary Problem’, in J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (eds.), *Nomos XXV: Liberal Democracy* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p.16.)

be interested in each of these aspects, since a model's desirability may vary in line with its coherence and plausibility, but ultimately some prominence will be given to the kinds of political vision that each implies, in particular its implications for active debate over matters of public concern and for the possibility of contestatory politics. The account is mainly schematic rather than historical, and certainly not chronological. The aim is to derive a series of logical positions which can act as points of orientation when looking at current debate on contemporary Europe, and to anticipate some of the lines of critique to which positions in this debate may be subject. While the charge that we engage here in the 'mythology of doctrines' may have some substance,<sup>13</sup> this is perhaps mitigated by the purpose of the exercise: not to provide a history of ideas, but to broaden our understanding of the possibilities open to the European debate. The goal is not naively to 'learn' from past authors, but to enrich the stock of resources with which we may 'do our own thinking for ourselves'.<sup>14</sup> Questions to do with how such bonds might be or have been explored in an empirically-informed way are postponed until the following chapter.

### Collective Bonds in Political Thought

That common *interests* might serve as the collective bond is a staple idea of political philosophy. Though not directly a contribution to democratic thought, Thomas Hobbes' social contract theory can be seen as proposing a collective bond based on *security* interests. Equally vulnerable to the dangers of the state of nature, and each having an interest in exiting a condition of anxiety and threats to survival, individuals (male heads of household, that is) come together to construct Leviathan. It is the concern for security that binds them, and it is the same which guarantees the stability of the polity, since only by submitting to the authority of the sovereign can citizens expect their security interests to be maintained. With their polity subsisting in a wider state of nature, it is through their self-interested loyalty that citizens derive protection from outside assault.<sup>15</sup> The collective bond is a *security bond*.

In John Locke's version of the social contract, interests are expanded beyond those of immediate security to include the need to protect private property and to develop the basic

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Skinner, 'Meaning and Understanding'.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.66.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Richard Tuck edn.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

infrastructure required for commerce.<sup>16</sup> The political significance of commercial interests becomes a theme of considerable prominence particularly in writings from the Scottish Enlightenment. Here one sees what can be called a *commercial bond*. While the private interests of individuals may clash, they are bound together by the marketplace, which allows them to pursue their private interests in organised and peaceful competition, to engage in transactions which are mutually desired, and to derive the benefits of overall economic growth. Whereas ‘the passions’ make the life in common unpredictable and prone to conflict and violence, ‘the interests’ serve to domesticate individuals and to encourage them towards mutual cooperation.<sup>17</sup> These ideas, traceable to the political thought of Bacon, Spinoza, Hume and Montesquieu,<sup>18</sup> find their most complete theoretical elaboration in the political economy of Adam Smith. ‘Commerce and manufactures gradually introduced order and good government,’ writes Smith, ‘and with them, the liberty and security of individuals, among the inhabitants of the country, who had before lived almost in a continual state of war with their neighbours and of servile dependency upon their superiors.’<sup>19</sup> It was this type of society, consisting of aggregates of self-interested individuals bound together by the interests of commercial exchange, which would later be referred to by Tönnies as *Gesellschaft*,<sup>20</sup> and via the work of Hayek it continues to inform modern libertarian theories of democracy and economic approaches to political science such as rational choice theory.

While their thin notions of the common good (security and economic growth) and their celebration of the private sphere might have been a progressive move in the Enlightenment period,<sup>21</sup> today these interests-based perspectives may seem to accord too minor a role to political discussion and action on matters of shared concern. A commercial perspective seeks to marginalise from the public domain those bonds of attachment which are not conceived in terms of economic interest, and holds a suspicion of activity which cannot

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<sup>16</sup> John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966).

<sup>17</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Hume’s treatises ‘Of Commerce’, ‘Of Money’, and ‘Of Trade’, in David Hume, *Political Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).; Charles-Louis De Secondat Montesquieu, baron de, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>19</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990), Book 3 Chap. 4, p.385.

<sup>20</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.57.

<sup>21</sup> Though it was by no means unopposed. See for instance Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1910), para. 165: ‘a political community ‘ought not to be considered as nothing better than a partnership agreement in a trade of pepper and coffee, calico or tobacco, or some other such low concern, to be taken up for a little temporary interest, and to be dissolved by the fancy of the parties. It is to be looked on with reverence, because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature.’

be understood in terms of the pursuit of individual advantage. While it may, in its democratic strands, acknowledge ‘the people’ as the ultimate source of authority in the political community, there is little room in this perspective for ‘the people’ as active agents engaged in collective decision-making and self-rule. Also, the goods which a commercial bond invokes (growth, increase, innovation) are substantively ill-defined, and therefore act badly as points of normative orientation.<sup>22</sup> More empirically, one may wonder whether a bond based on interests, whether security or commercial, is sufficient to constitute a political community. As Smith himself was no doubt aware, a commercial bond, and the legal agreements it entails, may require practices of cooperation based on ‘common sympathies’ as well as the pursuit of self-interest if it is to be maintained. Otherwise, as Charles Taylor puts it, such a bond may produce little more than ‘fair-weather friends’ who cooperate with one another so long as they profit, but who are tempted to revert to open brutality when their interests cease to be satisfied.<sup>23</sup> Even where the complete breakdown in civil relations is not in prospect, ‘consumer loyalty’ is a weak principle for political community, since consumer loyalties are easily transferred.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, ontologically, these perspectives generally rely heavily on some problematic units, in particular that of ‘the individual’ and of ‘interest’. The first of these will be considered further in Chapter 2; the second, as has often been noted, conceals considerable ambiguity. Interests can be perceived in multiple ways, and it is their social construction which is crucial. Interests in themselves explain everything and nothing.<sup>25</sup>

Classical sociology, in posing and seeking to understand the problem of social order, provides another body of ideas on what may hold ‘the people’ together. Here one might speak of a *structural bond*. Material social structures are the foundations of the common in this perspective, though these are conceptualised in a variety of ways. For Marx they consisted of class structures and forces of production.<sup>26</sup> For the early Durkheim, before he deepened his concern with the symbolic, they were to be understood as structures of social density and the ‘organic solidarity’ or mutual dependence generated by social

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Peter Wagner and Nathalie Karagiannis, 'Towards a Theory of Synagonism', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 13/3 (2005), p.241.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Taylor, 'Cross Purposes: The Liberal-Communitarian Debate', in N. L. Rosenblum (ed.), *Liberalism and the Moral Life* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), p.175. The same argument is made by Durkheim (Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (New York: Free Press, 1964), p.204): ‘There is nothing less constant than interest. Today, it unites me to you; tomorrow, it will make me your enemy. Such a cause can only give rise to transient relations and passing associations.’

<sup>24</sup> See Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory*, p.86.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Holmes, 'The Secret History of Self-Interest', in Jane Mansbridge (ed.), *Beyond Self-Interest* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990).

<sup>26</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1954).

differentiation.<sup>27</sup> For Simmel, it was social ‘forms’, such as cooperation, subordination and centralisation, that were the basic phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> These approaches deserve mention here because they constitute one of the main *materialist* counter-positions to accounts based on the interests of individuals. Just like individual interests, social structures are taken as objectively given, and the role of interpretation is downplayed. The systematic concern of these sociological approaches was not the viability of the polity however. Indeed, with strong elements of social determinism, they may be thought of as antithetical to any conception of politics which emphasises agential action and the possibility of directed change: as with interest-based perspectives, ‘the people’ as engaged in self-rule are quite marginalised, and with them the significance of political will. Furthermore, many such sociological approaches have been *reliant* upon political structures for the definition of their basic unit – society – and are therefore quite unable to problematise the viability of political institutions.<sup>29</sup> For the exploration of an emergent polity such as the EU, such classical sociological perspectives have for this reason been limited in their value.

An historically important attempt to specify the common has involved the evocation of ethical ties. In this perspective, the referent of ‘the people’ is conceived as something more than just the ultimate source of political authority and the aggregate of living individuals engaged in joint action. Rather, ‘the people’ is understood to be an organic unity which stretches across time, and towards which historically-existing individuals may owe duties. Loosely one may say that such approaches conjure an *ethical-cultural bond*. The unity may be conceived in religious terms, and examples of its political expression might be the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Zionist movement, contemporary Islamic movements, and anti-Catholic movements in early-modern England. It can be conceived in racial terms, as with the fascist ideology of the National Socialists. It can also be conceived using the category of nationhood – though as will be seen below, not all nationalisms are of this type. In all such approaches, shared attributes are given an ethical status which transcends the set of individuals who happen to exhibit them at any given moment. Essentialist or Romantic nationalism, as one may term it, creates its myth of the enduring collective through a mix of references to markers such as territory, language, symbolic

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<sup>27</sup> Durkheim, *The Division of Labour*.

<sup>28</sup> Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings* (Donald N. Levine edn.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed treatment of ‘methodological nationalism’, see Daniel Chernilo, ‘Social Theory’s Methodological Nationalism: Myth and Reality’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9/1 (2006).

practices, blood ties, historical events and feelings of belonging.<sup>30</sup> In particular, it contains a demand for political power, for the establishment of political institutions which can serve and advance the nation. Herder's celebration of the German language and its poetry as the repository of the *Volksggeist* and as the natural underpinning for a political community was one of the milder expressions of Romantic nationalism.<sup>31</sup> Mazzini called for widespread upheaval, albeit ultimately for the good of mankind as a whole, as Italians helped other nations to realise their destiny.<sup>32</sup> Fichte, in his *Addresses to the German Nation*, written after Prussia's defeat by Napoleon at Jena in 1806, was more narrowly assertive, recalling the resistance of 'our earliest common forefathers' to the Roman Empire as a spur to present-day action: 'It is they whom we must thank – we, the immediate heirs of their soil, their language, and their way of thinking – for being Germans still, for being still borne along on the stream of original and independent life. It is they whom we must thank for everything that we have been as a nation since those days, and to them we shall be indebted for everything that we shall be in the future, unless things come to an end with us now and the last drop of blood inherited from them has dried up in our veins.' The project was clear: 'Wherever a separate language is found, there a separate nation exists, which has the right to take independent charge of its own affairs and to govern itself.'<sup>33</sup>

Conceiving the common in these terms faces objections which to many contemporary eyes will seem obvious. There is the empirical problem that the map of peoples is scarcely so easily drawn, even in Europe alone. One decade's clearly identifiable nations are the next decade's artificial and untenable conglomerations (in a more recent period, the Czechs and Slovaks of Czechoslovakia for example). There is no finite number of nations: they evolve and splinter, as do religions. There is then the normative concern that, whilst collectivism of this kind need not in principle be aggressive to the outside world, it is clearly exclusive, and probably exclusionary of all who do not conform to the high level of commonality which it requires. In many cases compliance is no matter of decision: it is

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<sup>30</sup> For one summary see Bhikhu Parekh, 'Politics of Nationhood', in Keebet von Benda-Beckman and Maykel Verkuyten (eds.), *Nationalism, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in Europe* (Utrecht: ERCOMER, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Michael N. Forster (ed.), *Johann Gottfried von Herder: Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> 'Beyond the Alps, beyond the sea, are other peoples now fighting or preparing to fight the holy fight of independence, of nationality, of liberty; other peoples striving by different routes to reach the same goal [...] Unite with them; they will unite with you.' Nagendranath Gangulee (ed.), *Giuseppe Mazzini: Selected Writings* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974), p.112.

<sup>33</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, trans. R. F. Jones and G. H. Turnbull (Chicago: Greenwood Press, 1922), pp.145ff. For overviews of the literature on nationalism see Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory*; Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1998).

precisely attributes which cannot easily be adopted or rejected which are to the fore in these approaches. Even were it possible to adopt them (as perhaps is the case with language), this approach makes a strong assumption of there being a single common good. For anyone who believes that reasonable people may disagree on the good, and that politics in a democracy is about coming to terms with this fact, this perspective is likely to appear unduly homogenising, promoting a conception of political community which is strongly conformist.

A more common and ostensibly more feasible approach resists the essentialisation of particularist, inherited attributes by pointing instead to whatever combination of attributes and values a set of people happen to have, and believe or can be induced to believe they have, in common.<sup>34</sup> One could speak here of an *instrumentalist-cultural bond*, in contrast to the ethical version. This approach presents itself as pragmatic and reflexive: whilst not uncritical, it does not make strong normative assumptions about the proper nature of the common ties. 'The people' are understood as a set of living individuals; 'the people' as an organic totality, if it is invoked at all, is treated as a useful fiction. The community is no more than 'imagined'.<sup>35</sup> Since no outward markers or particular values are given *a priori* moral significance, in general this approach marks a turn towards people's goals, beliefs and feelings, a turn from the material to the ideational world. It is taken for granted that people have particularistic ties, but their nature will vary.<sup>36</sup> J.S. Mill provides a famous and comprehensive statement of this perspective in his discussion 'Of Nationality'. While Mill makes some functional arguments about the importance of a shared language for the circulation of opinions necessary for representative government, his argument tries to remain open on precisely what cultural and ideational features must be held in common. It is from a *contingent* combination of various perceived commonalities that the 'common sympathies' which allow the establishment and maintenance of common political institutions derive.<sup>37</sup> In

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<sup>34</sup> This approach can be described in various ways: 'liberal nationalism' and 'patriotism' are terms one finds in the literature. For arguments against treating them separately, see Margaret Canovan, 'Patriotism Is Not Enough', *British Journal of Political Science*, 30/3 (2000), esp. p.417.

<sup>35</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> For particularism taken as a 'brute fact', see. e.g. David Miller, 'In Defence of Nationality', in David Miller (ed.), *Citizenship and National Identity* (Malden: Polity, 2000a), p.25: 'There can be no question of trying to give rationally compelling reasons for people to have national attachments and allegiances. What we can do is to start from the premise that people generally do exhibit such attachments and allegiances, and then try to build a political philosophy which incorporates them.'

<sup>37</sup> 'A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a Nationality, if they are united among themselves by common sympathies, which do not exist between them and any others – which make them cooperate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves or a portion of themselves, exclusively. This feeling of nationality may have been generated by various causes. Sometimes it is the effect of identity of race and descent. Community of language, and community of religion, greatly contribute to it. Geographical limits are one of its causes. But the

more recent accounts, ‘common sympathies’ tend to be reworded as ‘trust’, ‘solidarity’ or ‘social capital’. In this formulation, nationality can be presented as a crucial underpinning for progressive agendas which call on individuals to accept costs for the benefit of others (e.g. wealth redistribution).<sup>38</sup> Indeed, it may be necessary to cultivate such feelings using various forms of indoctrination, education in particular. Such approaches recall the emphasis placed by Socrates on the ‘Phoenician tale’, the myth of common origins as described in Plato’s *Republic*, or similar instrumental arguments for creeds, myths, religions and education found in the work of Machiavelli, Rousseau and Montesquieu.<sup>39</sup> Other contemporary approaches recall Tocqueville’s emphasis on the importance of face-to-face interaction in associations for the achievement of common sympathies.<sup>40</sup>

While it is a wide range of approaches which come under the heading of an *instrumentalist-cultural bond*, they are certain problematic features which are shared by them all. Attributing importance to cultural markers or particularist values, even if one does not prescribe their content, means being ready to defend the process by which they emerge. As Margaret Canovan points out, herself sympathetic to this approach, it implies being ready to defend what is usually a bloody process. Cultural attributes or particularist values tend to be celebrated most if at some time in the past they have been fought for.<sup>41</sup> Civil and interethnic war, interstate war and the struggle for liberation tend to be the conditions for their emergence (and for the defeat of competing visions), rather than a steady process of crystallisation under a stable legal order. Not only this, but also once established they can be normatively problematic. These approaches may not prize any one conception of cultural or

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strongest of all is identity of political antecedents; the possession of a national history, and consequent community of recollections; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past. None of these circumstances however are either indispensable, or necessarily sufficient by themselves.’ J. S. Mill, Chap. 16 of John Stuart Mill, ‘Considerations on Representative Government’, *Three Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), ‘Of Nationality’, p.380.

<sup>38</sup> See e.g. David Miller, ‘The Nation-State: A Modest Defence’, in Chris Brown (ed.), *Political Restructuring in Europe: Ethical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1994); David Goodhart, ‘Too Diverse?: Is Britain Becoming Too Diverse to Sustain the Mutual Obligations Behind a Good Society and the Welfare State?’ *Prospect*, 95 (2004); Brian Barry, *Democracy, Power and Justice: Essays in Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory*.

<sup>39</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. R.E. Allen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), Book III; Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses* (Bernard Crick edn.; London: Penguin, 1970); Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin, 1963); *The Government of Poland*, trans. Willmoore Kendall (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972); Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Feelings and opinions are recruited,’ writes Tocqueville, ‘the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed only by the reciprocal influence of men upon one another. I have shown that these influences are almost null in democratic countries; they must therefore be artificially created, and this can only be accomplished by associations.’ Alexis de Tocqueville, ‘Of the Use Which the Americans Make of Public Associations in Civil Life’, in Olivier Zunz and Alan S. Kahan (eds.), *The Tocqueville Reader: A Life in Letters and Politics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p.183.

<sup>41</sup> Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory*, chap. 9.

values commonality, but they do prize a fairly high degree of homogeneity, of 'shared values, shared tastes or sensibilities' which extend across the majority of individuals.<sup>42</sup> It is difficult to see how this can avoid having repressive and totalising political implications. It is but a short step to the proposition, found in the essentialist perspectives on collectivity, that all those who supposedly share the same culture, identity or values also share a single, substantive common good, and that all those who do not easily align with this culture / identity / values, or who choose to dissociate themselves from it, must be in collision with this common good.<sup>43</sup> Political disagreement becomes suspect, and may be delegitimised as unpatriotic. Non-cultural forms of collective identification (e.g. based on categories of class) may be suppressed, with outcomes which are decidedly un-progressive. Cultural differences with those outside the community, and the significance of these, may be exaggerated in the attempt to cultivate a distinctive 'identity' for the citizens of the polity, leading to a potentially dangerous hardening of physical boundaries and, as an unintended consequence, of moral boundaries too. There is also, in the emphasis on tradition, a conservative tendency: to emphasise the need for (perceived) cultural regularities is to place a strong constraint on the possibility of innovative political action and new political beginnings, and may be to give a false sense of permanence and naturalness to boundaries which are subject to ongoing negotiation.

One response to these challenges is to downplay the importance of cultural markers and speak of trust and solidarity in more abstract terms. We shall return to the notion of a *social bond* in the next section, since it is in the contemporary European context that it has been given one of its fullest articulations. Another response, common amongst liberal nationalists, is to argue that national identification is not exclusive of other forms of identification, or that 'national identity' can exist 'at more than one level': as David Miller puts it, 'one can be both Catalan and Spanish ... perhaps emphasising different aspects of the double identity in different contexts or for different purposes.'<sup>44</sup> It is an intuitively plausible idea, but then raises awkward ontological questions about what is to be understood by terms such as 'identity', 'shared culture' and 'shared values, shared tastes or sensibilities'. Miller's move is to avoid social determinism by speaking of 'purposes' and context, with the implication that 'identities' are invoked reflexively according to the challenges of the

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<sup>42</sup> Miller, 'The Nation-State: A Modest Defence', pp.140-1.

<sup>43</sup> For a critique of this kind, see Parekh, 'Politics of Nationhood'.

<sup>44</sup> David Miller, *Citizenship and National Identity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000b), p.130. For a discussion of the difficulties of the word 'identity', see Peter Wagner, 'Identity and Selfhood as a Problématique', in Heidrun Friese (ed.), *Identities: Time, Difference and Boundaries* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2002), pp.32-55, and Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, 'Beyond 'Identity'', *Theory and Society*, 29/1 (2000).

situation at hand. The result however is a perspective which is highly flexible, agential, individual and instrumental, and one wonders then exactly what is meant by ‘identity’ (normally understood as coherence and sameness) and in what sense ‘shared values, shared tastes or sensibilities’ are shared. Are they shared always, or only when agents choose to share them? If the emphasis is on choice, must it be these things that they choose to share? There are also epistemological difficulties with these approaches: the wish to avoid the reification of cultural markers, since these evolve and since not all are attributed importance at a given moment, results in considerable emphasis being placed on beliefs and norms. As things existing ‘inside the brain’, these are inaccessible to observation, and their nature and existence is a matter of speculation. One may end up in a position of pure agnosticism about what features are held in common. Faced with such uncertainty, the danger is always that one lapses back into essentialism by focusing on particular markers and claiming that they are the crucial ones, with the likely political consequences we have indicated.<sup>45</sup>

A natural counter-position to these culturalist perspectives is to maintain that what a set of people must have in common so as to share political institutions is not outward markers given a spurious importance but a convergence on principles to which they may commit themselves by choice. One can speak here of a bond of *values and principles*. In the most radical perspective, these are conceived as universal. The French Declaration on the Rights of Man and the US Constitution can be understood as attempts to define principles of universal appeal which will be sufficient to bind together French and American citizens in an attitude of ‘constitutional patriotism’ towards their political institutions. In this perspective, what ‘the people’ have in common is post-political, the outcome of reasoned agreement, and pre-political allegiances are expected to be strongly subordinated or disowned. Human rights and the rule of law might be candidate universal principles. Amongst political theorists, the early Habermas would be a prominent example of this type of thin, universalist perspective on commonality.<sup>46</sup> At first glance the position is normatively appealing, since other than those who give an ethical status to particularist pre-political allegiances presumably few could object to universal principles. If one accepts the possibility that values and principles

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<sup>45</sup> Of course, it is possible to mitigate this problem by shifting away from an emphasis on mental phenomena and conceiving commonality of culture and values in terms of discursive resources. More on this will be said in Chapter 2. Disciplines such as cultural sociology and nationalism studies have much to offer here. Some recent approaches in political theory do gesture in this direction: see Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory*, chapter 7, where she introduces nationhood as a *mediating* phenomenon, and Rogers Smith, who emphasises the discursive when he refers to ‘stories of peoplehood’ (Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood*).

<sup>46</sup> For a reading of the evolution of Habermas’ thought on this, see Patchen Markell, ‘Making Affect Safe for Democracy?: On “Constitutional Patriotism”’, *Political Theory*, 28/1 (2000).

could be formulated sufficiently abstractly such that reasonable objection would be unthinkable, yet not so abstractly as to deprive them of meaning and affective appeal, then the political implications might seem attractive. However, firstly taking the argument on its own terms, there is the clear danger that an appetite amongst citizens for the universal could result in a cosmopolitan distaste for *all* political institutions (except perhaps the global) rather than a strong commitment to one particular set. The activities of non-state actors – human rights NGOs, for instance – might come to seem a better focus of loyalty than the polity. Certainly there is no reason why a set of people might be expected to see their own political institutions as the ones which best embody the universal: when judged on these criteria, the conduct of a neighbouring polity might seem more alluring. Insofar as universal values and principles were successful in inspiring allegiance, disengagement from the political life of the particular polity might be the predictable consequence. This would be depoliticisation in the form of political withdrawal. The history of post-revolutionary France and the US (and other polities with universalist doctrines such as the Soviet Union) suggests that further notions of commonality are generally required as a supplement in order to foster allegiance,<sup>47</sup> and Habermas's own thought has evolved in a somewhat more particularist direction, such that the principles which bind together the community are understood to be not expressions of the universal but 'nationally specific interpretations' thereof.<sup>48</sup> (Since this latter perspective has been developed furthest in connection to the EU debate itself, it will be looked at in detail in the next section.)

Secondly, as a more fundamental critique, there are reasons to doubt whether such universality is possible, and reasons to suppose that the pursuit of it may be adverse to contestatory politics. Despite acting as the inspiration for many well-intentioned conquerors, claims to the universal have a habit of coming across as 'yours', as resistance to Napoleon or as the experience of decolonialisation might suggest. Rather than there being a single scale of 'the good' against which all will make their assessments of value, arguably there are multiple conceptions of the good, and these may be incommensurable.<sup>49</sup> Given that a

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<sup>47</sup> For arguments that these 'supplements' are of a cultural kind, see Canovan, *The People*, and on France in particular see Singer, 'Cultural Versus Contractual Nations'.

<sup>48</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'Citizenship and National Identity', *Praxis International*, 12/1 (1992), p.507. Habermas also emphasises the maintenance of national identities in 'The Postnational Constellation and the Future of Democracy', in Jürgen Habermas (ed.), *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001a), p.99.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Richard Bellamy, *Liberalism and Pluralism: Towards a Politics of Compromise* (London: Routledge, 1999), and 'Still in Deficit: Rights, Regulation and Democracy in the EU', *European Law Journal*, 12/6 (2006); in a more sociological vein, see Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

consensus on the universal tends not to arise naturally, any attempt to consecrate a certain set of values and principles as universal is likely to involve a concerted effort to cast competing perspectives, though widely held, as illegitimate. The language of universality is the language of universal reason, which is intolerant of disagreement and always liable to treat that which opposes it as mad or bad. To advocate the pursuit of universality under conditions where 'the universal' is contentious requires narrowing the parameters of political debate such that one conception of the good is treated as unsusceptible to reasonable denunciation by competing conceptions of the good. This conception of the common, minimal on its own terms but liable to herald something rather thicker, seems quite problematic for a democratic polity.

The final perspective on the common which is considered here likewise avoids grounding the viability of political institutions on pre-political homogeneity. That 'the people' can be usefully thought of as existing as a social or cultural totality separate from the political process is denied. At the same time, that they may be held together by nothing more than objective interests, economic or security-related, is also doubted. Rather, it is the appraisal and debate of common problems, with a view to collective action to address them, which binds together citizens in this perspective. One can think of this as a *republican bond*.<sup>50</sup> As one author puts it, 'citizens are neighbors bound together neither by blood nor by contract but by their common concerns and common participation in the search for common solutions to common conflicts.'<sup>51</sup> Just as the approach looked at above considers *perceived* rather than 'really existing' cultural and values-based commonality, this approach may address perceived commonality of problems and the perceived importance of acting collectively to address them, without attempting to justify these perceptions with an appeal to material reality.<sup>52</sup> The process of identifying problems and disputing how they should be dealt with is given considerable importance. Particularly in the neo-Roman strand of

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<sup>50</sup> 'Republicanism' is a broad term of course: our focus here is less on the classical Greek tradition (as renewed later by Marsilius and then Rousseau) than on the neo-Roman tradition, as revived in the Italian Renaissance city-states. Cf. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Vol. 1: *The Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996).

<sup>51</sup> Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy: Participatory Politics for a New Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p.219. This approach has an affinity with the principle of 'all affected interests' which is sometimes proposed as the basis for political membership: Dahl, *After the Revolution?*; Goodin, 'Enfranchising All Affected Interests'. Whilst this principle can be formulated in different ways, its main contention is that a set of people should be enfranchised whenever there is a decision to be made whose consequences would (alternatively, might) affect them. While related, this principle refers primarily to membership rather than to the collective bond, and puts less emphasis on how interests are constructed as part of a political process.

<sup>52</sup> For this reason, like the others, it can provide no unequivocal answer to questions of political membership. Just as someone who claims to feel 'culturally Austrian' may be hard to gainsay, likewise someone who claims to be affected by a certain set of political problems. How one responds to such claims is a question of practice.

republicanism, the potential for persistent political disagreement and power-political struggle tends to be foregrounded – indeed, it is precisely because there may be no universally acceptable values or principles (other than the most basic ones of democracy itself, liberty and equality) that people may be inspired to participate in the political process so as to secure their objectives and visions.<sup>53</sup> There is little call for homogeneity in this perspective. As Chantal Mouffe has put it, the ‘modern form of political community is held together not by a substantive idea of the common good but by a common bond, a public concern. It is therefore a community without a definite shape or a definite identity and in continuous re-enactment.’<sup>54</sup>

The republican tradition was originally developed in an age of small political communities where ‘the people’ could assemble in person. First-hand participation and deliberation on collective action was seen to reinforce the sense of common endeavour amongst citizens and (particularly in the tradition inspired by ancient Greece) to enrich the individual’s moral capacity. A question which remains open is the degree to which participation can still be valorised under the conditions posed earlier, where even though the idea of self-rule is entrenched, not everyone can be engaged personally in decision-making and where some degree of representation is required.<sup>55</sup> The extent to which participation can be encouraged without resort to coercion also remains an ongoing debate within republican writing.<sup>56</sup> Another important concern must be with the nature of the problems which are held in common. While a sense of shared problems may bind people together strongly within a political community, there is no guarantee that others – inside or outside the community – will be treated with the level of respect which might be normatively desirable.<sup>57</sup> Chauvinism of all forms remains a danger. Finally, there are the same ontological and epistemological questions which were raised above to do with how the perception of commonality should be conceptualised. To all of these issues we shall return later in the course of this work.

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<sup>53</sup> Privileging rationality, consensus and morality is the Kantian tradition, with Habermasian ‘deliberative democracy’ an important contemporary variant as will be seen later. More inclined to emphasise the benefits of conflict are Machiavelli, *The Discourses*; Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Fania Oz-Salzberger edn.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Harrington and Milton (see the interpretation of Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Cambridge on 12th November 1997* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)), and more cautiously Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

<sup>54</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993), p.67.

<sup>55</sup> This is the question raised by Benjamin Constant, ‘The Liberty of Ancients Compared with That of Moderns’, *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. Barber, *Strong Democracy*.

<sup>57</sup> Discussing this, see Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory*, p.95.

## The European Demos Debate

The approaches we have outlined tend to explore the question of the common more as a conceptual problem than a historically rooted one. In many cases they form one dimension of a more general theoretical exploration of political and social order, where what is at stake is the viability of 'the polity' in the abstract rather than the viability of a particular polity. One body of work in which the question of the common has been matched to the study of a polity in its specificity is that which addresses the European Union. In this field, the so-called 'demos debate' has been a central feature of recent years.

This is a debate which was slow to emerge. As an offshoot of political science, EU studies traditionally restricted itself to a fairly narrow range of institutional questions, chiefly to do with how best to explain the process of regional integration. Next to the majesty of the neofunctionalist-intergovernmentalist debate, questions to do with 'the people' seemed rather slight. 'It is as impracticable as it is unnecessary,' explained Ernst Haas, 'to have recourse to general public opinion.'<sup>58</sup> Those of a more euphemistic disposition tended to speak of a 'permissive consensus' amongst member-state populations in favour of European integration.<sup>59</sup> Discussion of demos-related issues can be associated with two subsequent and related 'turns' in the EU-studies literature. The first may be called the 'polity turn'.<sup>60</sup> It marks a move towards treating the existence of the EU as an enduring phenomenon (a 'brute fact' rather than a temporary arrangement or an incipient process) and, moreover, as something worthy of study in its own right rather than as a derivation of national-governmental policies. The focus shifts from explaining the *process* of integration to exploring the nature of its outcome, and treating that outcome as a self-standing entity rather than just a highly developed form of intergovernmental organisation. For those who accept this polity turn, the amount and the scope of legislation which is produced in Brussels, the extent to which this is beyond the immediate control of any single member-state government because of the powers of the European Commission and Parliament, and the use of majority

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<sup>58</sup> Ernst Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces, 1950-57* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p.16.

<sup>59</sup> Leon Lindberg and Stuart Scheingold, *Europe's Would-Be Polity: Patterns of Change in the European Community* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Volker Balli, 'A Normative Self-Understanding of the European Union "In Practise"', *Standing Group on the European Union Third Pan-European Conference on EU Politics* (Istanbul, Turkey, 2006); Peter Wagner and Heidrun Friese, 'Survey Article: The Nascent Political Philosophy of the European Polity', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 10/3 (2002). The 'governance turn' may be treated as an alternative expression for the same – cf. Beate Kohler-Koch and Berthold Rittberger, 'Review Article: The 'Governance Turn' in EU Studies', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 44/1 (2006).

voting in the Council of Ministers, all point towards the need to see the EU as a polity of *some sort*. Precisely what sort is of course highly contested (the question of how best to characterise the institutional regime will be returned to in Chapter 6), but few consider that the debate is irrelevant.<sup>61</sup> The very ambiguity of the term ‘polity’, unburdened by the historical and disciplinary associations of terms such as the ‘state’ or the ‘political system’, and therefore accepting of a certain agnosticism as regards institutional design, makes it a suitable basis for consensus. This acceptance of the EU as a brute fact is coupled with the growing tendency in the fields of International Relations and European Studies to problematise the nation-state as the natural ‘container’ of the political process. Processes associated with ‘globalisation’, in particular the entrenchment of neoliberal economics and increases in transborder migration, have seemed to cast doubt on conventional (i.e. Westphalian) understandings of state sovereignty.<sup>62</sup>

A ‘polity turn’ implies a ‘normative turn’. Firstly, to acknowledge the emergence of the EU as a self-standing polity, and to entertain doubts about the future of nation-state sovereignty, is a strongly normative move, whether one chooses to advertise this or not.<sup>63</sup> Rather than simply a classificatory matter, it says much about the kinds of political vision to which one wants to lend credence. Secondly, and as a more explicit normative move, many scholars have addressed the implications for the health of contemporary European democracy of what they take to be the new empirical reality of a self-standing European polity.<sup>64</sup> A range of questions emerge in this literature. If democracy requires a demos, to what extent does one exist on a scale coextensive with the Union? What kind of collective bond should a demos be understood to imply? What are the preconditions for such a bond? Can one speak of a ‘democratic deficit’? More concretely, can the EU serve as the basis for a normative project designed to preserve certain achievements of the European nation-state which are deemed to be facing erosion under the conditions of globalisation? The continuous prospect

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<sup>61</sup> For a useful overview of this debate, see Paul Margette, *What Is the European Union?: Nature and Prospects* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); also Neil Walker, ‘The Idea of a European Constitution and the Finalité of Integration’, *Francisco Lucas Pires Working Papers Series on European Constitutionalism* (2002).

<sup>62</sup> For one perspective on this, see Jürgen Habermas, ‘The Postnational Constellation and the Future of Democracy’, in Jürgen Habermas (ed.), *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001b), esp. p.88.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Neil Walker, ‘Late Sovereignty in the European Union’, in Neil Walker (ed.), *Sovereignty in Transition* (Oxford: Hart, 2003).

<sup>64</sup> Richard Bellamy and Dario Castiglione, ‘The Normative Challenge of a European Polity: Cosmopolitan and Communitarian Models Compared, Criticised and Combined’, in Andreas Follesdal and Peter Koslowski (eds.), *Democracy and the European Union* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1998); also, on the need for a more ‘intentionalist’ paradigm for European integration, see Claus Offe, ‘The Democratic Welfare State: A European Regime under the Strain of European Integration’, *Political Science Series*, Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna, 68 (2000).

of enlarging the Union to include further states on its periphery, and thereby to increase the diversity within the Union, adds to the force of such questions. Authors concerned with normative questions have no doubt been drawn to the study of the EU exactly because it may seem to represent an opportunity to redefine what the nature of the collective bond should be. It represents a ‘fresh start’ as it were, and for the very fact that a multinational polity cannot rest purely on a national bond, it suggests the possibility to envisage a ‘post-national’ politics, a new kind of political closure which is not founded on an exclusive, hegemonic identity. Naturally, normative concerns and empirical claims are frequently intertwined, such that a prescription for further European integration, or a return to the nation-state, is presented as the logical conclusion to be drawn from a particular diagnosis of the present.<sup>65</sup>

The debate about the common in the European context draws in many of the arguments from social and political theory which were considered in the preceding section. One widely held position sees ‘Europeans’ as linked by their shared interests. In the 1940s and 1950s, the populations of European nation-states were generally seen as overtly hostile to one another, and it was assumed that any moves towards integration would have to quieten their passions by appealing to their interests. In the early post-War years these interests were understood by many as security interests, implying a *security bond* based on the need to establish peace between European states.<sup>66</sup> More commonly, and perhaps the default perspective on European integration once the early federalist visions had faded, an economic perspective was advanced. With arguments similar to those made during the Scottish Enlightenment, it was suggested that integration and polity formation could be advanced by enabling the pursuit of interests through commercial exchange. The deepening of market interaction, and functional integration led by the establishment of cross-national functional institutions, was viewed as establishing a *commercial bond* between elites; this in turn would create wider economic benefits for the member-state populations as a whole, and they would then come to associate their prosperity with the European Community and thus grant it a degree of allegiance. The earliest act of integration was explicitly characterised by Jean Monnet in these terms: ‘in itself this [the founding of the ECSC] was a technical step, but its

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<sup>65</sup> For an analysis of the interlinkage of normative and empirical arguments in Habermas’ work, see Pablo de Greiff, ‘Habermas on Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism’, *Ratio Juris*, 15/4 (2002), p.428.

<sup>66</sup> See e.g. Winston Churchill, ‘The tragedy of Europe’, Speech to the Academic Youth, Zurich, 19 September 1946, in Winston Churchill, *Winston S. Churchill: His Complete Speeches, 1897-1963* (Robert Rhodes James edn.; New York: Chelsea House, 1974). Security interests could also be understood in terms of the collective ability to influence global politics, an argument that has recently been explored by Glyn Morgan in the language of ‘justification’ – Glyn Morgan, *The Idea of a European Superstate: Public Justification and European Integration* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

new procedures, under common institutions, created a silent revolution in men's minds. It proved decisive in persuading businessmen, civil servants, politicians and trade unionists that ... the economic and political advantages of unity over division were immense.'<sup>67</sup> The ascendancy of the neofunctionalists, though they were little interested in normative questions and focused predominantly on elite actors, ensured that this was the mainstream perspective throughout the 1960s.<sup>68</sup>

The popularity of an interests-based approach has since somewhat declined however, no doubt partly because the Community itself has evolved (since the Maastricht treaty at the latest, its policy fields extend well beyond the economic), and probably also for many of the reasons described earlier. In descriptive-empirical terms, one may wonder whether a bond based on interests, security or commercial, is sufficient to constitute a political community. To conceive a European polity in terms of a commercial bond is to suggest that political community is ultimately reducible to one set of concerns (the economic) and that popular economic interests favour the integration process so unambiguously that they can be relied upon alone to generate the necessary allegiance to common institutions. But interests, as has been said, tend not to be so unambiguous: they can be appraised in multiple ways, and are always susceptible to redescription. Moreover, in this market-oriented perspective the only shared interests are long-term; in the short-term, interests relate to individuals or aggregates of individuals, and pull in different directions therefore. Even taking seriously the economic arguments for European integration, it is clear that not everyone can be a market 'winner' all of the time: benefits are distributed across time and space. Particularly in periods of slow economic growth, many actors may come to perceive themselves to be 'losers', and other economic actors as competitors rather than partners in transaction. Non-elites in particular may decide that the short-term costs of integration tend to weigh most heavily on them (as indeed may be the case), and there is no reason to suppose that an appeal to their 'long-term economic interests' will be sufficient to retain their sense of the collective. If the empirical argument is inconclusive, for this reason one can take a critical approach to the normative implications of accepting such a position. As suggested in the previous section, a commercial perspective on the common offers few opportunities for collective political action on the part of citizens. The role of government is likely to be restricted to establishing

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<sup>67</sup> Jean Monnet, 'A Ferment of Change', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 1/3 (1963), p.205.

<sup>68</sup> Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social and Economic Forces, 1950-57*; Haas, *Beyond the Nation-State: Functionalism and International Organization* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964); Leon Lindberg, *The Political Dynamics of European Economic Integration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963). On the influence of the neofunctionalists, see Jonathan P. J. White, 'Theory Guiding Practice: The Neofunctionalists and the Hallstein EEC Commission', *Journal of European Integration History*, 9/1 (2003).

the regulatory framework within which market-based relations unfold, with little opportunity for exercising democratic control over these. Decision-making consists of a series of bargains between the representatives of interest groups, and since interests are taken as given there is no role for a process of political debate and contestation through which to evaluate them and through which to seek an interpretation of the common good. To treat interests as constitutive of the demos is a depoliticising move, and is likely to exacerbate wider trends in contemporary democracy towards the marginalisation of the principle of democratic control or its narrow interpretation simply as the aggregation of votes on election day.

Considering a commercial bond too thin a basis for a European demos therefore, and seeking a perspective which enables the pursuit of more than just the most basic common goals, other authors have been tempted to apply some of the arguments to do with cultural and values-based commonality. The approach which tries to identify markers of ethical significance, as in the Romantic nationalist writings of the nineteenth-century, is rare in the academic literature. Although discussion of the significance of Christianity for the EU was a feature of the public debate surrounding the drafting of the Constitutional Treaty, and has since been revived as a possibility by the German Chancellor,<sup>69</sup> a religious bond of this kind seems both empirically and normatively implausible. Likewise the ‘common European civilisation’ based on a ‘common heritage’ which was referred to in the 1973 Declaration on European Identity finds little comparable expression in contemporary academic writing.<sup>70</sup> Larry Siedentop does come close to declaring latent commonality amongst Europeans when he writes of the ‘moral inheritance’ which they share and which they need to ‘become more conscious of’.<sup>71</sup> In his narrative, Christianity (Protestantism in particular) was crucial in entrenching the modern idea of equality and the tradition of political liberalism; a mixture of residual anticlericalism and a mistaken pursuit of the multicultural society prevents ‘Europeans’ recognising that this is what they have in common. ‘Europeans have only to pick up the pieces of their past in order to become aware of important moral continuities.’<sup>72</sup> Despite this language of authenticity, there is nonetheless an instrumentalist bent to his argument. This ‘story’ of the past which ‘we can tell ourselves’ has a purpose: ‘unless a coherent identity presides over the process of European integration, that process will, sooner or later, lead to disorder,’ and the ‘future influence of Europe in the world’ will depend on its

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<sup>69</sup> See [www.guardian.co.uk/eu/story/0,,1860140,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/eu/story/0,,1860140,00.html), accessed November 2006.

<sup>70</sup> For more on the Declaration, see Gerard Delanty, ‘Models of European Identity: Reconciling Universalism and Particularism’, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 3/3 (2002).

<sup>71</sup> Larry Siedentop, *Democracy in Europe* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), Chap. 10 (‘Europe, Christianity and Islam’), p.214.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* p.189.

clarity.<sup>73</sup> With this pragmatic twist, it is recognisably a twenty-first century version of the nineteenth-century argument. The position falls foul of the same arguments we raised against the original, however: it posits a level of homogeneity which can be seen either as wholly unrealistic for today's Europe or, if one were to take it seriously, highly repressive of those who do not conform easily to it.

A looser and unequivocally instrumentalist conception of a *cultural bond* is more frequently to be found in the European demos debate. Anthony Smith defines 'collective cultural identity' in terms which avoid valorising a particular narrative: 'This would refer not to some fixed pattern or uniformity of elements over time, but rather to a sense of shared *continuity* on the part of successive generations of a given unit of population, and to shared *memories* of earlier periods, events and personages in the history of the unit ... [and] the collective belief in a common *destiny* of that unit and its culture.'<sup>74</sup> The emphasis is strongly on perceptions – note the (not entirely clear) concepts of shared memories and collective beliefs. Like Miller in the previous section, Smith seeks to avoid the normative charge that he is positing an unduly strong degree of homogeneity by emphasising the possibility of multiple identifications and the importance of situation. 'In the ancient world,' he writes, 'it was possible to be Athenian, Ionian and Greek all at the same time; in the medieval world, to be Bernese, Swiss and Protestant; in the modern Third World to be Ibo, Nigerian and African simultaneously. Similarly, one could feel simultaneously Catalan, Spanish and European; even – dare one say it? – Scottish-or-English, British and European.'<sup>75</sup> A large body of empirical literature attempts to operationalise these distinctions and to measure the 'sense of belonging' or 'identity' which EU citizens display.<sup>76</sup> There is much talk of 'nested' and 'cross-cutting' identities, and even a 'marble cake' model has been put forward.<sup>77</sup> However, as suggested above, and as will be discussed further in the next chapter, the appeal to individual perceptions – unless one wishes to remain at a very high level of abstraction –

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p.189; p.214.

<sup>74</sup> Anthony Smith, 'National Identity and the Idea of European Unity', *International Affairs*, 68/1 (1992), p.58.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. pp.67-8.

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. Sophie Duchesne and André Paul Frogner, 'Is There a European Identity?', in Oskar Niedermayer and Richard Sinnott (eds.), *Public Opinion and Internationalised Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Lauren McLaren, 'Public Support for the European Union: Cost / Benefit Analysis or Perceived Cultural Threat?', *The Journal of Politics*, 64/2 (2002); Ignacio Sanchez-Cuenca, 'The Political Basis of Support for European Integration', *European Union Politics*, 1/2 (2000); Hermann Schmitt and Jacques Thomassen, *Political Representation and Legitimacy in the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Richard Sinnott, 'Knowledge and the Position of Attitudes to a European Foreign Policy on the Real-to-Random Continuum', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 12/2 (2000), and review articles by Matthew Gabel, 'Public Support for European Integration: An Empirical Test of Five Theories', *The Journal of Politics*, 60/2 (1998b) and Martin Kohli, 'The Battlegrounds of European Identity', *European Societies*, 2/2 (2000).

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Risse, 'The Euro between National and European Identity', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 10/4 (2003a).

brings significant methodological problems with it. Furthermore, how abstract feelings of belonging connect to the question of political community is not immediately clear, and the more the cultural identification is pluralised and relativised, and seen to be fluid and evolving, the less it can be seen as determining the viability of political institutions.

Unsurprisingly, the temptation is always to fill out the details of the narrative, leading to a position which is rather less ecumenical. When asking specifically what is common to all Europeans, Smith has a list of attributes including traditions of Roman law, political democracy, parliamentary institutions, Judeo-Christian ethics, Renaissance humanism, rationalism, empiricism, romanticism and classicism, which in his view together constitute a 'family of cultures' in at least some of which 'all Europe's communities' have participated.<sup>78</sup> For him, what needs to be established is how far an awareness of these shared traditions has penetrated 'each of Europe's national identities'.<sup>79</sup> The link between culture and political community is made explicit:

... until the great majority of Europeans, the great mass of the middle and lower classes, are ready to imbibe these European messages in a similar manner and to feel inspired by them to common action and community, the edifice of 'Europe' at the political level will remain shaky. This is all too clear today in respect of foreign policy and defence, where we are witnessing the need for European governments to respond to their national public opinion and the failure of Europeans to agree on a common policy. Once again, the usual divisions of public opinion between European states have been exposed, and with them the tortuous and divided actions of Europe's governments ... The 'European failure' only underlines the distance between the European ideal and its rootedness in the popular consciousness of Europe's national populations – and hence the distance between European unification at the political and cultural levels and the realities of divergent national identities, perceptions and interests within Europe.

By equating divisions of opinion with a lack of European identity and as therefore antithetical to political community, the culturalist reasoning thus arrives at a rather unfortunate political philosophy. Political adversarialism, rather than the mark of the healthy democracy, becomes that which should fade away once cultural disharmony is removed. While one may perhaps sympathise with Smith's frustration at an inadequate 'European' response to the 1990s Balkan crisis, it is clear that positing the necessity of cultural unity feeds all too easily into a strong conception of the common good which emphasises the necessity of political agreement. The conception of citizenship is a quite passive one, whereby good citizens display the regularity of opinion to which their cultural regularities should dispose them. A collective bond of this kind is a strongly depoliticising one.

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<sup>78</sup> Smith, 'National Identity and the Idea of European Unity', p.70.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. p.71.

Faced with these unwelcome implications, there is the option of course to downplay the cultural dimension and to speak of reciprocal identification less closely tied to cultural markers; that is, to propose a *social bond* rather than a cultural one. In this perspective, a polity must be underpinned by trust and solidarity amongst its citizens, trust understood as the belief that other citizens (strangers) will undertake their civic duties, solidarity as the willingness to comply in situations where others and not oneself are the beneficiaries. Such beliefs, it is supposed, enable the effective operation of many of the most basic functions of a polity, including taxation, social security and the assembly of military force. Neither of these social dispositions is simply the faithful observance of cultural commonality, but nor can they be generated from above: as Claus Offe puts it, ‘the “horizontal” phenomena of trust and solidarity (linking citizens to each other) are preconditions for the “vertical” phenomenon of the establishment and continued existence of state authority ...’<sup>80</sup> The polity can do no more than develop what already exists. Offe views a European polity with some scepticism on the grounds that such trust and solidarity is absent amongst Europeans.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, it may be that an ‘idea of liberation’ is required to generate the sense of unity between people under which trust and solidarity can flourish, ‘be it liberation from the rule of oppressive or exploitative foreign ... powers or liberation from princely particularism, arbitrariness, unjust oppression, and belligerent passions.’ Since there is no obvious sense in which Europe holds ‘the promise of liberation’, Offe concludes that for the foreseeable future there will be no European social bond to underpin a European polity.<sup>82</sup>

This diagnosis is ostensibly plausible, and avoids conceptualising the collectivity in terms which are inherently exclusionary. It largely avoids social determinism, since – not least because Offe is vague on the origins of trust and solidarity – he does not rule out the possibility that they might later emerge at a European level. Also, his approach initiates a welcome shift away from the focus on ‘objective realities’ (interests or cultural markers) and individual perceptions towards what one might call social practices, the methodological implications of which move will be considered further in the next chapter. Nonetheless, the account relies on a considerable amount of assertion. Offe’s challenge is to identify the ‘dog that doesn’t bark’: that is, the continued non-occurrence of trust and solidarity between Europeans. It is a notoriously difficult type of challenge, especially if one wishes to attribute a decisive importance to the non-occurrence, since one has little sense of what the non-

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<sup>80</sup> Offe, 'The Democratic Welfare State', p.5.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p.12.

<sup>82</sup> Claus Offe, 'Is There, or Can There Be, a “European Society”?' in Ines Katenhusen and Wolfram Lamping (eds.), *Demokratien in Europa* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 2003), p.76.

occurrence might look like if it did occur, and little reason to be sure that, of all the non-occurrences which do not occur, this is the decisive one. One could in principle use the method of contrast: that is, one could give some indication of the nature and significance of the non-occurrence by highlighting the nature and the significance of its occurrence elsewhere. However, Offe is not in a position to do this, since his argument is that the process of European integration *also* weakens levels of trust and solidarity which European populations demonstrate *amongst themselves* (as opposed to across one another). Thus he can give little indication, other than a footnote or two concerning patterns of charitable donation,<sup>83</sup> of how suitable levels of trust and solidarity would look if they were present. One does indeed wonder how one would measure the presence or absence of trust and solidarity other than with reference to that which it is supposed to determine, the viability of the polity and its institutions. Offe's argument, which is generally maintained at a high level of historico-sociological abstraction, does not clarify this.

These weak points in the descriptive-analytical potential of the argument mean that one needs good normative reasons for adopting it. One wonders, however, whether this approach does not rather overplay the importance of the social bond for political community, again at the expense of adversarialism. Offe speaks of 'social trust, or the presumption of generally benign or at least non-hostile intentions on the part of partners in interaction' as being 'arguably indispensable as a factor of social integration in modern democratic market societies.'<sup>84</sup> It seems evident that the kind of trust he has in mind is that which is universal across the political community, extended to all citizens, and without distinction according to issue-area. It is not clear however why this should be a necessary feature of a political community. Is it not possible for citizens to see certain other groups of citizens as opponents, persons whose intentions may well be hostile towards them, without this spelling the end of political community? Is this not precisely how, speaking in stereotypes, the poor may see the rich, or the country folk may see the urbanites? And is it not exactly this *mis*-trust which may inspire them to form political movements so as to seek to capture the political agenda? These are open questions admittedly, but they do seem to point towards an alternative reading. What are surely more important in the European context than blanket trust (or solidarity) across populations are two related but different conditions: a) that identification does not *always*, on all issues, divide up along national lines; and b) that those who are not

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<sup>83</sup> E.g. Offe, 'The Democratic Welfare State', fnt. 28.

<sup>84</sup> Claus Offe, 'How can we Trust our Fellow Citizens?' in Mark E. Warren (ed.), *Democracy and Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.2.

trusted (or however one terms it) are nonetheless *tolerated* as members of the political community. Neither of these presupposes the existence of a comprehensive social bond extending evenly across all citizens in all areas.

As will have been anticipated in light of the earlier section, a European demos can also be conceptualised without reference to a socio-cultural substrate. One such approach imagines a bond of shared *values* and *principles*. That supposedly *universal* shared principles such as human rights or the rule of law might constitute the common is a perspective which has been aired in the European debate, though predictably with limited success. The constitutional patriotism of the earlier Habermas provides little basis for a collective bond which is specifically European, and most constitutional patriots refer to a more particularist set of values, as below.<sup>85</sup> As Pierre Manent has observed, ‘Europeans cannot consider that only Europe is entitled to the universal because, if they did so, at that very instant the universal would cease to be universal!’<sup>86</sup> Some of those authors who do make reference to principles intended to be universal probably do so for the very reason that they oppose the idea of a European polity, preferring to see it instead as an expanding association of loosely interdependent states under conditions of globalisation. Thus Anthony Giddens, for whom ‘the EU is not a state at all, and will never become one’, argues that ‘the identity of the Union ... should be developed around civic values, not around attempts to find a common heritage’, and that ‘what matters about the European Union today is not primarily that it is European, but that it forms a bridgehead towards global governance.’<sup>87</sup> It is certainly a consistent move to reject the universal as a basis for the particular, but it comes at the price of claiming that the particular is actually the embodiment of the universal, i.e. that the EU is the vanguard of mankind’s future. Historically, such moves tend to arouse suspicion from those outside the vanguard.

More frequent therefore has been the move to invoke values or principles understood to be European rather than universal. This is the approach one associates with the later Habermas. It is not ‘relativist’ – it retains a critical disposition in prioritising certain values over others as expressive of the common – but it sees the universal as mediated by particularity. That which is shared comes to be elaborated and redefined in the course of constituting the polity, and acts as the normative consensus within which political conflict is

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. Markell, 'Making Affect Safe for Democracy?: On 'Constitutional Patriotism'', on this, and de Greiff, 'Habermas on Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism', p.51.

<sup>86</sup> Pierre Manent, *A World Beyond Politics? A Defense of the Nation-State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p.65.

<sup>87</sup> Anthony Giddens, 'A Third Way for the European Union', in Mark Leonard (ed.), *The Future Shape of Europe* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2000).

contained. ‘In a future Federal Republic of European States,’ writes Habermas, ‘the *same* legal principles would ... have to be interpreted from the perspectives of *different* national traditions and histories. One’s own tradition must in each case be appropriated from a vantage point relativised by the perspectives of other traditions, and appropriated in such a manner that it can be brought into a transnational, Western European constitutional culture. A particularist anchoring of *this kind* would not do away with one iota of the universalist meaning of popular sovereignty and human rights.’<sup>88</sup> Moral self-reflection on the experiences of European history plays a special role in this perspective, as a shared set of post-nationalist values emerges through an engagement with the past and an acknowledgement of the destructive tendencies of the Westphalian nation-state system.<sup>89</sup> Lest this process of reflection seem excessively abstract, often there is the suggestion that the shared values or shared ‘political culture’ be given tangible form with the creation of a European constitution. Both the legal text itself, and the experience of drafting and debating that text, serve to amplify the values held in common, ideally exerting a ‘catalytic effect’ on the consolidation of the polity.<sup>90</sup> The emphasis on a creative process is clear: rather than the polity being dependent upon pre-political bonds, it is affirmed that ‘peoples come into being ... only with their state constitutions.’<sup>91</sup> Habermas fills out the perspective by drawing on his earlier work on the public sphere,<sup>92</sup> and his later work on deliberative democracy.<sup>93</sup>

Importantly, those proposing a collective bond of this kind as the basis for a European demos generally do not see it as a substitute for identification at the national level. Habermas observes that ‘it is neither possible nor desirable to level out the national identities

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<sup>88</sup> Habermas, ‘Citizenship and National Identity’, p.500.

<sup>89</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Why Europe Needs a Constitution’, *New Left Review*, September / October (2001a), p.17.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. p.13 and Neil Walker, ‘Europe’s Constitutional Momentum and the Search for Polity Legitimacy’, *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 4/2 (2005).

<sup>91</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘The European Nation-State and the Pressures of Globalisation’, in Pablo de Greiff and Ciaran Cronin (eds.), *Global Justice and Transnational Politics* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2002), p.230. Cf. J.H.H. Weiler, ‘Does Europe Need a Constitution? Demos, Telos and the German Maastricht Decision’, *European Law Journal*, 1/3 (1995), p.239 for a similar emphasis on a top-down dynamic of people-making.

<sup>92</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1989); Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996b).

<sup>93</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Three Normative Models of Democracy’, in Seyla Benhabib (ed.), *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996a). In a quite different tradition emerging from political science and systems theory, the importance of social communication in fostering a collective bond had been explored by Karl Deutsch. See e.g. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1953), and Deutsch, ‘Communication Theory and Political Integration’, in Philip E. Jacob and James V. Toscano (eds.), *The Integration of Political Communities* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1964). His ‘transactionalist’ approach to transnational integration placed emphasis on the role of communication, aided by technological advances, to establish the socio-psychological basis for transnational institutional arrangements.

of member nations, nor melt them down into a “Nation of Europe”.’<sup>94</sup> Likewise, J.H.H. Weiler, though diverging from Habermas in expressing scepticism towards an EU constitution, envisages a separation of roles, European citizens having ‘contemporaneous membership in an organic national-cultural demos and in a supranational civic, value-driven demos.’<sup>95</sup> Rather than a European demos, this view imagines an assembly of *demosi*. ‘The national is Eros: Reaching back to the pre-modern, appealing to the heart with a grasp on our emotions, and evocative of the romantic vision of creative social organization as well as responding to our existential yearning for a meaning located in time and space. The nation, through its myths, provides a past and a future. And it is always a history and a destiny in a place, in a territory, a narrative that is fluid and fixed at the same time. The dangers are self-evident. The Supranational is Civilization: Confidently modernist, appealing to the rational within us and to Enlightenment neo-classical humanism, taming that Eros.’<sup>96</sup> Rather than negated, national modes of identification are simply not privileged: hence the sense of Cronin’s observation that this version of constitutional patriotism is best characterised as ‘post-nationalist’ rather than ‘post-national’.<sup>97</sup>

By focusing on discourse and the discursive renegotiation of the common, this approach avoids mistaking ‘the people’ for a coherent body extending through time. It is clear on the point that ‘the people’ should be understood as a floating signifier whose meaning is cast differently at different times, thereby opening the space for a political process of revaluation.<sup>98</sup> That it cannot specify who is to be party to this process of renegotiation is a failing shared with all the approaches we have discussed, contrary to the claims of certain culturalists, since no representations of ‘the people’ can count as final, and so the referent is always contested and evolving. This emphasis on ongoing reappraisal notwithstanding, in certain important ways it seems uncondusive to contestatory politics and active citizenship.<sup>99</sup> Firstly, insofar as a thin collective bond of civic values at the European level is coupled with the reinvention of a cultural bond at the national level, many of the

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<sup>94</sup> Habermas, 'The Postnational Constellation', p.99.

<sup>95</sup> Weiler, 'Does Europe Need a Constitution?', p.256.

<sup>96</sup> J.H.H. Weiler, 'To Be a European Citizen', in *The Constitution of Europe: Do the New Clothes Have an Emperor? And Other Essays on European Integration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.347.

<sup>97</sup> Ciaran Cronin, 'Democracy and Collective Identity: In Defence of Constitutional Patriotism', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 11/1 (2003).

<sup>98</sup> See e.g. Ciaran Cronin, 'Democracy and Collective Identity: In Defence of Constitutional Patriotism', *European Journal of Philosophy*, 11/1 (2003), p.15.

<sup>99</sup> For an overview of critiques which have been made, and possible responses, see Justine Lacroix, 'For a European Constitutional Patriotism', *Political Studies*, 50/5 (2002); Cronin, 'Democracy and Collective Identity: In Defence of Constitutional Patriotism', Wagner and Friese, 'Survey Article: The Nascent Political Philosophy of the European Polity'.

criticisms we directed at the latter are transferable: one does not circumvent them by insisting that the cultural bond be domestic to the nation-state. Secondly, while it is through a process of open debate that particularist European values are held to emerge, the parameters within which these should lie seem quite narrowly defined in advance: deliberation in the unfolding public sphere is marked by its rationality and should lead ultimately to a rational consensus. The model is therefore vulnerable to one of the criticisms made of Habermasian deliberative democracy more generally: that it is depoliticising because it has an elitist bias, since it limits the involvement of citizens who are only weakly able to frame their interventions according to prevailing conceptions of what characterises rational debate.<sup>100</sup> A disjuncture may then emerge such that certain values achieve consensus at the elite level – aversion to the death penalty, for instance – without these reflecting the achievement of a broader consensus across the citizen body, leaving large numbers of citizens (perhaps the majority) only with the options either to adapt or withdraw their consent.<sup>101</sup> Even were one to accept the conceptual possibility of a genuine post-political consensus that extended to all Europeans without it being a ‘top-down imposition’, one would be strained to imagine the public sphere adequately free of power-political influences and the functional problems of language diversity such that this ideal consensus could take shape in an inclusive public debate.<sup>102</sup>

Moreover, while it is questionable whether shared values sufficiently uncontroversial to be accepted by all would generate much of an affective response, those that might do so could well be politically unattractive. Appealing to emotions of shame and anger, one proposal for a more affective constitutional patriotism,<sup>103</sup> would involve couching large numbers of contemporary political issues in the language of morality. This holds considerable problems: if political actors conclude that moralistic arguments appealing to values embodied in a constitution are ‘trumps’, it encourages them to frame political debates as moral clashes between right and wrong. This may lead to the adoption of an unquestioning disposition and a conviction of moral superiority, which in turn may lead to a hardening of intolerance and the demonisation of opponents. Such features have been noted in the Europe-wide reaction in 2000 to the involvement of Jörg Haider’s FPÖ party in

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<sup>100</sup> See e.g. Lynn M. Sanders, 'Against Deliberation', *Political Theory*, 25/3 (1997).

<sup>101</sup> A disjuncture of this kind seems to be overlooked by Amitai Etzioni when he claims to find ‘several strong candidates for EU-wide particularistic values’ including the commitment to a peaceful foreign policy, to the ‘social market’, and to the practice of ‘openly fac[ing] common histories, especially the Holocaust’ (pp.33-4). Etzioni, ‘The Community Deficit’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 45/1.

<sup>102</sup> On some of the practical constraints on a public sphere, see Dieter Grimm, 'Does Europe Need a Constitution?' *European Law Journal*, 1/3 (1995).

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Cronin, 'Democracy and Collective Identity: In Defence of Constitutional Patriotism', p.14.

Austria's coalition government.<sup>104</sup> The withdrawal of normal courtesies at the diplomatic level, and a series of demonstrations by ordinary citizens around Europe intended to 'shame' those who had voted for Haider, engendered an unattractive mix of expressions of moral superiority on the one side and defensiveness and indignation on the other, both with nationalist undertones. By converting Haider's success from a political into a moral issue, the boundaries of legitimate public debate became narrowed, and those in sympathy with his views were placed outside the normal political process. Much as one may sympathise with the moral judgement behind it, such a move arguably weakens the political process by increasing the danger of anti-democratic responses.

Lastly there is the question of the constitution itself. Many advocates of constitutional patriotism in the EU context are advocates of an EU constitution: giving emphasis to legal structures is one way to avoid ungrounded speculation about the values which a set of people (as individuals) may hold in common. With a constitution, not only is there a specific text which the demos has in common; there is also the experience of drafting and debating that text, the experience of the constitutional moment.<sup>105</sup> While this is undoubtedly true in the case of successful constitutional polities, it may be that they also enjoy certain supporting conditions. The 'idea of liberation' referred to above may be one. Large numbers of popular movements embodying the demand for a constitution might be another. Widespread and stable prior agreement about the kind of polity which is to be founded (its regime) might be a further requirement (and this, in the EU case, presumably as a derivation of convergent experiences at the national level). These conditions allow for a constructive drafting process and for a text short enough to have popular resonance.<sup>106</sup> Where they are absent however, the drafting and approval process may be a divisive affair, merely serving to highlight how *little* 'the people' hold in common. Constitutions alone do not generate patriotism.

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<sup>104</sup> On the dangers of the use of 'shaming' in response to the rise of Haider in Austria, see both Jan-Werner Müller, 'A 'Thick' Constitutional Patriotism for the EU? On Morality, Memory and Militancy', *Law and Democracy in Europe's Post-National Constellation: Concluding Conference of the CIDEL-Project* (EUI Florence, 2005), and Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Verso, 2005).

<sup>105</sup> On this see Habermas, 'Why Europe Needs a Constitution', and Neil Walker, 'Europe's Constitutional Momentum and the Search for Polity Legitimacy', *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 4/2 (2005).

<sup>106</sup> The assumption here is that agreement is likely to produce a shorter text. One could of course imagine that disagreement might produce a *short and highly ambiguous* text, the avoidance of specificity being the only way to secure ultimate agreement, but such a text would be much less likely to succeed as a common point of (affective) identification.

In presenting this overview of the European demos debate, the intention has been to suggest that none of the approaches currently available is of such descriptive plausibility it has to be accepted at face value, and that for this reason the political implications of each are an appropriate element in their assessment. The commonality required for a European demos does not seem to be fully captured when conceptualised in terms of a *security* bond, a *commercial* bond, a *cultural* bond, a *social* bond, or a *values/constitutional* bond. Moreover, each seems to carry a depoliticising tendency of some kind, whether this involves proposing a high degree of regularity across the citizen body and downgrading the importance of political adversarialism, or emptying public life of the pursuit of all but the most general shared ends. None of these perspectives seems to provide a satisfactory perspective from which to conceive political community on a scale coextensive with the European Union.

One coherent response would be to dismiss therefore both the possibility of a European demos and with it the viability of the EU. The difficulty of conceptualising the collective bond would be read as the consequence of features specific to the EU case, such as cleavage structures across the member-state populations and the historical conditions in which the EU has emerged. In this perspective, the debate has ground to a halt due to real-world reasons: there is something particular about Europe which makes the question of peoplehood essentially problematic, and it should therefore be put to one side so as to concentrate better on democracy at the nation-state level. Such a response would be premature and perhaps a little complacent. It would suggest that there are no further lines to the debate that can be pursued, something one may hope to dispute. It would also suggest that the task of conceptualising the collective bond at the state level does not face similar difficulties. Yet as ongoing debates in many EU member-states and North America about 'national identity', citizenship, social inclusion and the limits of tolerance imply, the nature of the demos resists easy conceptualisation at the state level too.<sup>107</sup> Abolishing the EU would not resolve this, since wider processes of globalisation and ongoing social differentiation are involved. The question of the common is one which liberal democracy as a whole increasingly grapples with in today's world; its difficulty is not peculiar to the EU, and so its difficulty cannot lightly be seen in itself as evidence of the non-viability of the EU.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. Parekh, 'Politics of Nationhood', p.139.

<sup>108</sup> For further arguments to this effect, see Richard Bellamy and Alex Warleigh, 'Introduction: The Puzzle of EU Citizenship', in Richard Bellamy and Alex Warleigh (eds.), *Citizenship and Governance in the European Union* (London: Continuum, 2001), esp. pp.9-10; likewise Richard Bellamy and Dario Castiglione, 'Democracy, Sovereignty and the Constitution of the European Union: The Republican Alternative to Liberalism', in Zenon Bańkowski and Andrew Scott (eds.), *The European Union and Its Order: The Legal Theory of European Integration* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

A second coherent response would be to dismiss not the EU as such but the possibility of *democracy* at a European level. Such a move is quite common in the EU-studies literature. It tends not to take the form of a Schumpeterian dismissal of the very idea of rule by ‘the people’.<sup>109</sup> Rather, those contesting the ‘polity turn’ argue that the EU is best seen as an international regime in which member-state governments retain the crucial powers. The trappings of democracy, and collective bonds in particular, are not necessary at a European level therefore, since popular sovereignty is secured at the nation-state level; any remaining problems of democracy are institutional and can be addressed through member-state initiatives (e.g. making the Council of Ministers more transparent, or increasing the role of national MPs in the scrutiny of European legislation).<sup>110</sup> A related argument holds that, while the EU institutions do (and should) exert real powers in certain policy-areas, these are not areas in which majoritarian democracy is needed. Andrew Moravcsik speaks of a division of labour between the EU and its member-states which ‘gives the *impression* that the EU is undemocratic, whereas it is in fact simply specialising in those aspects of modern democratic governance that tend to involve less direct political participation.’<sup>111</sup> This is in line with Fritz Scharpf’s distinction between ‘input-oriented legitimation’, based on popular voice, and ‘output-oriented legitimation’, based on quantifiable success in the achievement of goals.<sup>112</sup> The activities of the EU institutions are restricted to policies which are regulatory rather than redistributive (or technocratic rather than political), and for this reason he suggests they require legitimation only of the second kind, for which ‘demos’-related issues are unimportant. Giandomenico Majone likewise emphasises that the EU’s competences are (and should remain) limited to regulatory policies (‘efficiency issues’, as he calls them), and argues that for these the crucial principles are expertise and the neutrality of regulators, principles which non-majoritarian institutions are best placed to observe. Accountability is thus indirect, and again the question of a demos that can exert democratic control is avoided.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. Schumpeter’s famous assertion that ‘democracy does not mean and cannot mean that the people actually rule in any obvious sense of the terms ‘people’ and ‘rule’. Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them.’ Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1943), p.284.

<sup>110</sup> See e.g. Andrew Moravcsik, ‘Federalism in the European Union: Rhetoric and Reality’, in Robert Howse and Kalypso Nicolaidis (eds.), *The Federal Vision: Legitimacy and Levels of Governance in the United States and the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>111</sup> Moravcsik, ‘In Defence of the ‘Democratic Deficit’’, p.606.

<sup>112</sup> Fritz Scharpf, *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>113</sup> Giandomenico Majone, *Regulating Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996); Majone, ‘The Regulatory State and Its Legitimacy Problems’, *West European Politics*, 22/1 (1999); Majone, ‘Nonmajoritarian Institutions and the Limits of Democratic Governance: A Political Transaction-Cost Approach’, *Journal of Institutional and*

The difficulty for these authors is to identify what constitutes an ‘efficiency issue’, i.e. an issue for which political contestation is unnecessary. To do so properly, one would have to be able to define the nature of the issue without appealing to a historically rooted set of ideological assumptions. That the contemporary liberal-economic orthodoxy holds for example that monetary policy is best removed from the control of political representatives does not suffice to establish that this is so; the contrary perspective, that the timing and depth of adjustments to currency exchange rates has consequences involving unequally distributed costs and benefits, and that the issue is therefore one for political negotiation and compromise, is an equally plausible perspective. This being so, the majoritarian model of democracy is hard fully to abandon. While the delegation of power to bureaucracies may be necessary for the day-to-day functioning of a democracy, in any perspective which takes seriously the sovereign authority of ‘the people’ it needs to be possible for this delegation of power to be periodically challenged. That one could conceive European-level policy-making as purely technocratic is illusory. Questions of democracy do not go away at the European level, and so neither does the question of the demos.

A third coherent response to the difficulties of conceptualising the common would be to argue that these difficulties highlight the impossibility of imagining the demos in anything less than universal terms. In this view, the acceptance of political boundaries can only be a temporary concession: any theoretical attempt to conceptualise the common should be more ambitious and should take a global polity as its point of departure. As the cosmopolitan theorist Robert Goodin puts it, there are ‘good grounds for thinking that (at least in principle) we should give virtually everyone a vote on virtually everything virtually everywhere in the world.’<sup>114</sup> This response, though not complacent, is again premature. The normative reasons to be sceptical of global governance cannot be explored here, though their existence can be acknowledged.<sup>115</sup> The practical difficulties are rather obvious: creating a world government would require all known power-centres voluntarily to relinquish their power under conditions where – quite in contrast to a Hobbesian state of nature – they are by no means all equally vulnerable to threat. This is, as Goodin acknowledges, quite possibly a ‘wildly impractical’ vision, and ‘even the most dewy-eyed cosmopolitans rarely envisage a centralized, unitary government issuing world-wide diktats from some Capital of the World. The proposal is

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*Theoretical Economics*, 157/1 (2001). For reviews of this literature see Wagner and Friese, 'Survey Article: The Nascent Political Philosophy of the European Polity', and Paul Magnette, 'European Governance and Civic Participation: Beyond Elitist Citizenship?', *Political Studies*, 51/1 (2003).

<sup>114</sup> Goodin, 'Enfranchising All Affected Interests', p.64.

<sup>115</sup> E.g. Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*.

almost always for a “world government, federal in form.”<sup>116</sup> Once one reverts to a federal model, taking territorial states as given and exploring the possible relations between them, the question of the common quickly returns at a sub-global level, for even in a global federation the viability of the federal units is an important concern. One suspects that the argument for a global demos may be treated as another device with which to highlight cosmopolitan obligations between states rather than as a proposal for global government, and is therefore a counter-argument to exploring further the European case only in appearance.

We shall therefore adopt what is a fourth coherent response, which is to conclude that the demos question needs to be explored from a different angle. A new kind of collective bond needs to be conceptualised, one that can serve as a normative ideal whilst retaining a basic level of empirical plausibility. The next section lays out some ideas for a formulation we shall refer to as a ‘political bond’. It will be sketched as an outline, to be developed further over the course of the subsequent chapters.

### A Political Bond

Drawing on what has been said so far, one challenge must be to conceive of a bond which is sufficiently ‘thick’ to make sense of the political community without being unacceptably exclusionary and without implying a position of social determinism. Though demanding, this seems an important orientating principle with which to begin. An alternative conception of the collective bond arguably needs to be more substantial than a *commercial* bond, which tends towards the atomisation of individuals and which allows space only for a minimal conception of the common and the common good. Such a position rather strongly downplays any notion of ‘the people’ as engaged in collective self-rule, and seeks to empty public life of the pursuit of all but the most general shared ends. At the same time, however, one does not want to lay the basis for a thicker conception of the common simply by invoking homogeneity of culture and values. The myth of ‘the people’ as an enduring, transgenerational entity needs to be abandoned: *contra* those espousing the essentialist version of a *cultural* bond, it should be considered no more than a myth, and *contra* those espousing the *instrumentalist* version of such a bond, it should be considered an unhelpful myth. It posits a degree of uniformity which is unrealistic and which, being unrealistic,

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<sup>116</sup> Goodin, ‘Enfranchising All Affected Interests’, p.65.

would be repressive to seek to achieve. Its conception of the common good is too strong. It also – in some variants – implies strong constraints on the possibility of new political beginnings, since the viability of political institutions is socio-culturally determined. Such approaches, one might say, put excessive emphasis on what individuals are assumed to *have* in common, at the expense of what, more voluntaristically, they may be said to *hold* in common, where the latter refers to a practice rather than an attribute. If this suggests a move away from the socio-cultural to the political, again care is needed to avoid conceptualising the common in terms which are overly thin, as may be the case when one imagines a constitutional bond based on allegiance to fundamental principles.

A related challenge is to strike a balance between emphasising relations of conflict and relations of consensus and agreement. A *commercial* bond is perhaps too comfortable with the presence of conflict, since its image of self-interested individuals in competitive pursuit of divergent private interests raises the likelihood of political community itself being the object of ongoing cost-benefit calculations. The integrity of the demos is likely to persist despite, rather than as a result of, such a bond. However, many of the other approaches we have considered put rather too much store by consensus and agreement, often seeking an overarching ‘identity’ to which all must subscribe, whether this is understood pre-politically, in terms of culture, values, trust and solidarity, or post-politically, in terms of rationality. Any conception of politics which allows for reasonable but fundamental disagreement about the life in common requires a collective bond which lies somewhere between these two, which allows for some notion of common endeavour whilst at the same time admitting the possibility of a plurality of political goods and some degree of conflict in their pursuit. Some sense of common purpose with others in the citizen body is indispensable, but one need not assume that this should extend to all citizens at all times. In conceptualising an alternative collective bond one may take inspiration in this regard from those who conceive an agonistic model of democracy. Mouffe presents her understanding of agonistic politics in contrast to rationalist perspectives on the one hand and ‘antagonism’, i.e. unrestrained intolerance, on the other. She maintains the idea of the common good, but treats it as a ‘vanishing point’ which can never be reached.<sup>117</sup> As she puts it: ‘In politics the public interest is always a matter of debate and a final agreement can never be reached; to imagine such a situation is to dream of a society without politics. One should not hope for the elimination of disagreement but for its containment within forms that respect the existence of liberal democratic

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<sup>117</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, pp.84-5.

institutions.’<sup>118</sup> From this perspective, the embrace of adversarialism may also engender the kind of affective response liable to be absent when the collective bond is conceived in terms of allegiance to abstract principles. Mouffe’s opposition to all kinds of consensus and rationalism tends to be rather strongly stated, and it may be that the *possibility* of consensus, based on some idea of ‘reasonableness’ rather than rationality, is something which one needs to hold on to, both for normative and empirical reasons.<sup>119</sup> Without it, there may be little defence against a tyranny of the majority, little scope for a progressive politics, and the constant danger that passions become mobilised for illiberal ends. But a conceptualisation of the collective bond should treat consensus as a possible achievement rather than as a presupposition. Benjamin Barber seems to have it right with his rather poetic formulation: ‘the garden where there is no discord makes politics unnecessary; just as the jungle where there is no reasonableness makes politics impossible.’<sup>120</sup>

A further challenge for formulating a more political conception of the common is to maintain a close link to the substantive issues which political decision-making addresses. One wants political problems themselves, rather than cultural markers, values or suchlike, to be the reference-points for collective positioning, enabling ordinary citizens to ‘make sense of’ the political community in terms which are closely related to their everyday concerns, and taking advantage of the possibilities a European polity seems to hold for tackling common problems on a continental scale. This means giving greater emphasis to how the nature of the collective may vary across issue-areas. Instead of performing what we called earlier a reductive move, whereby just economic issues or just cultural issues are held to be the fundamental points of orientation for political community, one wants to hold open the possibility that different issue-areas inspire kinds of identification. One wants to problematise the notion that one must speak either of a ‘European demos’ or of a ‘national demos’ (or of both, or neither), and to raise the possibility, cautiously, that the collective bond may be rather less uniform than this, that it need not involve a comprehensive symbolic closure and a settled allocation of institutional competences either at the one level or the other. There is an empirical sense to this move – such uniformity may be unrealistic, both in terms of institutional structures and symbolic boundary-marking – and a normative sense – such uniformity may sacrifice the attainment of certain substantive goods and certain

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid. p.50.

<sup>119</sup> On this see Wagner and Karagiannis, ‘Towards a Theory of Synagonism’. One way to understand ‘reasonableness’ without the strong appeal to rationality is in terms of acceptance of the principle ‘always listen to the other side’ (*audi alteram partem*). On this see Tully, ‘The Unfreedom of the Moderns’.

<sup>120</sup> Barber, *Strong Democracy*, p.128.

possibilities for political inclusion to a rather dry concern with structural coherence. Such a move is not without potential difficulties, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. There is however an existing body of literature which explores the institutional consequences of such a move in the European context.<sup>121</sup>

Most conceptualisations of the collective bond in the European debate avoid altogether the discussion of specific political issues and maintain their discussion at a more abstract level.<sup>122</sup> Most likely this is because the demos question seems to refer to the *form* of political life rather than to its substance, and seems to require a perspective emptied of particularities, since ‘the nature of an issue’ cannot itself determine the political process by which it should be dealt. To be sure, who does and does not share in a particular set of substantive problems does not translate easily into a principle by which to include and exclude people from the political community, since these are highly subjective matters, but that should not disqualify it from consideration: unless one expects from one’s conceptualisation of the common an answer to the boundary question, something which should not be made the mark of a useful perspective, an appeal to issues in their particularity does not seem out of place. Indeed, precisely this ambiguity on matters of membership may speak in its favour, since it discourages the formation of hard boundaries towards the world outside the polity. This is indeed the approach which we associated earlier with a *republican* bond, whereby commonality is conceived in terms of common problems and common conflicts. Elements of this more issue-based approach have been taken up in the EU debate by several scholars. Kalypso Nicolaidis has gestured in this direction by arguing that ‘the glue that binds the EU together is not a shared identity; it is, rather, shared projects and objectives’, and by speaking of the Union as a ‘community of projects’.<sup>123</sup> Charles Sabel and his collaborators have developed a distinctive, pragmatist approach to the EU – ‘directly-deliberative polyarchy’ – which is marked by its rejection of the need for common identity, shared orientations or fundamental values, and its emphasis rather on the recognition of common problems whose resolution, because of the complexity and uncertainty of the modern world, requires mutual engagement, practical cooperation and the reciprocal

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<sup>121</sup> See for example Richard Bellamy’s work in the republican tradition: e.g. Bellamy and Castiglione, ‘Democracy, Sovereignty and the Constitution of the European Union’, and Richard Bellamy, ‘Citizenship and the EU’s Political Constitution’, in Richard Bellamy and Alex Warleigh (eds.), *Citizenship and Governance in the European Union* (London: Continuum, 2001). These questions are returned to in Chapter 6. On the need to overcome a simple dichotomy of European demos vs national demos, see Walker, ‘The Idea of a European Constitution and the Finalité of Integration’.

<sup>122</sup> The literature on the public sphere is an exception to this, and will be considered further in the next chapter.

<sup>123</sup> Kalypso Nicolaidis, ‘We, the Peoples of Europe ...’, *Foreign Affairs*, November / December (2004), p.103.

exchange of ideas.<sup>124</sup> Though the question of the common tends to be secondary in these accounts to matters of institutional design, the move towards substantive issues seems a useful one, allowing a close link to be maintained between the theoretical question of the demos and the everyday concerns of ordinary people. Furthermore, it allows us to draw on a body of literature (explored further in Chapter 2) that looks at how political issues may become the target of mass mobilisation for collective action. The demos debate can therefore be enriched not just with theoretical work on agonistic democracy but also with empirically-minded approaches to citizenship and mass involvement in adversarial politics.<sup>125</sup>

With these considerations in mind, one can sketch, in the form of a normative ideal, an alternative conceptualisation of the collective bond, one that will be taken forward for further exploration in the following chapters. This perspective is centred on the idea that human ties may emerge out of the sense of ‘shared predicament’, i.e. the sense of being faced with the same problems. What constitutes ‘us’ in this perspective is not some attribute that ‘we’ share or believe ourselves to share, but the sense that we find ourselves in situations which are alike. From this may emerge the sense that ‘our’ fates are entwined and that our problems need addressing collectively. ‘We’ may come to see ourselves locked into situations together, and therefore grant allegiance to those political institutions which seem to promise an amelioration of those situations. These ideas can be set out more exactly by dividing this alternative conceptualisation of the collective bond into three parts as follows:

### **1. The Political Common.**

This first element points to the significance of substantive political issues. A *political common* may be defined as *the assumed existence by members of the collective of important common problems in need of address*. At its core would be the myriad substantive problems which provoke a sense of injustice and the perceived need for remedy amongst sections of the citizen body. Such problems would be ‘common’ in the sense that they would be treated by those who articulate them as shared, as liable to affect ‘people like us’ rather than just ‘me’, where the ‘we’ may differ according to the problem in question. This is not to suggest

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<sup>124</sup> See in particular Joshua Cohen and Charles F. Sabel, ‘Sovereignty and Solidarity: EU and US’, in David Trubek and Jonathan Zeitlin (eds.), *Governing Work and Welfare in a New Economy: European and American Experiments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.721ff.; also Oliver Gerstenberg and Charles F. Sabel, ‘Directly-Deliberative Polyarchy: An Institutional Ideal for Europe?’ in Renaud Dehousse and Christian Joerges (eds.), *Good Governance in Europe's Integrated Market* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>125</sup> E.g. William Gamson, *Talking Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Gamson’s concepts of feelings of injustice, collective identity, and agency (p.7 and throughout) are useful points of departure for the kind of collective bond which will be conceptualised below.

they would be appraised by all in consistently the same way, that there is uniformity in how they are constructed: one could expect some variation across space and time. They would not be common in the sense of there being a consensus that every such problem affects everyone alike in the political community: on the contrary, a we-they dynamic would be involved, such that it is assumed that there are opponents to ‘people like us’ living within the political community whose position on these problems is quite different, or who may indeed be generative of them. What is critical, rather than that they would attract ‘common frames’ shared by all in the community, is that when articulated they would be ‘framed as common’ and recognised by others as familiar points of reference.<sup>126</sup>

By speaking of ‘assumed existence’ the intention is to avoid taking a position on the ontological status of such problems, and instead to foreground their appraisal and interpretation. By suggesting that these problems would be considered ‘important’ and ‘in need of address’ it is implied that they would be the subject of a certain amount of affective involvement. They would be reference-points considered to be significant. It might be that those who articulated and appraised them would not necessarily themselves use the word ‘political’ to refer to such problems, but they would have to treat them as both shared and significant. By referring to ‘members of the collective’, one implies an unspecified number of individuals affiliated to the polity. The origins of their membership is a question which can be bracketed for the reasons given above. Their number would be unspecified, since not all problems would need to be of importance to all persons in all places: there is scope for variety here, though one would want ‘most of the people’ to make ‘at least some assumptions’ of this kind.

One can suppose that a rich political common composed of many diverse kinds of problem would be conducive to preserving the integrity of the community. In so far as common problems are perceived, it is perhaps likely that some would be seen as ‘going together’ because they have similar origins or similar effects, as opposed to others which relate to quite different aspects of life, with the consequence that a political common would be composed of a plurality of *problem domains*, each with a different thematic focus. This could be normatively attractive. If opponents are constructed in relation to problems, and there is a plurality of problem domains, then there will be a plurality of we-they formulations rather than a single axis of confrontation. Different kinds of problem will provoke different ways of formulating opponents, and any one formulation will relate only to a subset of the

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<sup>126</sup> This is a reference to one of the concerns of the public-sphere literature, which will be discussed more carefully in Chapter 2.

problems of the common, thus constraining the likelihood that the community fragments into a series of discrete adversarial groups who choose to separate from each other. The feasibility of pointing to a particular section of the citizen body and saying ‘we have nothing in common with them’ would be reduced by the multiplicity of resources for collective positioning. Thus rather than binding all citizens to one another in an image of unity, the problems of the political common would pit some against others in a web of allegiances and conflicts.

## **2. The Political Subjects, their Counterparts and Opponents**

In order to foster a collective bond appropriate to a polity such as the EU, the acts of collective positioning thus inspired would need to fulfil two conditions. Firstly, as the basis for a transnational demos, one would want those ‘people like us’ who are affected by the problems in question – call them the *political subjects* – to be conceived not just as limited to ‘people in our country’. Treating the problems as purely domestic to individual member-states would provide little basis for a collective bond wider than this, and while it might be valid for a subset of problems to be treated in this way, this could not be the case for all. Instead one would want to see the assumption that there are *counterparts* to ‘us’ in other EU countries, i.e. people who face similar problems. It would not be necessary that problems are described as affecting specifically ‘Europeans’, since this would imply a strong level of consensus across the board. But there would need to be some sense of transnational ‘shared predicament’, of there being at least some groups in other EU countries who constitute ‘people like us’. By the same token, other EU countries one would want to see treated not just as unitary actors but as environments worthy of comparison because they feature others who face similar problems. One would want to see reference not so much to undifferentiated wholes (‘the French’ or ‘the Spanish’) but to the comparable experiences of those living within these countries (*in France, in Spain*).

This positioning of the subjects and their counterparts would have to be coupled with tolerance towards those who are assumed to be opponents, i.e. those who threaten their well-being. While, if one holds that conflict is constitutive of the political, a ‘we-they’ dynamic of some kind is always present, still it would have to be agonistic rather than antagonistic: opponents would have to be treated, in the language of Mouffe, as adversaries who are to be convinced or defeated, rather than enemies to be destroyed or banished from the

community.<sup>127</sup> They would need to be seen as legitimate sharers of ‘our space’, even if much disliked. While the subjects/counterparts and their opponents would have little in common other than their conflicts and their membership in the community – in contrast to maximalist approaches to the common there is no overarching ‘identity’ that links them, nor a diffuse sense of solidarity or a common set of values beyond the basic democratic values of liberty and equality – their adversarialism would have to stop short of the break-up of the community. The struggle against opponents would have to be treated as ongoing. Ultimately this would not be something for which one could give grounds – opponents would be tolerated not because they bear a particular attribute which links them to ‘us’, but simply because, to speak with Wittgenstein, ‘this is what we do’.<sup>128</sup> Nurturing this attitude of tolerance would be a role for civic education. Again, that acts of collective positioning would be made according to *problems*, and that there might be multiple sets of problems at stake, would perhaps make the task of fostering this tolerance easier, since a plurality of domains would mean that those who may be seen as opponents with regard to one set of problems may be seen as ‘people like us’ in connection to another.

### **3. The Political Project**

A political bond would be completed by the assumption that seeking to address these problems through common political institutions constitutes a worthwhile endeavour. They would have to be treated as problems which can and should be tackled, rather than as just ‘facts of life’, and tackled in organised collective terms rather than just on an *ad hoc* personal basis. If they were seen in such a way that there was no sense of their possible remedy, the problems associated with the political common would be as likely to inspire a retreat into the private realm as a concern for collective action. Likewise, if these problems were assumed to be resolvable on a personal basis, whether by individual intervention or individual adaptation, there would be no reason to make political claims which attempted to influence decision-making. (This would be a model based on ‘consumer satisfaction’ again.) Only if they were seen as requiring *collective* address would these problems have an integrative force. The level of popular participation in decision-making would not necessarily have to be high (this is a separate issue to which Chapter 6 will return), but it would need to be

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<sup>127</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political*, p.20.

<sup>128</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), §217.

readily assumed that political approaches are worthwhile. The sense of shared predicament would have to be linked in other words to a sense of the worth of a *political project*.

To constitute a collective bond supportive of a European polity there would need, moreover, to be the assumption that the nation-state cannot alone provide the means to address all these problems sufficiently, coupled with a sense that at least some of these problems can and should be addressed at a higher-than-national level, with the EU as one plausible option. Some Europe-wide approaches would have to ‘make sense’ in principle, even if the Brussels institutions in their current form, and the policy-making they have given rise to, were assumed to be deficient in some way.<sup>129</sup> The opportunity to tackle some of the problems of the political common is what would lend to the European polity the necessary commonsense plausibility.

With each of these three elements present one could speak of a collective bond, and given that it is addressed to the framing of public concerns one might refer to it as a *political bond*. On membership questions it would be as ambiguous as all formulations of the collective bond: it would not provide a clear criterion for inclusion or exclusion, since who shares in the same problems is something about which plenty of debate may be had. There is no myth here of ‘the people’ as a coherent and unambiguous collective extended through time. The conceptualisation fits well, on the other hand, with the two other senses of ‘the people’ which have been highlighted, that of the final source of authority, and the more empirical sense of a set of individuals engaged in influencing the course of decision-making. A political bond provides an alternative perspective on the nature of the common – the appraisal of common problems. It conceives members of the collective as tied to one another by the mutual concern that a sense of shared predicament may generate. Such citizens, rather than being atomised, have a web of links extending out towards others. To the extent that others share in ‘our’ problems, ‘we’ take interest in their experiences because through the practice of comparison there may be something to be learned, and because in some cases it may be desirable to seek joint political action in remedy of those problems. Yet there is no presumption of consensus across the full range of political problems: indeed, the absence of consensus and the consequent desire to control aspects of the political agenda are what – in the ideal rendition of such a bond – provide the impetus to come together. This conceptualisation does not presume coherence across issue-areas: indeed, a certain

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. Morgan’s useful distinction between the ‘project’, ‘process’ and ‘product’ of European integration, in Morgan, *The Idea of a European Superstate*.

irregularity may usefully soften the symbolic boundaries which are constructed. It need not imply a high degree of political participation, but does require a certain degree of faith in the worth of acting politically.

It has been one of the themes of this chapter that the debate about how to conceptualise a European demos, rather than being mainly empirical, is of an ideological character, since whatever position one adopts implies consequences for the kind of democracy which is possible. How one responds to these basic questions says much about which contemporary political trends in nation-state politics one approves of and wishes to see replicated at a transnational level. This is why we have approached the question of the common in Europe with an eye to how it may connect with wider developments to do with the health of contestatory politics, the principle of democratic control and the role of citizens in public life. The argument has been that many of the existing approaches to this question conceive either of a quite minimal degree of commonality amongst citizens or that they rather overplay the degree of regularity which is necessary, and that both of these moves may have depoliticising consequences. By minimising the sense of common purpose amongst citizens one is liable to diminish the expectation and possibility of exercising democratic control over matters of common concern; conversely, by overstating the degree of common purpose one may narrow the sphere of reasonable disagreement and circumvent some of the very debates which it is the peculiar virtue of democracy to make possible. What one wants from an explicitly political conceptualisation of the collective bond is a perspective which allows greater scope for political adversarialism and which points towards revitalising the principle of popular sovereignty and active citizenship. A political bond as it has been outlined so far, centred on the three elements of the *political common*, *collective positioning* and the *political project*, seems to provide this, but it is just the bare sketch of an ideal: it can be treated as a starting-point for further exploration.

Each of these three elements will be the subject of a later chapter, where they will be approached with an empirical eye. Ideals, it need scarcely be said, are not susceptible to empirical (dis)confirmation, since they are intended to organise one's understanding and suggest diagnoses rather than directly correspond to a real-world situation. At the same time however, to treat them as purely theoretical constructs, and to evaluate them only on the grounds of internal consistency, is to deprive them of much of the critical and suggestive force they may have, and to overlook an important means by which they can be explored and developed. This is all the more true given that the goal is not to theorise the political bond in some purely abstract or universal sense but to conceptualise it for a specific context.

Empirical research represents a useful way to pursue a line of thought, and ‘theory without some kind of exemplification is no theory at all,’<sup>130</sup> just as empirical research should be concept-driven. The strategy is therefore to set these lightly sketched theoretical ideas in a dialectical relationship with a small-scale empirical study. The concept of the political bond is applied to a body of empirical material, on the one hand to assess how smoothly the concept may be employed, and on the other to explore the material in a theoretically informed way. But before embarking on this exploratory study, we take advantage of the opportunity which exploratory research provides to deal head-on with some of the epistemological and methodological questions which arise in the course of theoretical elaboration. These are the topic of the next chapter.

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<sup>130</sup> Barry Barnes, *The Elements of Social Theory* (London: UCL Press, 1995), p.61, also cited in Theodore R. Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), p.xix.

# Chapter 2

## Studying the Politics of ‘the People’

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By raising the prospect of a *political* bond as an alternative way to conceptualise the common, we are placing centre-stage the political concerns of ordinary people. It is these that are taken as the best starting-point for exploring political community, and it is through these that a close link can be maintained to questions of popular sovereignty and the health of democracy more generally. At least since the early twentieth century, social and political science has tried to engage with these everyday political concerns in a number of ways: with ‘the people’ taken to be involved in at least some degree of self-rule, the political dispositions of the citizenry in modern democracy have naturally been a topic of some interest. But how to study empirically these dispositions represents something of a puzzle, for the reason that ‘the people’ can be conceptualised in such different ways. To list just some, the object of study might be conceived as a certain aggregate of individuals, as a unitary collective, a communication system, an ensemble of practices, or perhaps as just another piece of raw matter upon which material forces exert themselves. The politics of ‘the people’, as an empirical phenomenon, has therefore been subject to widely different approaches. The task of this chapter is to look at some of these approaches to lay (i.e. non-professional) politics in detail, particularly those which are currently widespread in EU studies, with a view to assessing their applicability to the project of exploring a political bond. Then, in the latter part of the chapter, the attention will be focused more closely on the study to be developed in the chapters that follow.

In exploring a political bond as we have defined it, it is clear that the symbolic world – that to do with meanings and interpretation – is to be taken seriously. A collective bond based on the notion of objective interests has been rejected as both normatively weak and empirically unsatisfactory. One methodological approach to lay politics on which there is little need to dwell therefore is the political-economic one which conceives the subject matter as the aggregation of individual or collective interests. Writers such as Josef Schumpeter and

Anthony Downs take as their starting assumption man's instrumental rationality.<sup>1</sup> Subjective appraisals diverging from means-ends rationality are strongly downplayed so as to facilitate theoretical abstraction. The weaknesses of such moves have been well documented and need not be repeated here.<sup>2</sup> Whilst these models have spilt over into empirical work looking at the accuracy with which economic interests can be used to explain political behaviour (e.g. voting), these studies are generally unable to avoid bringing in the ideational dimension: 'attitudes' usually make an appearance as an 'intervening variable' to explain how interests guide behaviour.<sup>3</sup> Interests are essentially ambiguous things even in an established polity, and all the more so in conditions where the boundaries of political community are under challenge. Simple utility maximisation cannot be the basic ordering principle by which to explore a political bond.

If *homo economicus* cannot be the guide, nor too can *homo sociologicus*, the protagonist of much traditional sociological theory who plays out his role in a social totality held together by forces of production, the division of labour or behaviour-determining values and norms.<sup>4</sup> A number of those who seek to explore empirically a culture- or values-based bond fall into this category: not those who seek to explore *perceptions* of commonality (these will be considered below) but those who attempt to trace the distribution of objectively observable attributes. Such studies explore whether, for instance, individuals in post-communist Europe tend to share the same 'values' as their western counterparts.<sup>5</sup> This is sociology of the Talcott Parsons variety – as is often the case when self-consciously sociological approaches are adopted in International Relations or European studies. Ontological collectivism of this kind, despite the appearance of radical divergence from the individualism of economic approaches, shares the basic assumption that the ideational is

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<sup>1</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*; Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1957).

<sup>2</sup> For one discussion see Holmes, 'The Secret History of Self-Interest'; Jane Mansbridge, 'The Rise and Fall of Self-Interest in the Explanation of Political Life', in Jane Mansbridge (ed.), *Beyond Self-Interest* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Seymour Lipset, *Political Man* (London: Heinemann, 1959); Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Andreas Reckwitz, 'Towards a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorising', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5/2 (2002).

<sup>5</sup> See for instance Dieter Fuchs and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, 'Eastward Enlargement of the European Union and the Identity of Europe', in Jan Zielonka (ed.), *Europe Unbound: Enlarging and Reshaping the Boundaries of the European Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Jürgen Gerhards and Michael Holscher, *Kulturelle Unterschiede in der Europäischen Union: Ein Vergleich zwischen Mitgliedsländern, Beitrittskandidaten und der Türkei* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005); Peter Ester, Loek Halman, and Ruud De Moor (eds.), *The Individualizing Society: Value Change in Europe and North America* (Tilburg: Tilburg University Press, 1993). Such works are in the tradition pioneered by Ronald Inglehart, e.g. Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).

epiphenomenal, that order is achieved independently of people's interpretation. As Andreas Reckwitz writes, pointing to an alternative perspective, 'the seemingly opposed classical figures of the *homo economicus* and the *homo sociologicus* share a common "blind spot": they both dismiss the implicit, tacit or unconscious layer of knowledge which enables a symbolic organisation of reality. The basic distinctions and schemes of this knowledge lay down which desires are regarded as desirable and which norms are considered to be legitimate; moreover, these cognitive-symbolic structures (of which language is a prominent example) reproduce a social order even in cases in which a normative consensus does not exist.'<sup>6</sup> Exploring the political bond as a normative ideal is exactly to explore the ideational background that conditions what may be considered desirable and legitimate. For this reason, this chapter concentrates on those approaches which put the ideational/symbolic at the centre of their accounts of social order and political behaviour. For our purposes, it is useful to distinguish between three broad traditions, referred to here as mentalism, intersubjectivism, and text/practice-oriented approaches. These will be addressed in turn.

### Mentalism: Approaches from Political and Social Psychology

One way to make sense of the ideational or symbolic world is to conceive it in terms of the structure of individual minds, an approach which has been referred to in social theory as 'mentalist'.<sup>7</sup> In political science, this approach is adopted widely, often with aspirations to explanatory science, and usually in combination with empirical research which uses quantitative, statistical methods. A Cartesian mind-body dualism is the basis of this perspective, whereby inward mental states (independent variable, sometimes dependent variable) are taken to cause or condition outward behaviour (dependent variable). Identity studies is one field where this perspective is commonly found: 'collective identity' is then understood to be the sum of individual beliefs about what is shared with other individuals. One finds this approach taken by many in the European debate when exploring the possibility of cultural commonality at a European level: do citizens of the EU believe that they share cultural features with one another? Do they have a 'sense of belonging' towards Europe and/or the EU; do they claim a 'European identity'?<sup>8</sup> As one author asks, 'is the EU

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<sup>6</sup> Reckwitz, 'Towards a Theory of Social Practices', p.246.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Surveying a large literature, see Kohli, 'The Battlegrounds of European Identity'.

represented as an entity in its citizens' minds?'<sup>9</sup> This approach also represents one means by which to operationalise a *social bond*, whereby one examines whether EU citizens believe they can trust one another.<sup>10</sup> The reasoning behind all such approaches is ostensibly valid: if charting 'objectively existing' commonality risks slipping into essentialism and social determinism, the answer must be to measure the 'subjective perception' of commonality or the 'psychological existence of a community'.<sup>11</sup> As one scholar puts it, a 'bottom-up' perspective may be more fruitful than a 'top-down' one.<sup>12</sup>

Given that many of these approaches draw on political psychology (and indirectly social psychology), it is worth looking at this field in a little detail. Political psychology emerged as a discipline in the US in the early 1960s, assisted by advances in the fields of sampling theory and psychology. As the self-description 'psychological' makes clear, the focus is firmly on the individual and that which is in the individual's head: attitudes (general dispositions), beliefs (deeply held attitudes) and opinions (expressly formulated views on a particular subject).<sup>13</sup> Key research questions for political psychology have included: how much do people know and care about politics? How much coherence and stability is there to their beliefs and opinions? To what extent are elite-level ideological structures (e.g. the left-right divide) manifest in lay political opinion? How are emotions engaged? How can voting behaviour be explained? One contributor to the European debate neatly sums up the political-psychological perspective by referring to 'a golden hierarchical assumption of the study of political behaviour: the idea that for every individual, his beliefs influence his attitudes, which, in turn, influence his actual behaviour.'<sup>14</sup>

Two works are often singled out for their subsequent impact on the discipline, and their titles give an indication of the research preoccupations of the time: Robert Lane titled his interviews-based study *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does*, and stated one of the aims of his project as 'undertak[ing] to discover the

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<sup>9</sup> Emanuele Castano, 'European Identity: A Social-Psychological Perspective', in Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse, and Marilynn B. Brewer (eds.), *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), p.43.

<sup>10</sup> Oskar Niedermayer, 'Trust and Sense of Community', in Oskar Niedermayer and Richard Sinnott (eds.), *Public Opinion and Internationalized Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.229 makes an empirical study of trust with reference to a Eurobarometer question about trust in people from other countries.

<sup>11</sup> Castano, 'European Identity: A Social-Psychological Perspective', p.43.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Bruter, *Citizens of Europe? The Emergence of a Mass European Identity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Summarising this conventional usage of terms, see Dennis Kavanagh, *Political Science and Political Behaviour* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983).

<sup>14</sup> Bruter, *Citizens of Europe?*, p.3.

latent political ideology of the American urban common man'.<sup>15</sup> Philip E. Converse, a highly influential figure in the (largely dominant) quantitative tradition, wrote under the heading 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics', and defined a belief system as 'a configuration of ideas and attitudes in which the elements are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence.'<sup>16</sup> 'Ideology' and 'belief system' are the key words for both authors: the starting-point is that of the coherent and sophisticated ideal, from which empirically observed reality diverges.<sup>17</sup> The kind of hypothesis one might test was whether those who favour 'federal aid to education could be predicted to be more, rather than less, favourable to an internationalist posture in foreign affairs, for these two positions in the 1950s were generally associated with "liberalism" in American politics.'<sup>18</sup> The important conclusion of Converse's study was that, other than for those he termed elites (the top 10% or so), beliefs about politics tended to be unstable and weakly integrated: 'the net result, as one moves downward, is that constraint declines across the universe of idea-elements, and that the range of relevant belief systems becomes narrower and narrower.' Knowledge of 'what goes with what', and why, is information that has to be diffused from above; 'very little information "trickles down" very far,'<sup>19</sup> and there existed 'a basic discontinuity between the "message-as-sent" and the "message-as-received".'<sup>20</sup> This sparked much discussion as to whether 'attitudes' or 'non-attitudes' are the norm amongst non-elites. John Zaller caused some discomfort by suggesting that citizens might respond to opinion polls according to whatever happens to be at the top of their minds, based on factors such as the headlines of yesterday's news or how the question was framed.<sup>21</sup> His suggestion that they 'make it up as they go along' was successfully provocative.<sup>22</sup>

Thus the shadow hanging over these mentalist approaches to the ideational has been the lingering suspicion that, taking individual minds as the unit of analysis, there may in fact

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<sup>15</sup> Robert E. Lane, *Political Ideology: Why the American Common Man Believes What He Does* (New York: Free Press, 1962), p.3.

<sup>16</sup> Philip E. Converse, 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics', in David E. Apter (ed.), *Ideology and Discontent* (New York: Free Press, 1964), p.207.

<sup>17</sup> N.B. Lane (*Political Ideology*) also talks more loosely about 'latent ideological themes' and 'ideological patterns' (pp.9-10), but the highly developed scheme he presents (on pp.14-5) makes clear the extent to which his starting point is the complex, intertwined system.

<sup>18</sup> Converse, 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics', p.230.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p.213.

<sup>20</sup> Philip E. Converse, 'Public Opinion and Voting Behavior', in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science 4* (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975), p.81.

<sup>21</sup> John R. Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> See for example Paul M. Sniderman, Philip E. Tetlock, and Laurel Elms, 'Public Opinion and Democratic Politics: The Problem of Nonattitudes and Social Construction of Political Judgement', in James H. Kuklinski (ed.), *Citizens and Politics: Perspectives from Political Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.254-88, where Zaller's suggestion is called 'an extraordinary assertion' (p.256).

be nothing that is worth studying. The target of enquiry may be too unstable to be measured. Nonetheless, other scholars in political psychology, reacting against the connotations of citizen incompetence and the negative implications for democracy, abandoned the search for over-arching belief-systems and sought to move research in the ostensibly more promising direction of domain-specific structures. Key research questions here have included: how do individuals nonetheless get by on a limited amount of knowledge, and what mechanisms are available to them to allow them a basic degree of organisation in their political views on at least some issues? Two strands of research can be distinguished here, following a cleavage which one might term 'hard vs soft individualism'. Both address the attitudes, beliefs and opinions of individuals, with these 'located in the head' and separable from the interactive context, but explain them from different perspectives. 'Hard individualists' tend to address these questions by focusing on factors inside the mind which may facilitate a degree of coherence and stability: 'core values',<sup>23</sup> for example, political engagement,<sup>24</sup> or education and individual cognitive abilities.<sup>25</sup> 'Soft individualists' by contrast focus on the role of environmental factors outside the mind in structuring mental activity, such as the way political parties and the media bundle issues together into ideational packets,<sup>26</sup> or how the media may encourage individuals to see their experiences as part of broader social patterns rather than as personal, isolated and idiosyncratic.<sup>27</sup> Lying somewhere on the continuum between hard and soft individualism are a series of approaches which try to link the cognitive and the environmental, e.g. by studying heuristics,<sup>28</sup> stereotypes,<sup>29</sup> or schemas.<sup>30</sup> Again, this

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<sup>23</sup> E.g. Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics*, Inglehart and Paul R. Abramson, 'Economic Security and Value Change', *American Political Science Review*, 88/2 (1994); Stanley Feldman, 'Structure and Consistency in Public Opinion: The Role of Core Beliefs and Values', *American Journal of Political Science*, 32/2 (1988).

<sup>24</sup> Studies of engagement often pick up Converse's concepts of 'centrality' and 'issue publics' (the aggregate of those individuals for whom a given issue is of particular salience and on which their opinions are fairly stable). See Converse, 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics', p.245. The concept has been developed by David J. Elkins, *Manipulation and Consent: How Voters and Leaders Manage Complexity* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993).

<sup>25</sup> For a discussion of the importance of education as predictor of attitude stability, see Converse, 'Public Opinion and Voting Behavior', pp.103-4. For an interesting typography covering 'sequential thinkers', 'linear thinkers' and 'systematic thinkers', see Shawn Rosenberg, 'The Structure of Political Thinking', *American Journal of Political Science*, 32/3 (1988).

<sup>26</sup> See e.g. Paul M. Sniderman and John Bullock, 'A Consistency Theory of Public Opinion and Public Choice: The Hypothesis of Menu Dependence', in Paul M. Sniderman and Willem E. Saris (eds.), *Studies in Public Opinion* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), drawing on Edward G. Carmines and Geoffrey C. Layman, 'Value Priorities, Partisanship and Electoral Choice: The Neglected Case of the United States', *Political Behaviour*, 19/4 (1997), pp.283-316.

<sup>27</sup> Diana Mutz, 'Contextualising Personal Experience: The Role of the Mass Media', *The Journal of Politics*, 56/3 (1994).

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Paul M. Sniderman, Richard A. Brody, and Philip E. Tetlock, *Reasoning and Choice: Explorations in Political Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Heuristics commonly studied include racial heuristics, judgement of political parties based on attitudes towards their 'brand names' (Michael Tomz

literature tends to downplay the possibility of integrated beliefs across the range of political issues (the kind of global constraint which Converse was looking for) and to focus on domain-specific ideational packages.<sup>31</sup>

While these mentalist approaches do at least give prominence to the ideational, they are problematic in several ways. The most important is the strong emphasis on the individual, even in those approaches which accord importance to environmental factors. Reasons may include the simplification this entails for empirical research ('measurement' is easier if one assumes that the appropriate units correspond to the layout of a telephone directory, and aggregation becomes more straightforward if each unit is taken to be of equal value), the ambition to causal explanation (which requires parcelling up the world so as to give ontological priority to some bits over others), and semantic and normative assumptions about what we do and *should* mean when we speak of democracy. But it relies on a piece of strong conjecture: the assumption, that is, that inside the individual's mind there are attitudes, beliefs, values, heuristics or schemas as things which he or she carries around and deploys in like manner from one situation to another, regardless of the context, so as to form an opinion. Converse defines constraint in its 'static' version as this: 'the success we would have in predicting, given initial knowledge that an individual holds a specified attitude, that he holds

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and Paul M. Sniderman, 'Constraint in Mass Belief Systems: Political Brand Names as Signals', *2004 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association* (2004) and judgements based on attitudes towards individual politicians. The concept of 'heuristic' is a loose one (a heuristic, one might say) and attracts criticism within the field for imprecision regarding how it can be identified and the conditions needed for it to be employed. For some doubts see e.g. Robert Luskin, 'From Denial to Extenuation (and Finally Beyond): Political Sophistication and Citizen Performance', in James Kuklinski (ed.), *Thinking About Political Psychology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and for some self-doubts see Sniderman and Bullock, 'A Consistency Theory of Public Opinion', pp.599-600; also Paul M. Sniderman, 'Taking Sides: A Fixed Choice Theory of Political Reasoning', in Arthur Lupia, Mathew McCubbins, and Samuel Popkin (eds.), *Elements of Political Reason: Understanding and Expanding the Limits of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.599-600.

<sup>29</sup> Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, *Reasoning and Choice*; John Duckitt, *The Social Psychology of Prejudice* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994); Peter W. Robinson (ed.), *Social Groups and Identities: Developing the Legacy of Henri Tajfel* (Bodmin: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1996); Russell Spears, Penelope J. Oakes, Naomi Ellemers, and Alexander S. Haslam (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Stereotyping and Group Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997); Penelope Oakes, Alexander Haslam, and John Turner, *Stereotyping and Social Reality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>30</sup> Susan T. Fiske and Shelley E. Taylor, *Social Cognition* (Reading MA: Addison-Wesley, 1984); Pamela Johnston Conover and Stanley Feldman, 'How People Organize the Political World: A Schematic Model', *American Review of Political Science*, 28/1 (1984), p.96. For critiques and responses, James Kuklinski, Robert Luskin, and John Bolland, 'Where Is the Schema? Going Beyond the 'S' Word in Political Psychology', *American Political Science Review*, 85/4 (1991); Milton Lodge and Kathleen M. McGraw, 'Where Is the Schema? Critiques', *American Political Science Review*, 85/4 (1991).

<sup>31</sup> Johnston Conover and Feldman, 'How People Organize the Political World', talk (p.101) of four basic 'domains of stimuli about which people have political beliefs': foreign affairs, economic matters, racial affairs, and social concerns.

certain further ideas and attitudes.’<sup>32</sup> Ideas and attitudes are described as though they come in a specifiable unit form, like the songs which make up a record collection, possessed or not possessed. Following an analogy no more tortuous than the original, it is like assuming the existence of a music-player in the brain, and then asking whether it can confidently be predicted that an individual holds a Leonard Cohen song on their mental player given that it seems they have a Bob Dylan song there.<sup>33</sup>

One scholar of European identity, who takes identity in individualist terms as a question of ‘how EU citizens feel’, claims that it is ‘most obviously’ the case that there is ‘a causal link between European identity and support for integration.’<sup>34</sup> The problems associated with hypothesising mental states have been noted by Wittgenstein and his interpreters, and in advance of significant developments in cognitive science (the point would still be contentious) there are good reasons for avoiding speculation of this sort altogether.<sup>35</sup> What seems particularly difficult is to hypothesise a chain of mental states and then to attribute to some of these a causal status. Not only is it a kind of guesswork most at odds with the scientific-explanatory intentions of this literature; it is also rather in contrast to the empirical spirit, since all that one can study are processes of interaction, not pre-interactional mental states. Study itself is a form of interaction, and as such is always non-individual and contextually situated.

Research methods serve to embed this problematic emphasis on the individual mind. Opinion polls and related quantitative approaches are quite unable (and not designed) to study contextual interaction, the formation of opinions in argumentation with others, or how argumentation weaves different issues together; quite the contrary, the point of using polls is usually to neutralise the importance of situational cues and thereby get at the supposed pre-interactional attitude, belief (etc.) as directly as possible. Albeit in the name of polling *public* opinion, respondents are questioned in private, are encouraged to make up their own mind without help from the interviewer or from acquaintances, and are guaranteed anonymity of response, all lest their answers be distorted in some way. The goal is to minimise the intrusion of ‘context’ (sometimes referred to as ‘bias’ or ‘framing effects’). When empirical findings do not invite unequivocal conclusions, it is often these situational factors which take

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<sup>32</sup> Converse, ‘The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics’, p.207.

<sup>33</sup> The analogy can be comfortably extended to Converse’s ‘dynamic’ notion of constraint also. It is, incidentally, unfortunate that the word ‘view’ has come to be used in a similar fashion to beliefs and attitudes (one ‘holds’ a view, so it is said), despite the perspectival understanding that it seems to promise.

<sup>34</sup> Bruter, *Citizens of Europe?*, p.6; p.3.

<sup>35</sup> See for example Theodore R. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chapter 2; and more below.

the blame, resulting in rather fruitless debates about whether ‘real attitudes’ are being missed because of the distorting effect of framing, and whether the attitudes which have been documented are not in fact merely ‘non-attitudes’ masquerading as attitudes.<sup>36</sup> The polling method is the logical operationalisation of the theoretical assumption that individuals can be considered in isolation, and serves at the same time to entrench it.

A related problem concerns the propositions on which opinions are to be taken. An aggregative approach based on adding up opinions, beliefs or attitudes relies on there being only one proper way to formulate these propositions and only one proper way for these propositions to be interpreted. If there were multiple ways then the logic of numbers would break down and the aggregations would be meaningless. It assumes, in other words, a fixed vantage-point from which all political issues can be described and correctly appraised, an ideal language of politics in which neutral propositions can be expressed. The vitality of this assumption is remarkable given the strength of the challenges which have been made to it in contemporary philosophy, challenges which are generally ignored in the field.<sup>37</sup> Instead, large amounts of data of doubtful worth are scrutinised and made the basis of explanatory accounts. The aggregative data assembled by Eurobarometer provide one example. Consider for example some of the findings of Standard Eurobarometer 65 released in the summer of 2006, which neatly illustrate the significance of question-wording.<sup>38</sup> Question A11a asks: ‘Generally speaking, do you think that (our country)’s membership of the European Union is a good thing?’ Question A12a asks: ‘Taking everything into account, would you say that (our country) has on balance benefited or not from being a member of the European Union?’ Now, for countries which joined the EU in 2004, i.e. little more than two years before the study, one would expect these two questions to produce very similar responses, with the interesting variation occurring for those countries which had been members of the Union for perhaps a decade or more. Where accession was very recent, the distinction between past and current benefits should in principle be negligible. Instead, with

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<sup>36</sup> See above. The metaphor of the ‘frame’ is an interesting one: it asks us to think of the objects towards which attitudes are formed as being analogous to pictures, and contextual factors as analogous to the picture-frame and the picture’s setting more generally (neighbouring pictures, the play of sunlight, the art gallery itself, and so on). In the view of art which the metaphor asks us to take up, there is a correct picture-frame, a correct set of neighbouring pictures, a correct play of sunlight, a correct art gallery, etc., and all other variations can only be treated as distortions. This conception of art is not widely held, and raises doubts about the analogous conception of politics.

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). Urging a reassessment of social-scientific methods in light of these challenges, see Friedrich V. Kratochwil and Jörg Friedrichs, ‘On Acting and Knowing’, *Workshop on the (Re-)turn to Practice: Thinking Practices in International Relations and Security Studies* (EUI Florence, 2007).

<sup>38</sup> Accessed October 2006 at [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/eb/eb65/eb65\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb65/eb65_en.htm).

the exception of Cyprus, all ten of the populations which joined in 2004 produce considerably more positive responses to the second question than the first (18% higher in the case of Latvia, 15% higher in the cases of Slovakia and Estonia, 14% higher in the case of Slovenia, 13% higher in the case of Lithuania). Unless one attributes this discrepancy to respondents making a judicious distinction between the benefits of the previous months and the expected hazards of the coming ones – an endorsement of the Union combined with a desire to leave it – one is tempted to think that one could carry on concocting questions with slightly different wording, each of which would result in a rather different ‘aggregation of attitudes’.<sup>39</sup> *Contra* Converse, there is no fixed ‘universe of idea-elements’, and therefore no single correct way to formulate survey questions.<sup>40</sup> One is reminded of the old warning that quite discrepant results may be had from polling a sample of priests on whether it is ‘OK to smoke when praying’, and whether it is ‘OK to pray when smoking’.

Not only is one confronted by empirical oddities. More theoretically, all questions carry a large number of assumptions with them. One sees this with the questions which Eurobarometer has regularly posed concerning people’s attitudes to EU-related issues: ‘Generally speaking, do you think that [your country’s] membership of the European Community is a good thing, a bad thing, or neither good nor bad?’ ‘In general, are you [very much / to some extent] for or against efforts being made to unify Western Europe?’ ‘In the near future do you see yourself as [nationality] only, [nationality] and European, European and [nationality] or European only?’<sup>41</sup> Here again one sees the difficulties of the ideal-language perspective. Each question is in no way ‘neutral’ since it contains a whole range of assumptions, e.g. that the European Community is important to people and that they should have an opinion on it (even if this be that it is ‘neither good nor bad’), or that ‘feeling European’ is something as natural as ‘feeling British’. (One rather suspects that when Eurobarometer asks such questions it is being faithful to one of the ambitions of those that subsidise them – the European Commission – to problematise the notion that citizens’

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<sup>39</sup> Note also that responses to *both* questions are *as* positive or *more* positive than in Eurobarometer polls of the preceding years, suggesting that the discrepancy should not be understood as a careful evaluation of the changing fortunes in the EU of the country in question.

<sup>40</sup> A personal favourite from the literature is the finding that 98% of Albanians favour democracy while 65% favour autocracy (cit. in Fuchs and Klingemann, ‘Eastward Enlargement of the European Union’, p.16).

<sup>41</sup> Using the first two questions, Matthew Gabel and Harvey D. Palmer, ‘Understanding Variation in Public Support for European Integration’, *European Journal of Political Research*, 27/1 (1995). Using the first, Christopher Anderson, ‘When in Doubt, Use Proxies: Attitudes toward Domestic Politics and Support for European Integration’, *Comparative Political Studies*, 31/5 (1998); McLaren, ‘Public Support for the European Union’. Using the last, Sean Carey, ‘Undivided Loyalties: Is National Identity an Obstacle to European Integration?’, *European Union Politics*, 3/4 (2002).

automatic identification should be with the nation-state.<sup>42</sup>) Furthermore, the analyst has no way of knowing what criteria are being brought to bear on these questions by respondents, and may be tempted – often due to the ambition to explain – to supply his or her own: one major scholar in the field, Matthew Gabel, is inclined to equate European integration with economic interdependence;<sup>43</sup> others have cast political institutions as the core feature,<sup>44</sup> for others it is the relocation of sovereignty,<sup>45</sup> each the kind of mono-causal account which is necessary for the formulation of explanatory hypotheses. The ‘explanation of attitudes to the EU’ is thus deduced to be considerations of individual utility, institutional effectiveness or national identity and value preferences.<sup>46</sup> Because of the plurality of ways in which these survey questions can be interpreted, each of these readings and many more are possible, and none of them can be judged the most authentic. The problem is compounded in many cases by the use of ambiguous words like ‘identity’ to suggest a specious unity to a range of quite disparate ideas – despite the far-reaching critiques to which ‘identity’ has been subject, in particular by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper.<sup>47</sup> These failings make it particularly hard to accept the pretensions to scientific objectivity with which these and many studies of attitudes, beliefs and opinion are presented, with heavy use of vocabulary such as ‘hypothesis’, ‘variable’, ‘statistical representativity’ and ‘controlling for’: the implication is that there is an unambiguous truth to be accessed and that those who arrive at alternative interpretations are mistaken. On this reading, plurality becomes an empirical curiosity, whereas it should be treated as theoretically grounded.<sup>48</sup>

There need be no automatic association between methodological and ontological individualism and quantitative methods, and while quantitative polling methods have a natural affinity with aggregative approaches (since both prioritise the numerical) this association could in principle be weakened.<sup>49</sup> Most in the field of political psychology would

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<sup>42</sup> On the intended performative effects of such polling, see Cris Shore, *Building Europe: The Cultural Politics of European Integration* (London: Routledge, 2000), esp. pp.51-2.

<sup>43</sup> See Matthew Gabel, 'Economic Integration and Mass Politics: Market Liberalisation and Public Attitudes in the European Union', *American Journal of Political Science*, 42/3 (1998a), p.937: 'EU membership represents a specific international economic policy: the liberalization of the movement of goods, capital, labor and services among the EU member-states.'

<sup>44</sup> Anderson, 'When in Doubt, Use Proxies'.

<sup>45</sup> Carey, 'Undivided Loyalties'.

<sup>46</sup> These major approaches have been summarised by Gabel, 'Public Support for European Integration'.

<sup>47</sup> Brubaker and Cooper, 'Beyond Identity'.

<sup>48</sup> On the problems surrounding the study of 'beliefs' and 'attitudes' using polling methods, see e.g. Claire Waterton and Brian Wynne, 'Can Focus Groups Access Community Views?' in Jenny Kitzinger and Rosaline S. Barbour (eds.), *Developing Focus Group Research: Politics, Theory and Practice* (London: Sage, 1999).

<sup>49</sup> Note Lane's use of interview methods. Suggesting a shift to the collective whilst maintaining quantitative methods, see e.g. Lynn M. Sanders, 'Democratic Politics and Survey Research', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 29/2 (1999). In *European Studies*, Bruter supplements his quantitative work with some focus-group

probably dispute, however, the necessity of such a move, and the association between individualism and quantitative methods has been institutionalised by key periodicals such as *Public Opinion Quarterly* and *Political Psychology*. That survey questionnaires are problematic is well known however: they are agenda-setters in the sense that they presuppose which are the important questions to be asked, and so can justifiably be criticised as instruments of power. They also remove from the researcher's view much of the most interesting material – the process of engagement with a question, the hesitations, the indifference, the side-comments, discussion with others, and variation in discussion across contexts. Aggregative approaches based on opinion polling can be insensitive to differences a) in the relative importance of different political issue areas, and b) in the relative importance of the opinions of different individuals or groups.<sup>50</sup> Whilst innovations in method can to some extent alleviate the first of these blind-spots,<sup>51</sup> the second is bound up in the logic of random sampling, the point of which is to be blind to such differences. Quantitative methods are also particularly problematic under conditions where the 'container' of the political process is itself in question, as in the contemporary European case. The political community cannot confidently be equated with the nation-state or with the European polity, or with any other immediately recognisable formation, and therefore there is no clear answer to the question of whom to include in the aggregation tally. Opting to aggregate the opinions of all citizens of the European Union, or not to do so, is a highly normative, 'unscientific' decision.

One of the standard defences given of opinion polling is that, for all its faults, it is no worse than the mechanisms which are used as part of the democratic process to 'capture public opinion': electoral voting and referenda. These are also based on the principles of

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research (Bruter, *Citizens of Europe?*). While he claims that this refines his 'bottom-up' approach to 'political identity' and 'European identity' (p.164), it is based on direct questions designed to elicit attitudes towards all things European and gives no indication of how readily European reference-points would be invoked in discussion without such prompting. It retains the 'top-down', Euro-centric predisposition in other words. Of course, all research is interventionary in some way, but when examining something as conceptually problematic as European identity one needs to be especially careful in one's methods.

<sup>50</sup> On the problems of the polling method, see Herbert Blumer, 'Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling', *American Sociological Review*, 13/5 (1948); Pierre Bourdieu, 'Public Opinion Does Not Exist', in A. Mattelart and S. Siegelau (eds.), *Communication and Class Struggle* (New York: International General, 1979), and Theodor W. Adorno, 'Opinion Research and Publicness (*Meinungsforschung und Öffentlichkeit*)', translated by Andrew J. Perrin and Lars Jarkko, *Sociological Theory*, 23/1 (2005). Of course, good political psychologists are not unaware of these limitations. Converse himself noted that that 'attention to numbers [i.e. aggregations of beliefs], more or less customary in democratic thought, is very nearly irrelevant in many political settings,' and he argued only that 'claims to numbers are of some modest continuing importance in democratic systems for the legitimacy they confer upon demands.' Converse, 'The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics', p.207.

<sup>51</sup> On this see Philip E. Converse, 'Changing Conceptions of Public Opinion in the Political Process', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 51/2 (1987). Pre-poll interviews can be used to improve the question set.

equality of individuals and the secrecy of ballot. Following this argument, polls are therefore rather well equipped to study the political process,<sup>52</sup> and those who criticise the one must inevitably criticise the other. The research method is thereby given a kind of normative protection. There is indeed some truth in the idea that the two are linked: it is quite possible that, in liberal democracies, a certain conception of public opinion is reified so as to give meaning to the idea of popular sovereignty, and that polling is embraced as another means to lend solidity to this. Hence what Blumer called ‘the narrow operationalist position that public opinion consists of what public opinion polls poll.’<sup>53</sup> However, the critique need not be so radical. It is sufficient to note that polls are very often bad predictors of political behaviour, and should therefore be accorded no special status as a research method. To pick an obvious and important example, in March 2005 Eurobarometer released figures suggesting that 48% of the French population and 63% of the Dutch population were in favour of the EU Constitutional Treaty, with 17% and 11% against it respectively. It moreover suggested that these high levels of support corresponded to a high level of knowledge about the Treaty, with the populations of both countries featuring in the top five of the EU-25 on this measure.<sup>54</sup> The results of the referenda themselves a few months later were rather different of course: 55% of the French vote and 62% of the Dutch was against. Although it is quite possible that ‘public opinion’ changed rapidly in the intervening months, or that the referenda themselves failed to capture that opinion, both possibilities raise strong questions about exactly what it is which is captured at any one moment and aggregated.

Mentalism, individualism and the quantitative survey method seem to offer quite limited possibilities for our purposes. This is not to say that these approaches contain nothing which is relevant to this study: the move which one sees within political psychology from global approaches (like that of Converse or Lane, looking at large-scale structures like ‘belief-systems’ or ‘ideologies’) to domain-specific approaches is in fact highly suggestive of the problems of conceiving lay politics as an integrated whole, and in this sense is rather valuable.<sup>55</sup> The suggestion by certain authors in the schema-theory tradition that there may be four basic domains of stimuli about which people have political beliefs – economic matters, social concerns, foreign affairs and racial affairs (with a suggested interlinkage

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<sup>52</sup> Blumer anticipates this point ('Public Opinion', pp.547-8).

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. p.543.

<sup>54</sup> See Eurobarometer Special 214, 'The Future Constitutional Treaty', March 2005, downloaded November 2005 from [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_214\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_214_en.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> The increasing popularity of a domain-specific approach in cognitive psychology has been charted by DiMaggio in Paul Dimaggio, 'Culture and Cognition', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23 (1997).

between the last two) – is a useful sensitising idea.<sup>56</sup> Likewise the concern with ‘framing effects’, which has been forced upon the discipline by the incoherence of data derived from polling, is of considerable interest. But despite noteworthy developments of this kind, these approaches do not offer a model for our empirical exploration. Individualist mentalism does not mark a sufficient improvement on perspectives based on interests, norms and values.<sup>57</sup>

### Intersubjectivism: the Deliberative Democracy Approach

In the earlier decades of the twentieth century, a number of other scholars had been studying lay politics from a rather less individualist perspective. Many, particularly in the American pragmatist tradition, were interested in studying empirically the inheritance of Enlightenment political theory, and concepts such as ‘public reason’ and ‘public opinion’ provided points of departure for investigating how contemporary democracy measured up to Enlightenment ideals. For writers such as Cooley, James, Peirce, Dewey, Mead, Le Bon, Park, Blumer, C. Wright Mills and Tönnies, public opinion was essentially an ‘organic social process’,<sup>58</sup> and their writing was oriented to the study of the collective, whether in the form of ‘the public’ (the classical idea of a collective bound together by reasoned debate), ‘the crowd’ (a collective linked by sentiment) or ‘the mass’ (a collective linked by a common object of interest). In a period when the idea of a systematic scientific method was coming to dominate the study of society and politics, the imaginative and often explicitly normative approaches favoured by authors in this tradition, accompanied by the methodological difficulties associated with *not* treating public opinion as an aggregate of individual opinions, probably gave rise to suspicion.<sup>59</sup> Perhaps also, in focusing on the collective, some of these authors – though not all – were guilty of replicating an individual-society dichotomy and giving an undue priority to the second of the two poles, with all the problems of mystification, social determinism and re-subordination of the ideational which this can lead to.

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<sup>56</sup> Johnston Conover and Feldman, 'How People Organize the Political World: A Schematic Model'. On domain specificity see also Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Barnes, 'Practice as Collective Action', pp.17-8.

<sup>58</sup> Slavko Splichal, *Public Opinion: Developments and Controversies in the Twentieth Century* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), p.78.

<sup>59</sup> This is not to say that all writers in the mentalist-individualist tradition were dismissive: Converse's notion of the 'issue public', which viewed the size of the public increasing or decreasing according to the issue around which it coalesced, can be thought of as a response to these sociological perspectives.

However, with its emphasis on interaction and communication, this tradition was a forerunner for more recent approaches which look at lay politics not in terms of aggregating the attributes of unitary individuals but in terms of discursive interaction. The study of discourse and discursive practice has been attractive for several reasons. Firstly, it holds out the possibility of dissolving the dichotomy of individual and society.<sup>60</sup> Discourse plainly cannot be understood purely in terms of individual action or collective structures: the sentence is not ‘owned’ by the speaker, since it requires borrowed vocabulary and grammar to be meaningful, but vocabulary and grammar would neither exist nor evolve but for the incessant creativity of the speaker.<sup>61</sup> The speaker is both master and slave.<sup>62</sup> In addition to this useful starting-point, a focus on discourse invites particular emphasis on the context in which opinions are formed and on the process by which they are developed, both of which are neglected in the mentalist approach. It also invites sensitivity to a wider field of political behaviour than simply the ticking of boxes on questionnaires and voting slips. Attention to discourse has taken divergent forms, with ontological assumptions and normative commitments which do not always coincide. What these approaches share however is that each may be said to have evolved in reaction both to mentalist approaches and to the ‘objectivist’ approaches of political economy and traditional sociology. In this section we consider the deliberative model, which in the context of European Studies takes as its principal theoretical point of departure the work of Jürgen Habermas.<sup>63</sup>

The deliberative model has been treated as both a normative ideal of democracy and as an explanatory model for the institutional processes of existing polities, amongst them the

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<sup>60</sup> That the dualism is problematic has been long observed, yet from many social-theoretical perspectives it is hard to shake off. On this see for instance John Dewey (*Dewey, The Public and Its Problems* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1927), p.191): ‘Because an individual can be dissociated from this, that and the other grouping, since he need not be married, or be a church-member or a voter, or belong to a club or scientific association, there grows up in the mind an image of a residual individual who is not a member of any association at all. From this premise, and from this only, there develops the unreal question of how individuals come to be united in societies and groups: *the* individual and *the* social are now opposed to each other, and there is the problem of “reconciling” them.’

<sup>61</sup> On moving beyond the dichotomy of individual and social totality, see Schatzki, *Social Practices*, chapter 1.

<sup>62</sup> Roland Barthes, ‘Inaugural Lecture, Collège De France’, in Susan Sontag (ed.), *Barthes: Selected Writings* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982).

<sup>63</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*; Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*; Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory* (Ciaran Cronin and Pablo de Greif edn.; Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1998). Habermas, ‘The Postnational Constellation’. More generally, see also John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); John S. Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Amy Gutmann, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). For a review article, Simone Chambers, ‘Deliberative Democratic Theory’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6 (2003).

European Union.<sup>64</sup> In terms of the different kinds of collective bond that were considered in the previous chapter, it can clearly be linked to a *constitutional bond*. In its ontology it is informed by Habermas' intersubjectivism: agents are conceived as expressing their individuality in the context of social relationships of communication.<sup>65</sup> They engage as partners in 'communicative action', understood as follows:

[action] oriented to achieving, sustaining and reviewing consensus – and indeed a consensus that rests on the intersubjective recognition of criticisable validity claims. The rationality inherent in this practice is seen in the fact that a communicatively achieved agreement must be based *in the end* on reasons. And the rationality of those who participate in this communicative practice is determined by whether, if necessary, they could, *under suitable circumstances*, provide reasons for their expressions.<sup>66</sup>

Rationality, understood in terms of a social process of argumentation, is central to this perspective: the emphasis is on an inclusive process of open and reasoned argumentation, leading to enlightened opinion-formation and the adoption of policies universally recognisable as favourable. Deliberation rather than voting is the key practice. In a definition which has been taken up in the EU literature, one author casts the deliberative model as the 'rule of reasons': 'a political practice of argumentation and reason-giving among free and equal citizens, a practice in which individual and collective perspectives and positions are subject to change through deliberation and in which only those norms, rules or decisions which result from some form of reason-based agreement among the citizens are accepted as legitimate.'<sup>67</sup> In the field of empirical research, key questions have been: how far can existing decision-making processes be considered deliberative, and how can institutions be designed so as to allow deliberation to flourish? In what ways does a 'deliberative' public, more engaged and better informed than the usual, produce a better quality of opinion?<sup>68</sup> In the European context, a question given considerable prominence is whether it is possible to speak of an emerging European 'public sphere'.

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<sup>64</sup> Explicitly connecting the normative and the explanatory, see Erik O. Eriksen, 'Reflexive Integration in Europe', in Erik O. Eriksen (ed.), *Making the European Polity: Reflexive Integration in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2005a), esp. pp.9-10 and pp.16-7.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Maeve Cooke, 'The Weakness of Strong Intersubjectivism: Habermas's Conception of Justice', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 2/3 (2003).

<sup>66</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, p.17.

<sup>67</sup> Rainer Forst, 'The Rule of Reasons: Three Models of Deliberative Democracy', *Ratio Juris*, 14/4 (2001). His definition is invoked in Rainer Schmalz-Bruns, 'On the Political Theory of the Euro-Polity', in Erik O. Eriksen (ed.), *Making the European Polity: Reflexive Integration in the EU* (London: Routledge, 2005), and in Eriksen, 'Reflexive Integration in Europe'.

<sup>68</sup> For a review of the empirical work see Michael X. Delli Carpini, Fay Lomax Cook, and Lawrence R. Jacobs, 'Public Deliberation, Discursive Participation, and Citizen Engagement: A Review of the Empirical Literature', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 7 (2004). Note in particular Fishkin's 'deliberative polls', intended to

First elaborated by Habermas in historical terms, as the sphere of debate which emerged among the middle-classes of late-seventeenth- and early-eighteenth-century England in contradistinction to state authority,<sup>69</sup> the term ‘public sphere’ has been adopted in the European debate with more than one meaning. Some give it a spatial definition, for instance ‘that space in which citizens come together to discuss and debate issues of common or public concern’.<sup>70</sup> Others take it in a more linguistic sense, as a ‘social construction’ which ‘does not pre-exist outside social and political discourses’,<sup>71</sup> or as ‘the debate held in public by several actors who are in one way or another in contact with each other, for instance, through the pages of a newspaper.’<sup>72</sup> It has also been suggested that, in English, the conventional word ‘public’ can do much the same work, and that the concept ‘public sphere’ is at least in part an artefact of the English-language translation of Habermas’ key text.<sup>73</sup> What unites these perspectives is the concern to denote the unfolding process of rational consensus-formation so central to deliberative democracy: given that this process is indispensable to the vision, a term which can signify its material expression is indispensable too, and ‘public sphere’ plays this role. Those who envisage a deliberative EU therefore claim the necessity of a European public sphere, and see its achievement as necessary to fostering political community at the European level and redressing the deficiencies of EU democracy.<sup>74</sup> Under modern conditions, direct deliberation involving all citizens appears impossible: therefore, where public-sphere literature takes an empirical turn, it is very often to study the media (traditional and new), understood as a ‘proxy’ for a public sphere<sup>75</sup> or ‘a container, or carrier of a mediated public sphere.’<sup>76</sup> It has been studied in very different ways, from content analyses of national media which trace the frequency with which

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provide a glimpse of the possibilities for lay deliberation. See e.g. Robert Luskin, James Fishkin, and Roger Jowell, ‘Considered Opinions: Deliberative Polling in Britain’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 32/3 (2002).

<sup>69</sup> Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.

<sup>70</sup> John Crowley and Liana Giorgi, ‘Introduction: The Political Sociology of the European Public Sphere’, in Liana Giorgi, Ingmar von Homeyer, and Wayne Parsons (eds.), *Democracy in the European Union: Towards the Emergence of a Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 2006). Likewise, Erik O. Eriksen speaks of the public sphere as ‘the social room that is created when individuals discuss common concerns in front of an audience.’ Erik O. Eriksen, ‘An Emerging European Public Sphere’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 8/3 (2005b), p.341.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Risse, ‘An Emerging European Public Sphere? Theoretical Clarifications and Empirical Indicators’, *Annual Meeting of the European Union Studies Association (EUSA)* (Nashville TN, 2003b), p.2.

<sup>72</sup> Marianne van de Steeg, ‘Rethinking the Conditions for a Public Sphere in the European Union’, *European Journal of Social Theory* Special issue (November) (2002), p.503.

<sup>73</sup> Slavko Splichal, ‘In Search of a Strong European Public Sphere: Some Critical Observations on Conceptualizations of Publicness and the (European) Public Sphere’, *Media, Culture and Society*, 28/5 (2006).

<sup>74</sup> As Splichal notes though (ibid. p.7), there is no consensus on whether a European public sphere is necessary to solving the EU’s ‘democratic deficit’ or whether it is this deficit itself which must be addressed so as to create the circumstances conducive to a public sphere.

<sup>75</sup> Risse, ‘An Emerging European Public Sphere?’

<sup>76</sup> Van de Steeg, ‘Rethinking the Conditions for a Public Sphere’, p.503.

European themes are discussed, to discussions of the possibilities for a pan-European media.<sup>77</sup> No consensus has emerged on whether a European public sphere does or can exist.

To some extent, the public-sphere debate has moved beyond the original concerns of deliberative democracy, with certain recent contributions celebrating the possibilities for meaningful disagreement and ideological contestation that would be opened up in a well-functioning European public sphere.<sup>78</sup> Deliberative democracy itself has become a pluralised set of approaches, some of which emphasise the non-necessity of consensus and the embeddedness of the reasoning process.<sup>79</sup> While these are welcome developments from the perspective of a political bond, which we have defined in agonistic terms, it is important to address an assessment to the core of the approach, which remains the Habermasian tradition. In this, deliberative democracy is predicated on the idea that discursive interaction which is free and fair will produce a rational consensus – perhaps even that a rational consensus can be *defined* as that which emerges when conditions for free and fair discursive interaction are achieved.<sup>80</sup> Where these conditions fail, it is assumed to be for empirical rather than theoretical reasons. The intersubjectivist perspective therefore relies, like those in the mentalist-aggregative tradition, on the idea of a single language of politics, the medium through which free public reason can be exercised and rational consensus can be achieved. A quotation from Habermas serves to confirm as much: ‘The concept of communicative action presupposes the use of language as a medium for a kind of reaching understanding, in the course of which participants, through relating to a world, reciprocally raise validity claims that can be accepted or contested.’<sup>81</sup> However, treating language as a medium and equating rationality with the giving of reasons is to severely downplay the significance of routinised language practice and the taking-of-things-for-granted. As James Tully has emphasised, drawing on the insights of the later Wittgenstein, it is quite *un-reasonable* to see reason-

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<sup>77</sup> For reflections on the relative merits of these approaches, see Jürgen Gerhards, 'Europäisierung von Ökonomie und Politik und die Trägheit der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 52/Sonderheft 40 (2000); Cathleen Kantner, *Kein modernes Babel: Kommunikative Voraussetzungen europäischer Öffentlichkeit* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004).

<sup>78</sup> In particular, see Risse, 'An Emerging European Public Sphere?'. See also the discussion of 'constituency building' in John E. Fossum and Hans-Jörg Trenz, 'The EU's Fledgling Society: From Deafening Silence to Critical Voice in European Constitution-Making', *Journal of Civil Society*, 2/1 (2006).

<sup>79</sup> For a discussion of how deliberative democracy may come to terms with the reality of disagreement and contestation, see Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond: Liberals, Critics, Contestations*, chapter 3. Emphasising the common ground between certain deliberative-democracy approaches and agonistic approaches, see Andrew Knops, 'Debate: Agonism as Deliberation – on Mouffe's Theory of Democracy', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 15/1 (2007).

<sup>80</sup> For the different positions taken by Habermas on these definitional questions, see Cooke, 'The Weakness of Strong Intersubjectivism'.

<sup>81</sup> Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, p.99.

guided behaviour as that which submits (or grants the possibility of submitting) all arguments to a validity-test. There is always a point at which the justifications are exhausted, when bedrock is reached and ‘my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: This is simply what I do.’<sup>82</sup> If assumptions are therefore unavoidable, the notion that the discourse can be divested of all particularity so as to enable a rational universal consensus, answerable to a universal morality, is implausible. Indeed, it is precisely the *impossibility* of shaking off all features of particularity which establishes the ‘rough ground’, as Wittgenstein calls it, upon which discursive practices like communication and deliberation can be achieved.<sup>83</sup>

From this perspective, an intersubjectivist approach which takes discourse as a matter of reasoned communicative action seems rather narrow, and some of the concerns of the EU deliberative-democracy literature appear somewhat overdrawn. If one weakens the attachment to a certain understanding of rational consensus as the outcome of deliberation, one need not follow the preoccupation of certain scholars that political issues be framed in the same common fashion across the member-states of the EU.<sup>84</sup> If one loosens the concern for the overarching unity of debate, the attention given to media discourse may likewise come to seem excessive. Certainly, in giving overwhelming emphasis to reasoned debate amongst the (political- and media-) elites of the public sphere as the foundation of political community, such a perspective is likely to underestimate the significance of the taken-for-granted knowledge which exists amongst EU citizens more widely. Arguably, instead of dismissing the tacit as the unreasonable, one needs to look more closely at precisely the assumptions about political problems which are to be found in everyday language. This means shifting away from an intersubjectivist ontology and the metaphor of language as medium towards a perspective from which one studies the possibilities for subjecthood and political action which are held out in discursive practice. This is the sense of Mouffe’s call not simply to ‘replace the dominant “means/ends rationality” [of aggregative perspectives] by another form of rationality, a “deliberative” and “communicative” one’:

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<sup>82</sup> James Tully, 'Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: Understanding Practices of Critical Reflection', *Political Theory*, 17/2 (1989), p.181, citing Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976), §217.

<sup>83</sup> A similar conclusion is reached in Chantal Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism* (Vienna: Institut für Höhere Studien, 2000b), p.13.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Jürgen Gerhards, 'Das Öffentlichkeitsdefizit der EU im Horizont normativer Öffentlichkeitstheorien', in Hartmut Kaelble, Martin Kirsch, and Alexander Schmidt-Gernig (eds.), *Transnationale Öffentlichkeiten und Identitäten im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2002); Klaus Eder and Cathleen Kantner, 'Transnationale Resonanzstrukturen in Europa. Eine Kritik der Rede vom Öffentlichkeitsdefizit', in Maurizio Bach (ed.), *Die Europäisierung nationaler Gesellschaften. Sonderheft 40 der Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2000). As Risse puts it ('An Emerging European Public Sphere?', p.6), 'communicating about the same issues at the same time is a definitional requirement for a public sphere which is not really controversial in the literature.'

the failure of current democratic theory to tackle the question of citizenship is the consequence of their operating with a conception of the subject which sees the individuals as prior to society, as bearers of natural rights, and either as utility maximising agents or as rational subjects. In all cases they are abstracted from social and power relations, language, culture and the whole set of practices that make the individuality possible. What is precluded in these rationalistic approaches is the very question of what are the conditions of existence of the democratic subject.<sup>85</sup>

While the deliberative-democracy approach marks an important move towards taking ideational questions seriously while avoiding the individualism and the guesswork associated with mentalist approaches, a more complete shift towards discourse and practice is one which foregrounds these ‘conditions of individuality’ as the central object of study. Thus, while sharing many of the normative orientations of Habermasian deliberative democracy (not least the emphasis on politics as the basis of community) and being in sympathy with the some of its methodological interests (in particular, the workings of language), we turn attention to a third body of literature which contains the most relevant ideas for the exploratory research that follows.

#### Text- and practice-oriented approaches

Here one is embracing a range of approaches. Most can loosely be associated with the so-called interpretative or linguistic turn in the social and political sciences, though the word ‘turn’ is misleading if taken to imply chronological sequence (these approaches exist in parallel with those we have already looked at, and draw on philosophical traditions which are hardly recent) and if taken to imply a strong programmatic unity. Most share a commitment to the notion, popularised by contemporary philosophers such as Richard Rorty, that reality is best treated not as something external to language which can be ‘captured’ with it, but as something that impinges on us *through* language. These approaches therefore mark ‘a turn from socio-historical “realities” to their linguistic representation. [...] [L]anguage is no longer understood as an instrument in social practice but rather as the site or “ground” for such practice.’<sup>86</sup> What can profitably be studied is not the *correspondence* between the phenomenal world and our descriptions of it, but rather the *relationship* which we establish with this world in our act of describing it.

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<sup>85</sup> Mouffe, *Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism*, p.10.

<sup>86</sup> Christopher Fynsk, ‘Linguistic Turn’, in Paul Baltes and Neil Smelser (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001), pp.8913-4.

Such a perspective weakens the faith in rationality as a point of (potentially) universal orientation because it implies that disagreement may be rooted in divergence of language use, and that any particular language use which claims to embody rational discourse may be susceptible to persistent scepticism.<sup>87</sup> Such a perspective also challenges scientific aspirations towards explanatory accounts of human behaviour. As James Tully puts it, following Wittgenstein, ‘do not look for an “explanation” but simply investigate how the “*language game is played*” (Wittgenstein 1997: 654, 656). ... [C]oncentrate on the ways language-users use words and the activities in which the uses of words are woven (Wittgenstein 1997: 10, 1974: 204). What is needed is neither a theory of the game in question (which is another game with signs) nor an explanation of an underlying structure that determines the play, but a perspicuous representation of the physiognomy of the game itself: what the players do and how they do it [...]’<sup>88</sup> Interest is refocused on the routine and the performative use of language, the latter as influentially set out in John Austin’s theory of speech acts. Rather than treating the utterance as a pure rendition of something which is in people’s heads, attention is directed to the place of the utterance in the discursive situation, on what people are *doing* when they express opinion, when they say one thing rather than another.<sup>89</sup> More generally, one sees in these approaches a shift towards the affirmation of plurality and contingency, and a shift away from the prioritising of coherence, order, structure and system characteristic of much of traditional sociology or sister-disciplines such as semiotics. The idea that the social world is governed by macro principles or rules that determine individual behaviour is rejected. In this, the influence is evident – to varying degrees – of the French post-structuralists, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan and Deleuze. One can speak of a new emphasis on the *creativity* of human action.<sup>90</sup> The problems never shaken off by the structuralists – how to think about agency and change, how to think about contradiction – are given pride of place. Typical research questions become: how do the linguistic resources at people’s disposal shape the way they talk about politics? What patterns of meaning-making and argumentation are available to them? What kind of variety is there, and what can be said of it? What can one be told not just by the explicitly expressed (the opinion) but also by that which is taken for granted, the common sense? How do different ‘ways of talking’ relate to different kinds of political action? Interpretation and

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<sup>87</sup> Note, however, that Rorty himself chooses to give both Rawls and Habermas a favourable reading, e.g. ‘Globalisation, the politics of identity and social hope’, in Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999).

<sup>88</sup> James Tully, ‘The Agonic Freedom of Citizens’, *Economy and Society*, 28/2 (1999), p.163.

<sup>89</sup> John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

<sup>90</sup> Hans Joas, *The Creativity of Action* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

exploration rather than explanation are to the fore. Research methods reflect the shift away from the acontextual: the study of texts (naturally-occurring or in interviews) is common, as are anthropological methods such as participant observation.

Though broadly in sympathy with these textualist approaches, another set of authors have argued that it is the 'practice' rather than the 'text' which should be taken as the basic social phenomenon.<sup>91</sup> These approaches share the concern to avoid seeing the world in terms either of individuals or holistic social entities: as with textual approaches, theirs is, as Theodore Schatzki terms it, a 'site ontology'.<sup>92</sup> They differ however in emphasising the importance of non-propositional knowledge ('know-how', as opposed to 'know-that') for understanding human behaviour, in foregrounding the 'embodied' character of this knowledge, and in making more frequent reference to the material world. Thus in defining a 'practice', Reckwitz speaks of 'a routinised way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood.'<sup>93</sup> The discursive is in this way treated as one of several kinds of routinised behaviour, and not all of these have a well-defined discourse that accompanies them.<sup>94</sup> 'Competence' is a key concept, since it allows one to avoid seeing behaviour as the following of predefined rules which exist external to practices themselves. Another definition, by Barry Barnes, brings this out clearly: 'Let practices be socially recognised forms of activity, done on the basis of what members learn from others, and capable of being done well or badly, correctly or incorrectly.'<sup>95</sup> A practice is identifiable not because it is the enactment of a rule, but because it is a 'way of carrying on' which can be judged by others to whom it is recognisable as being more or less competent.

These textualist and practice-oriented theoretical moves, which share much in common compared to the mentalism of political psychology and the rationalism of the Habermasian deliberative democratic approach, can be associated with several empirical approaches to the study of lay politics. One of these (though perhaps the most loosely related) is 'frame analysis'. Broadly falling within the fields of political sociology and

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<sup>91</sup> For a comparison of textualist and practice-oriented approaches, see Reckwitz, 'Towards a Theory of Social Practices'; Iver B. Neumann, 'Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 31/3 (2002).

<sup>92</sup> Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*.

<sup>93</sup> Reckwitz, 'Towards a Theory of Social Practices', p.250.

<sup>94</sup> See Stephen Turner, 'Throwing out the Tacit Rule Book: Learning and Practices', in Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny (eds.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001), discussing the question of vocabulary of appraisal for such practices as house-painting and flirting.

<sup>95</sup> Barry Barnes, 'Practice as Collective Action', *ibid.* p.19.

communications, it traces its ancestry to US symbolic interactionism as developed by G. H. Mead and Herbert Blumer, takes its unit of analysis (the ‘frame’) from Erving Goffman, and has been further developed from the 1980s onwards by authors such as David Snow, Robert Benford and Sydney Tarrow in their studies of social movements, and William Gamson in his landmark study of everyday political discussion, *Talking Politics*. There is no consensus on the definition of a frame (some scholars giving it a considerably more linguistic twist than others<sup>96</sup>) but one way to think of them is as inherited ‘ideational materials’<sup>97</sup> or tropes which both enable and constrain actors in their political discursive practice. Robert Entman has suggested that ‘to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item prescribed.’ He suggests that frames define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements, and suggest remedies.<sup>98</sup> Key questions for these authors have included: what role do frames and framing play in determining the success of social movements in capturing lay support for political causes? What is the role of media – how do they make use of popular tropes,<sup>99</sup> and what are the consequences of certain ways of news reporting (‘episodic’ versus ‘thematic’) for how lay people attribute political responsibility?<sup>100</sup> How do cultural tropes affect people’s receptivity to institutional change, including the process of European integration?<sup>101</sup>

One way to avoid slipping into a structure-agency dichotomy is to conceive of frames as ideational *resources*, and to adopt the toolkit metaphor which has been proposed by Ann Swidler for cultural analysis more generally. Swidler argues against the assumption that the

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<sup>96</sup> Note that some authors still use the concept of ‘belief system’ (e.g. David A. Snow and Robert D. Benford, ‘Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization’, in Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *International Social Movement Research*, 1 (London: JAI Press, 1988)), and are therefore using ‘frame’ in a more cognitive sense.

<sup>97</sup> Sidney Tarrow, ‘Mentalities, Political Cultures and Collective Action Frames’, in Aldon D. Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (eds.), *Frontiers of Social Movement Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>98</sup> Robert M. Entman, ‘Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm’, *Journal of Communication*, 43/4 (1993), p.52.

<sup>99</sup> On the relationship between media and lay discourse, see Katherine Cramer Walsh, *Talking About Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Life* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>100</sup> Looking at this, see Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible?*, which also draws on fields in social psychology such as ‘attribution theory’. Attention is directed to how different framing acts can produce different attributions of ‘causal responsibility’ (where the origins of a problem are seen) and ‘treatment responsibility’ (who is held accountable for such problems).

<sup>101</sup> Juan Díez Medrano, *Framing Europe: Attitudes to European Integration in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003). He mixes the languages of ‘frames’, ‘attitudes’ and variables rather awkwardly, however, and his Chapter 9, titled ‘Frames and Attitudes toward European Integration: A Statistical Validation’ and based on the analysis of Eurobarometer data, is something of a snake in the grass.

influence of culture on behaviour is to be seen in terms of values supplying the ultimate ends towards which action is oriented. 'People do not build lines of action from scratch, choosing actions one at a time as efficient means to given ends. Instead, they construct chains of action beginning with at least some pre-fabricated links. [...] A culture is not a unified system that pushes action in a consistent direction. Rather, it is more like a "tool kit" or repertoire from which actors select differing pieces for constructing lines of action.' Here one sees a move towards a stronger emphasis on actor agency than is customary in sociology, and her move away from the assumption of coherence is signalled in the call for cultural research to focus 'not on cultures as unified wholes, but on chunks of culture, each with its own history.'<sup>102</sup> At the same time, pure voluntarism is avoided by noting that resources are taken up only to the extent that they are culturally available. The study of 'symbolic boundaries' is one way in which research in cultural sociology has explored these questions empirically.<sup>103</sup> Modes of justification have been another important field of enquiry, especially under the influence of social theorists Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot. In their account, humans find themselves in situations where they must relate to one another according (*inter alia*) to 'regimes' of love, of violence, of familiarity and of justification. In outlining the grammar of the regime of justification, they claim to have identified by empirical means six 'orders of worth' or *grandeur* ('Inspired', 'Domestic', 'Civic', 'Opinion', 'Market' and 'Industrial') by the logic of which justificatory arguments can be made. Here again one sees the shift away from the assumption of coherence and of ideal language: these orders of worth are 'formally incompatible with one another, since each of them is recognised in the situation in which its validity is established as universal'; conflict resolution depends on participants to the conflict reaching 'tacit agreement' about which orders of worth are relevant to their dispute.<sup>104</sup> Some orders of worth may be more prevalent in certain social environments than others, a possibility which has been explored empirically by Lamont and Thévenot and their fellow contributors in *Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology: Repertoires of Evaluation in France and the United States*. Likewise,

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<sup>102</sup> Ann Swidler, 'Culture in Action', *American Sociological Review*, 51/2 (1986), p.273; p.277; p.283. See also Ann Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001b), Chapter 2. Equating frames and cultural resources, see Cramer Walsh, *Talking About Politics*, p.22.

<sup>103</sup> Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár, 'The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28 (2002).

<sup>104</sup> Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, 'The Sociology of Critical Capacity', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2/3 (1999), p.365.

reconciliation between orders of worth may be more achievable in some contexts than others.<sup>105</sup>

Often as important for scholars associated with these approaches is how collective ideational materials (maintaining the broadest formulation) can *inhibit* as well as foster political participation. The normative commitment to active citizenship and ‘civil society’, characteristic of much of empirical political sociology, comes through strongly in these works. In *Avoiding Politics*, Nina Eliasoph looks at how, in certain social situations, norms of etiquette can render inappropriate discussion of politics and the adoption of perspectives which go beyond personal interest. As she puts it, emphasising the significance of discursive practice, ‘the problem with psychological approaches is that what matters for democracy is not only what individuals privately hold inside their brains. [...] The “democratic norms” that really matter are unspoken norms for conversation, manners, civility, tact, that make citizens comfortable engaging in freewheeling political conversation in everyday life contexts.’<sup>106</sup> Invoking Goffman’s distinction between ‘frontstage’ and ‘backstage’, she explores how people in private contexts can feel fully able to articulate collective interests whilst in public contexts they may feel constrained to adopt the more parochial language of a particular ‘identity’. By studying how norms may vary across contexts and how they rely on individual choices for their maintenance, she avoids resurrecting the passive figure of *homo sociologicus*. In *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven M. Tipton deploy interview methods to explore the contemporary condition of American *mores* – things such as ‘consciousness, culture, and the daily practices of life’<sup>107</sup> – and chart the processes of increasing individualism and fragmentation plus the ways in which these are resisted. In some of these political sociological approaches, the recognition of the lack of a shared, coherent language of politics seems to coexist with a yearning for exactly such a language;<sup>108</sup> to this extent they maintain a linkage with the deliberative-democracy tradition.

In Britain and parts of continental Europe, similar questions to those explored in political and cultural sociology are studied under the explicitly textualist rubric of ‘discourse

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<sup>105</sup> Peter Wagner, 'After *Justification*: Repertoires of Evaluation and the Sociology of Modernity', *Ibid.* p.353. Looking at the logics of justification invoked by ordinary people in discussion of different political problems, see Andrew J. Perrin, *Citizen Speak: The Democratic Imagination in American Life* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>106</sup> Nina Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.20.

<sup>107</sup> Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), p. 275.

<sup>108</sup> See e.g. *Ibid.* p.viii.

analysis', though between these literatures there has been little in the way of cross-fertilisation. Discourse analysis is a wide field (a bit like Hampstead Heath). It traces its lineage from language philosophy through French post-structuralism, Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology, Conversation Analysis as developed by Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff, the neo-Marxism of Antonio Gramsci, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and a range of other influences depending on the particular subfield. By no means all works in this tradition have been empirical, but those which have been tend to look at the 'interpretative repertoires' which speakers in discourse situations invoke as they engage in discursive practices such as the construction of (collective) identity, acts of legitimisation and delegitimisation, and the building and mobilising of coalitions.<sup>109</sup> This approach has been usefully applied in the context of European Studies to explore the 'narratives about Europe' which may structure how the EU is discussed by political actors.<sup>110</sup>

Finally, in an approach emerging from social psychology, Rom Harré has developed 'positioning theory', a perspective with considerable possibilities of empirical application to the study of lay politics.<sup>111</sup> Reacting against frame analysis (and, less directly, identity studies) for being insensitive to the dynamic and performative aspects of conversational interaction, he works with the concepts of 'subject position' and 'positioning'. Subject positions are locations in discourse to which individuals attach themselves using pronoun grammar, thereby embracing the conceptual repertoire which comes with that position. Positioning refers to the discursive practice whereby individuals assign subject positions to themselves and to others. It is a relational activity (others are positioned as one positions oneself), and it can extend beyond the intentions and the awareness of the actors involved (indeed, actors are constituted by positioning). As a psychologist, Harré's focus is generally on interpersonal positioning in the small-group setting, but the concepts have been applied

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<sup>109</sup> For an overview, see the introduction by Jacob Torfing in David Howarth and Jacob Torfing, *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). In discursive and rhetorical psychology, see Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour* (London: Sage, 1987), and Michael Billig, *Ideology and Opinions* (London: Sage, 1991). Looking at the organisation of everyday talk at the micro-level in small passages of text, see conversation analysts such as Charles Antaki, (*Explaining and Arguing: The Social Organization of Accounts* (London: Sage, 1994)).

<sup>110</sup> See e.g. Eugenia Siapera, 'EU Correspondents in Brussels: Between Europe and the Nation-State', in Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse, and Marilyn B. Brewer (eds.), *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). For a textualist approach to European identity, see Thomas Risse, 'A European Identity? Europeanisation and the Evolution of Nation-State Identities', in Maria Green Cowles, James Caporaso, and Thomas Risse (eds.), *Transforming Europe: Europeanisation and Domestic Change* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>111</sup> Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré, 'Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 20/1 (1990).

also to the intergroup level, whereby groups of individuals position themselves as a 'we' at the same time as constructing a 'them'.<sup>112</sup>

Whilst many of these approaches have developed in parallel rather than in conjunction with one another, there is a certain overlap in their strengths and weaknesses. Their attraction lies in their resistance to many of the thematic criticisms we have developed in this chapter so far: they seek the symbolic in the observable world rather than the cognitive; they avoid reducing language to the medium of conscious communication, focusing instead on its unintended aspects and its political effects; and they provide opportunities for sidestepping structure-agency problems and the slide into determinism or voluntarism. Our empirical exploration of the 'political bond' will focus on *discursive practices* (i.e. patterns of talk) as the site for study, and will draw inspiration from these approaches to do so. Political community is thereby explored in the common-sense assumptions and taken-for-granted reference-points which people invoke when discussing matters of political relevance. A focus on discursive interaction enables the advantages of a practice-oriented approach to be combined with sensitivity to the ideational content of politics. It matches with a number of talk-centred perspectives on citizenship in which discussion is treated as a form of political practice.<sup>113</sup> For the reason that we shall be drawing on a number of the approaches above, it is as well to be mindful of some of the questions they leave unresolved, before sketching out more fully our own perspective.

One straightforward problem is that they have all suffered from substantial imprecision regarding their key concepts: 'frames', 'cultural tools or resources', 'discourses', 'interpretative repertoires', 'practices' and 'orders of worth' have been used to mean rather different things by authors working within the same tradition, with little convergence on common definitions. It has been noted, for instance, that the word 'discourse' has been taken to mean 'a textual unit that is larger than a sentence', a 'wider set of social practices' and, most expansively, as 'coterminous with the social'.<sup>114</sup> Such variation can be found merely amongst those who style themselves discourse analysts; if one looks further afield, to US sociology for example, further connotations are added to the word. Likewise, the concept of

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<sup>112</sup> See in particular Sui-Lan Tan and F. M. Moghaddam, 'Positioning in Intergroup Relations', in Rom Harré and Luk van Langenhove (eds.), *Positioning Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999); also the introduction to this volume.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Perrin, *Citizen Speak*; Sophie Duchesne and Florence Haegel, 'Avoiding or Accepting Conflict in Public Talk', *British Journal of Political Science* 37/1 (2007); Pamela Conover, Donald D. Searing, and Ivor Crewe, 'The Deliberative Potential of Discussion', *British Journal of Political Science* 32/1 (2002).

<sup>114</sup> Torfing, in Howarth and Torfing, *Discourse Theory in European Politics*, pp.6-8.

frame as used by frame analysts has a wide semantic range, and arguably ‘framing is not a clearly explicated and generally applicable concept, but only a metaphor that cannot be directly translated into research questions.’<sup>115</sup> A glance at *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* is enough to observe the word ‘practice’ being used in more than one way. Meanwhile, even within a single article, Boltanski and Thévenot’s fundamental concept ‘order of worth’ is occasionally substituted for terms such as ‘world’ or ‘convention of equivalence’, according to a rationale which is not always obvious.

For those sympathetic to such approaches, ambiguity of this kind need not be a major concern – indeed it is fully understandable as part of the vibrant and disruptive character of language and its evolution. More problematic – regardless of how one defines the units of analysis – is how one explores them empirically. How does one identify a discursive resource, or a practice? One needs to be sufficiently alien to the subject matter in question to be ‘struck’ by its distinctive features (the danger being that one takes these for granted just like the actors themselves) and yet one needs also to be sufficiently embedded in it as to be able to interpret and make sense of what is found.<sup>116</sup> As well as striking this balance for the purpose of identification, one faces the challenge of how best to think of the specimens that one draws out: as embedded in a larger grammatical structure (a *parole* embedded in a *langue*, in Saussure’s terminology), or as simply one of several utterances bearing a resemblance to one another but not structured by a larger whole? If the former, then how does one study grammatical structures when all that one can access is particular utterances, how does one derive the nature of the category from the item? If the latter, then what is it that allows a connection between utterances to be made, how does one generalise one’s findings? Many discourse analysts and practice theorists describe themselves as post-structuralist and reject the idea of grammars, though often they seem unable to dispense with these entirely. Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell, for example, claim that ‘in discourse analysis the extracts [selected from interviews] are *not* characterisations or illustrations of the data, they are examples of the data itself. Or, in ethnomethodological terms, they are the topics itself, not a resource from which the topic is rebuilt [...]’, but this sits rather badly with their definition of an interpretative repertoire as ‘basically a lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterise and evaluate actions and events.’ It is unclear how one can speak of that which is ‘drawn upon’ without making assumptions about the

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<sup>115</sup> Dietram A. Scheufele, 'Framing as a Theory of Media Effects', *Journal of Communication*, Winter (1999), p.103.

<sup>116</sup> This is what Turner refers to as the ‘[Marcel] Mauss problem’ (Stephen Turner, *The Social Theory of Practices: Tradition, Knowledge and Presuppositions* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), pp.19-24).

place of the utterance in a broader scheme, without, in other words, linking that which is ‘in the text’ to something which is ‘beyond the text’.<sup>117</sup> Harré and Davies are particularly insistent: ‘language exists only as concrete occasions of language in use. *La langue* is an intellectualising myth – only *la parole* is psychologically and socially real.’<sup>118</sup> For them, Erving Goffman’s frame analysis was flawed because it was ‘transcendental’: frames were understood as ‘transcendent to action ... as pre-existing devices (or tools) employed by people to create conversations’, whereas ‘the whole of the “apparatus” must be immanent, reproduced moment by moment in conversational action and carried through time, not as abstract schemata, but as current understandings of past and present conversations.’<sup>119</sup> Whilst theirs is a coherent perspective, it seems to make difficult something which can often be of great interest in the analysis of any given empirical situation: that is, consideration not just of what was said but of what was *not* said and might have been said. When Boltanski and Thévenot adopt the term ‘grammars of worth’, it is precisely this possibility which they enable, albeit at the risk of reifying structure once more.

Similar problems of inference arise in a different guise when one inquires into how best to describe the set of people who invoke these repertoires (frames, resources etc.). In this there is a strong danger of ‘groupism’, that is, of inferring arbitrarily that the boundaries of the circle of repertoire-users correspond to the boundaries of a recognisable group. The problem is more fundamental than methodological nationalism, since redescribing the account with reference to other units (cities, for example, or professions) is of little help.<sup>120</sup> Potter and Wetherell seem to slip into groupism when lauding a work of discourse analysis which takes a particular set of biochemists as representative of all biochemists, and these as representative of scientists generally.<sup>121</sup> Clearly one wants to avoid linking the use of particular discursive repertoires with a pre-defined collectivity, both because a neat overlap of this kind is empirically implausible and because for normative reasons one wants to avoid arriving at a determinist perspective which does not allow for the possibility that individuals may renounce some of the patterns with which they are confronted. To some extent one can circumvent the difficulty by careful phrasing of one’s research goals and conclusions. A good example is the work of Lamont and Thévenot, studying ‘schemas of evaluation

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<sup>117</sup> Potter and Wetherell, *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*, p.173, p.138, p.49 respectively.

<sup>118</sup> Davies and Harré, ‘Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves’, p.43.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* p.57.

<sup>120</sup> Chernilo, ‘Social Theory’s Methodological Nationalism’.

<sup>121</sup> See chapter 7. Note in particular how they vary their references between ‘biochemists’, ‘the scientists’ and ‘scientists’.

mobilised at the discursive or interactional level,' who state their concern as with 'documenting how these schemas are unevenly present across national cultural repertoires,' on the assumption that 'different national communities are not equally likely to draw on the same cultural tools to construct and assess the world that surrounds them.' Their leading argument is nicely worded to emphasise the territorial spread and 'availability' of such repertoires rather than their adhesion to particular social groups: 'we suggest that cultural repertoires prevailing in the United States make market references more readily available to Americans and enable them to resort to such references in a wide range of situations, whereas the French repertoires make principles of civic solidarity more salient and enable a larger number of French people to resort to them across situations ... However, this does not mean that market criteria of evaluation are absent from the French repertoires, but only that they are used in a small number of situations by a smaller number of people'.<sup>122</sup> Even this formulation, however, supposes that the most noteworthy variation is cross-national, rather than for instance cross-regional or cross-class (or cross-whatever), and so the difficulty is only partially resolved. It is likely that language itself is the culprit, since whatever noun one uses to describe the participants in an empirical study (other than 'the participants') will imply some act of inference to a larger population: 'taxi-drivers', 'British working men', 'Czechs', 'taxi-drivers in Lübeck' ... each category description presupposes a generalisation. A combination of cautiously phrased and consistently problematised generalisations, plus the avoidance of questions of statistical significance, probably represents the most sensible and the least dogmatic means by which to continue empirical research in the face of this challenge.<sup>123</sup>

A final problem which persists in these approaches relates to the question of agency – particularly important for those interested in tracing causal connections. One of Swidler's arguments for shifting to an understanding of culture as 'toolkit' was that this was a move away from the social determinism associated with seeing culture as determinative of values. Humans could now be understood as active 'problem-solvers' rather than as passive bearers of structure, but without sliding to the polar extreme of the radically autonomous individual since they work within the constraints of their inherited cultural resources. Similar

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<sup>122</sup> Michèle Lamont and Laurent Thévenot (eds.), *Rethinking Comparative Cultural Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp.6-9.

<sup>123</sup> In the analytical chapters that follow, we shall speak not of 'what British, German and Czech taxi-drivers say' (a formulation which suggests a strong overlap between discourse and pre-defined collectivities), but of the discursive patterns which recur in their discussion (a formulation which better permits of variation and individual deviation). While this is essentially a matter of phrasing, the distinction seems important so as to avoid a determinist perspective.

considerations are undoubtedly behind several of the approaches we have considered: those using frame analysis to study social movements have often emphasised – perhaps out of sympathy for their agenda – the freedom which such movements have to select the frames most likely to mobilise supporters.<sup>124</sup> Discourse analysts vary on this question, depending on whether they locate power in the discourse or in manipulators of the discourse, but Boltanski and Thévenot are explicitly sensitive to the *selection and deployment* of orders of worth by actors who are interested in justice, and Harré and Davies speak of ‘at least a possibility of notional choice ... [being] inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in.’<sup>125</sup> Arguably, however, none of these approaches is able to give a satisfactory account of how this process of strategic choice works. In particular, there is a danger that, in presenting actors as able to select different frames or discursive resources according to their particular goals, one reverts on the one hand to means-ends rationality and a disembedding of the actor, and on the other hand one resurrects the idea of a meta-language in which competing options are constituted, evaluated and selected. These difficulties can be avoided if one abandons the attempt at causal explanation, and it would seem that there are good reasons for doing so, but it is a move which many are naturally reluctant to make.

Having taken some time to explore the neighbouring terrain, we can now lay out some principles for the empirical study which follows. Discursive practices are the focus, here understood to consist in coordinated speech-acts. They are transpersonal phenomena which involve mutual adjustment amongst persons. Discursive practices are not ‘shared’ across individuals in the sense that they are the result of common knowledge or common norms, whether explicit or tacit: there is not, following the important critique made by Stephen Turner, a ‘tacit rulebook’ which all are assumed to have learnt. But nor can these practices simply be reduced to idiosyncratic habits of speaking which individual persons have picked up in one way or another over the course of their lives and which they then deploy as just the enactment of a disposition.<sup>126</sup> As Barnes correctly points out, there is an irreducibly social or coordinative dimension to practices, in that ‘habit is not enacted well or badly, but practice

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<sup>124</sup> Snow and Benford, 'Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization'; William Gamson, 'Political Discourse and Collective Action', in Bert Klandermans, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Sidney Tarrow (eds.), *International Social Movement Research*, 1 (London: JAI Press, 1988); Gamson, *Talking Politics*; Gamson, 'Constructing Social Protest', in Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (eds.), *Social Movements and Culture* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

<sup>125</sup> Davies and Harré, 'Positioning: The Discursive Production of Selves', p.45.

<sup>126</sup> Turner, *The Social Theory of Practices*.

is.<sup>127</sup> For our purposes, this means the object of study can be taken as the conversation in which participants successfully interact with one another without visible signs of bewilderment. It is their ability to 'get by' in discussion which is considered suggestive, and that which they share is that which they collectively create in discussion.

*Contra* mentalist approaches, and the quantitative methods with which they have been associated, beliefs are rejected as the appropriate unit of analysis. It is held that there is no definitive description to be given of the mental phenomena which give rise to the articulation of opinions, since these are underdetermined by the opinions themselves. Putting mental phenomena to one side, and abandoning thereby the attempt at causal explanation, one can nonetheless investigate phenomena which appear at the level of the text, namely the patterns of assumption which can be identified in discursive interaction. Assumptions in other words are understood not as psychological phenomena (on which this work will remain largely agnostic) but as transpersonal things manifest in what is said or pointedly not said in a given discursive situation, the things which are taken for granted in any given speech act. These are deep features of the text: even where there is disagreement in opinions, one may look for agreement in assumptions, since in order to carry on a discussion people must take a large amount for granted so as to restrict the sphere of agreement or disagreement to a manageable size. For the purposes of exploring a political bond, the assumptions that will be of interest are those to do with what kinds of political problem are important, how problems are linked to one another, how they can be explained, and the extent to which it is plausible to attempt to address them in some organised, collective fashion.

In studying assumptions as textual features, the research is addressed to observable kinds of behaviour rather than hypothesised mental states. Studying discursive practice is therefore methodologically attractive, and also allows one to sidestep complex questions to do with intentionality. Of course, this is not to make a positivist or behaviouralist claim in its favour. Identifying assumptions requires interpretation: they are never self-evident, and it is always possible to add more to those which one has identified. Analysis of this kind is therefore no more a 'neutral' exercise than any other form of empirical research – but it is better grounded than that which relies on hypothesising about invisible states of

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<sup>127</sup> Barnes, 'Practice as Collective Action', p.26.

consciousness.<sup>128</sup> To reiterate, the problem of agency, and the associated problems of explanation or the identification of causal mechanisms, will be considered mainly in passing.

Assumptions, it is suggested, are not made 'at random'. At any given discursive moment, some are appropriate and some are inappropriate; more generally some tend to go together and others not, and some tend to appear accompanied by certain concepts and ideas in clusters. Certain assumptions – e.g. that all heads of state will die tomorrow – are likely to provoke surprise and censure in the text, if they are made at all. It is possible therefore to speak of at least a basic level of order, and thus the necessity that participants to the discursive practice exercise some competence in the way they speak. It is the existence of order and the necessity of competence which allows the researcher the possibility of drawing generalisable conclusions, since these features point to the existence of patterns which extend beyond the collection of individuals who happen to be present. It is also this which allows the researcher to simplify what would otherwise be unmanageably complex.

Aside from on the making of assumptions, the focus will also be on discursive practices of positioning, something of crucial relevance to the political bond as we have described it. Rather than speaking of 'identity', individual or collective, as something which is brought to bear on a discussion by its participants, we look at how the text exhibits subject positions within a discourse which are taken up, ascribed or resisted by the speakers. Chapter 4 will look closely at the subject positions which recur in the text, how 'we's' and 'they's' are constructed and what kind of relationship is posited between the two – something which serves to illuminate the question of 'shared predicament'. We shall be looking at who is implied by the 'we' who share in certain problems, and how those 'others' who oppose them are positioned; also at how certain subject positions carry implications of agency and others of passivity. Just as certain assumptions tend to go together, so too do certain subject positions. Thus it becomes possible to pick up the idea of 'domains' of patterned discourse, and to attempt to 'make sense' or 'find order' in what appear to be contradictions. Here one can refer to Mouffe's idea of the individual: 'It is necessary to theorise the individual, not as a monad, an 'unencumbered' self that exists prior to and independently of society, but rather as a site constituted by an ensemble of "subject positions", inscribed in a multiplicity of social relations, the member of many communities and participant in a plurality of collective

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<sup>128</sup> For remarks in a similar vein, see *ibid.* and Ann Swidler, 'What Anchors Cultural Practices', in Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny (eds.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (London: Routledge, 2001a).

forms of identification.’<sup>129</sup> Individuals are ‘always multiple and contradictory subjects ... constructed by a variety of discourses, and precariously and temporarily sutured at the intersection of those subject positions.’<sup>130</sup>

In setting out these premises, to be clarified and developed in subsequent chapters, we borrow liberally from the textualist and practice-oriented approaches outlined above. The focus on routinised discursive behaviour (in the form of assumptions and positioning), and the concern with know-how and competence, are both clearly in tune with some of the key concerns of practice-oriented approaches. Departing from a purely textualist understanding, a collective bond is conceived not simply as a ‘discourse of the common’ or a ‘story of peoplehood’<sup>131</sup>: this would be to put too much emphasis on conscious and full articulation, coherence and narrativisation, and would prompt questions as to where the authoritative versions of such stories are to be found. Rather, a bond is explored in routinised discursive practices in which competence can be judged, the taken-for-granted aspects of knowledge which precede conscious deliberation and reflection. Conversely, unlike practice-oriented approaches, for the purposes of this project there is little need to emphasise the ‘embodied’ character of such routines: they are embodied in so far as they involve patterned usage of the tongue, but this is not their most interesting feature. In this sense the approach is more textualist, and the adoption of terminology from Harré and Mouffe (whose work also invokes ‘subject positions’ as a concept) is an expression of this. Occasionally there will be reason to adopt the vocabulary of ‘practice’, ‘discourse’, ‘repertoire’, ‘resource’ and ‘common sense’, notwithstanding the degree of ambiguity that each of these suggestive terms contains. The notion that they can be usefully defined in the abstract as a precursor to the analytical process is rejected: their meaning should be sought in their usage.

Ultimately the assembly of terms and premises is pragmatic, and it is in the spirit of the approaches described above that one designs one’s research not according to abstract principles of good method but according to the specificities of the research problem at hand.<sup>132</sup> As Reckwitz highlights, practice theory is not ‘true’ in the sense of being the only perspective which corresponds to the ‘facts’, nor should it necessarily be seen as a ‘theory’ in the sense of a unitary body of principles which must be adopted or rejected wholesale. Rather it is a ‘vocabulary’, a ‘heuristic device, a sensitising “framework” for empirical

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<sup>129</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, p.97.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p.20.

<sup>131</sup> Using the latter term, see Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood*.

<sup>132</sup> In the terms of Michael Billig, scholarship must take precedence over methodology: cf. Billig, ‘Methodology and Scholarship in Understanding Ideological Explanation’, in Charles Antaki (ed.), *Analysing Everyday Explanation: A Casebook of Methods* (London: Sage, 1988).

research [..., one which] opens up a certain way of seeing and analysing social phenomena.<sup>133</sup> Consequently, one should not approach empirical study styling oneself as a ‘frame analyst’ as opposed to a ‘discourse analyst’, a ‘cultural sociologist’ or a ‘political sociologist’, as though these terms each implied a clear and distinct kind of activity. Instead one should treat these fields as providing useful indications of how relevant research might be undertaken. In the words of Alexander Pope, ‘fools admire, but men of sense approve.’<sup>134</sup>

### Outline of an Empirical Study

The research with which we shall explore the notion of a ‘political bond’ involves assembling groups of lay people – i.e. those with no professional interest in politics – and getting them talking about problems in public life. Our focus is on everyday talk, unlike the close attention to media discourse which one tends to find in the public-sphere debate, or the articulations of well-organised social movements that one finds in the literature on contentious politics. While the media undoubtedly have a key role in supplying the repertoires with which everyday talk unfolds, media messages are very often supplemented by other resources drawn from daily life, with outcomes which are unpredictable. Moreover, that which is given prominence in the media is by no means automatically given prominence in everyday talk: reading, listening and watching is selective, and topics and messages can be ignored as well as borrowed. There is a disjuncture between what journalists choose to write about and what lay people are able to talk about.<sup>135</sup> Similarly, scholars who focus on claims-making by organised societal actors are at risk of overlooking the broader and less conspicuous social configuration from which these emerge. A political bond needs to be sought in the wider citizenry and not just in its most structured and most vocal elements.<sup>136</sup>

The extent to which ordinary people ‘talk politics’ in their everyday lives is of course a matter of some debate, even taking a quite broad understanding of what constitutes political talk. Some studies based on participant observation, mainly in the US, have emphasised the tendency of non-elites actively to avoid such discussion, considering taboo the expression of strong and opposing views, and unwilling, as individuals, to put themselves in a position

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<sup>133</sup> Reckwitz, 'Towards a Theory of Social Practices', p.257.

<sup>134</sup> Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (London: Collins, 1973), Part II, l.190.

<sup>135</sup> For some thoughts on the relation between media and everyday discourse, see Gamson, *Talking Politics*.

<sup>136</sup> This point is well made in Fossum and Trenz, 'The EU's Fledgling Society', in their discussion of works such as Doug Imig and Sidney Tarrow, 'Political Contention in a Europeanising Polity', *West European Politics*, 23 (4) (2000).

where they might have to justify opinions.<sup>137</sup> Other studies, by contrast, have suggested that it is by no means uncommon, at least amongst those of fairly close acquaintance.<sup>138</sup> Context is no doubt important: familiar surroundings and familiar faces are likely to be conducive to such talk.<sup>139</sup> As will become clear, the discussions which form the basis of this study were not isolated events: they contained a number of cross-references to conversations which had taken place naturally between some of the participants on prior occasions, and were thus enmeshed in a broader history of discussion. Our focus is principally qualitative, however, on the *kinds* of discursive practice which can be observed rather than on the frequency with which they arise in different contexts. Participant observation would not have been suitable to the goal of exploring common patterns of discursive practice in multiple locations and a number of linguistic environments.<sup>140</sup> We look at how a certain set of people talk when given the opportunity to do so, and treat the provision of opportunities as a separate – though important – issue.<sup>141</sup>

The discussions that were conducted were loosely structured: while certain topics were placed on the agenda by the researcher using thematic index-cards, participants were generally given freedom to choose what to talk about and when. (For full details on methods, see the following chapter and the Methodological Appendix). The goal was to minimise the significance of the researcher's *a priori* assumptions about what was 'relevant' and 'important' to the discussion whilst at the same time maintaining a minimum level of comparability between the interviews. Too many studies of lay perspectives on European politics start with the assumption that the EU is inherently important to people and go on to

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<sup>137</sup> See in particular Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics*.

<sup>138</sup> Katherine Cramer Walsh reports that explicitly political conversations took place on more than half of the 100-plus mornings that she observed the discussion of a group of pension-age male friends hanging out in their local coffee-shop. Cramer Walsh, *Talking About Politics*.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Pamela Conover, Donald D. Searing, and Ivor Crewe, 'The Deliberative Potential of Discussion'.

<sup>140</sup> One rationale for participant observation is that it provides access to naturally-arising situations rather than those arranged by the researcher. The dichotomy of natural and artificial is, however, a problematic one, as others have noted (Gamson, *Talking Politics*, pp.18-9), and relies on a model of the scientific method which is not shared here. A strong rationale for participant observation, on the other hand, is that it allows one to chart variation in behaviour across different contexts. Comparison, rather than some notion of the 'natural', is then the guiding principle, and many interesting findings may be gathered. However, if one wishes to draw data from a considerable number of settings, participant observation is generally unviable because of the level of familiarity which one needs to cultivate with those one is studying. This process is likely to be all the longer if one is (e.g. for language reasons) identifiably a 'foreigner' in at least some of those settings.

<sup>141</sup> Much the same approach, though it is rarely acknowledged, tends to be taken by those who put cultural symbols (flags etc.) at the forefront of their exploration of the common. There seems little reason to assume that these have a more prominent place in daily life than the substantive problématiques which will be explored here, and for this reason no special justification for studying the latter seems to be required.

ask interviewees what they think about it.<sup>142</sup> By contrast, the attempt here was to see what reference-points were invoked spontaneously in discussion.<sup>143</sup> This meant allowing participants considerable freedom to set the discussion agenda, and probing directly on matters related to the EU only towards the end of the discussions.<sup>144</sup> The use of *group* discussions rather than one-to-one interviews has a number of advantages: the power-advantage of the interviewer over the interviewee is somewhat reduced, and the interviewer is in less of a position to dominate the discussion either by direct intervention or silent authority. Indeed, after the first twenty minutes or so, the researcher can adopt a fairly low profile (though of course, his presence is surely always felt, as perhaps is the presence-to-come of an academic audience). Furthermore, group discussions allow one to look at such interactional features as responses, reactions, consensus and jokes, and to get a better feel for the ‘common sense’. The role of the individual’s whimsy in setting the course of discussion is also reduced in the group environment, since interviewees are accountable to each other for what they choose to talk about; that which is collectively deemed inconsequential is likely to be drowned out in discussion.<sup>145</sup>

Taxi-drivers were chosen as the interview subjects. Groups of four of them, sometimes three, were enlisted at taxi-ranks using a financial incentive, and accompanied to pubs or cafés for approximately two hours of discussion. Participants were usually familiar with one another – in many cases, already talking to each other when approached – and were familiar with the surroundings in which they were interviewed. As subjects for empirical research, taxi-drivers have been used before. Diego Gambetta and Heather Hamill

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<sup>142</sup> See e.g. OPTEM, 'The European Citizens and the Future of Europe: A Qualitative Study in the 25 Member States', (Eurobarometer, 2006). While this large-scale qualitative study contains some interesting findings, it seems likely to have overstated the extent to which citizens look to the EU as a response to their concerns (pp.8-9) simply by virtue of the structure of its Discussion Guide (Appendix III). Already from the second question (p.73), respondents are invited to focus their attentions on the EU by being told that ‘one of the factors likely to play a role in the future is the European Union and how it will develop.’ Thus the everyday concerns which they articulate in response to the first question are automatically given a connection to matters European, and this can hardly but encourage the ‘europeanisation’ of subsequent responses.

<sup>143</sup> A valuable study in this regard is Ulrike Hanna Meinhof, 'Europe Viewed from Below: Agents, Victims, and the Threat of the Other', in Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse, and Marilynn B. Brewer (eds.), *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004). Meinhof uses interviews involving visual prompts to investigate the reference points which inhabitants of border towns in East/West Germany and Germany/Poland invoke in their everyday-life narratives. This is a well-structured study, and her finding – that European reference points are invoked rarely – confirms the soundness of this approach.

<sup>144</sup> This technique of delaying direct probes on the topic of research interest until the end of the interview, so as to explore the extent to which it is invoked naturally, is sometimes referred to as ‘funneling’: cf. David L. Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* (Qualitative Research Methods Series 16; London: Sage, 1997), p.41.

<sup>145</sup> On the group-interview method, see *ibid.*, Michael Bloor et al., *Focus Groups in Social Research* (London: Sage, 2001), and Jenny Kitzinger and Rosaline S. Barbour, 'The Challenge and Promise of Focus Groups', in Jenny Kitzinger and Rosaline S. Barbour (eds.), *Developing Focus Group Research: Politics, Theory and Practice* (London: Sage, 1999).

interviewed taxi-drivers in Belfast and New York to explore the cues that are used to make quick decisions about which strangers are likely to be trustworthy.<sup>146</sup> In their sociological study, taxi-drivers were interesting because their daily vulnerability to being cheated, intimidated or attacked meant that they were likely to be particularly skilled players of the 'trust game'; they were interesting, in other words, because they were in a position of heightened sensitivity to rather ordinary problems. Likewise, in this study of lay politics, taxi-drivers were chosen on the supposition that their conversation may exhibit in concentrated form the kinds of assumption which are frequently made by lay people. On the one hand their profession puts them in a position of heightened sensitivity to a wide range of political developments. They are amongst the first to be affected by changes in prices or spending behaviour, by the arrival of immigrant labour, by increases in criminal behaviour or by new policing tactics. On the other hand they are also exposed to a wide range of opinion stimuli (in particular newspapers and the radio, and the experiences of others as narrated to them on the job), militating against the possibility that theirs is a speech community isolated from the rest of society. Also, the *self-understanding*<sup>147</sup> of many taxi-drivers is arguably as people of common sense and practical wisdom. Unlike, for example, students, academics or perhaps artists, they show little tendency to emphasise their personal originality by formulating opinions which consciously diverge from those they hear around them; rather, it seems, they take some pride in saying pretty much what 'everyone' is saying. Of course, one should be wary about whether they do this accurately, whether they in any sense represent the 'voice of the people' as some of them claim to, and there is no doubt that some of the concerns they voice are idiosyncratic, such as annoyance at the parking violations of civilian drivers who park on their ranks. But it is generally their stated intention to speak as other people speak, and so their talk makes an interesting site for the analysis of discursive resources which are available more widely. Furthermore, they have no reason to be unusually favourable or hostile to the EU, something which might have had a bearing on the kind of issues which are to be explored.

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<sup>146</sup> Diego Gambetta, *Streetwise: How Taxi Drivers Establish Their Customers' Trustworthiness* (New York: Russell Sage, 2005). Studying the experiences of South Asians in the North of England, see Virinder S. Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks: Experiences of Migration, Labour and Social Change* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000). A useful overview of the taxi-driving industry is contained in Chapter 9. Taxi-drivers have also been used in the field of neurology to study brain activity during the process of memory recall: their significance here lies in their need to activate large amounts of stored memory to navigate their way around the city. See Eleanor A. Maguire, Katherine Woollett, and Hugo J. Spiers, 'London Taxi Drivers and Bus Drivers: A Structural MRI and Neuropsychological Analysis', *Hippocampus* 16/12 (2006).

<sup>147</sup> For thoughts on the use of this term, see Brubaker and Cooper, 'Beyond 'Identity''.

While we are interested in them mainly for the patterns to be found in their conversation, taxi-drivers also may have some significance as actors in themselves. They can be treated as belonging, across the countries and cities studied, to a class position which, from most ideological perspectives, is politically important. The large majority of taxi-drivers are without higher education (a few individuals in our sample had attended university for a couple of semesters, but left before completion).<sup>148</sup> While average earnings are inherently difficult to calculate for taxi-drivers, anecdotal evidence suggests that for each of the countries studied, the majority of taxi-drivers may be considered to earn below the average income and to occupy that socio-economic space which extends, on a conventional stratification scale, from the working class to the lower-middle class or petit bourgeoisie.<sup>149</sup> There are of course many theories of class and political mobilisation,<sup>150</sup> and given that this study does not treat the ideational as socio-economically determined, these questions are not explored here in detail;<sup>151</sup> nonetheless, it can perhaps plausibly be said that it is such people whom political movements have to mobilise so as to be politically meaningful, and that by studying the discursive practices of such people one can study the resources which are there to be mobilised and the common-sense assumptions which may inhibit their mobilisation. It

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<sup>148</sup> An interesting study in itself would be the stereotypes to be found in different countries concerning who it is one is likely to find behind the wheel of a taxi. A considerable number of German social scientists gave warnings before this research was begun that the researcher was likely to encounter taxi-driving social-science students, anxiously trying to study him as he studied them! Sadly, it seems there were none (though maybe future scholarship will prove otherwise).

<sup>149</sup> Calculation of average earnings is problematic for two reasons: firstly, much depends on the number of hours the individual chooses to work, and whether those hours are in the daytime or nighttime, and during the working week or at the weekends. Drivers who work weekend nights may earn considerably more than those doing a weekday day-shift. Secondly, many drivers are very wary of anyone who might turn out to be a tax-inspector, and therefore tend to be reluctant to declare truthfully their earnings. Data on average earnings, as for instance compiled by the British Office for National Statistics (see 2006 report), should therefore be treated with considerable scepticism. A better approximation can be had by browsing the internet chatrooms which taxi-drivers themselves use to compare earnings with one another – see e.g. [www.taxi-driver.co.uk](http://www.taxi-driver.co.uk) or [www.taxiforen.de/forum](http://www.taxiforen.de/forum). These indicate earnings after running costs (fuel, licensing, maintenance, possible car rental etc.), and before tax, of around €25,000 in Britain, €20,000 in Germany (though lower in the east), and €6000 in the Czech Republic, each of which falls short of Gross National Income per capita as cited in the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WDI) database 2006. Drivers working night hours in capital cities (who do not feature in this study) may nonetheless earn considerably higher figures. Perhaps less important (in terms purely of earnings) is the distinction between drivers who are self-employed (and own their taxi) and those who are employed by a firm, of which there was a mixture in each of the cities interviewed in (though in Britain there was a larger proportion of self-employed drivers than in Germany and the Czech Republic, and some variation between cities). There is no clear economic hierarchy between the two, since while those who are self-employed keep a larger share of their profits and may work for longer hours, those who work for a firm tend to have a more reliable turnover of jobs and may not have to purchase their taxi.

<sup>150</sup> Klaus Eder, 'Does Social Class Matter in the Study of Social Movements? A Theory of Middle Class Radicalism', in Louis Maheu (ed.), *Social Movements and Social Classes* (London: Sage, 1995).

<sup>151</sup> For a similar thought on the (non)-importance of 'exogenous identities', see Ruth Wodak, 'National and Transnational Identities: European and Other Identities Constructed in Interviews with EU Officials', in Richard K. Herrmann, Thomas Risse, and Marilyn B. Brewer (eds.), *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp.99-100.

is sometimes suggested, both in the EU context and in democracies more generally, that those in the upper-middle and upper classes of society tend to be more supportive of the polity and the institutions under which they live than those lower down the socio-economic scale.<sup>152</sup> To the extent that this is so, it is the working classes and the lower-middle classes that one needs to study if one is to assess the viability of the polity. Finally, there are some practical reasons for choosing taxi-drivers. They are accessible, since with the right incentive their time can be secured, and since they can generally be found clustered in one or two places. They generally display camaraderie with each other and are rarely intimidated into silence. They are also people who are used to selling their time, suggesting a two-hour interview does not represent a major interruption or distortion of their schedule. One can speculate that in this sense the interview is not *as* unnatural a phenomenon as it might be for certain other social groups operating to different daily routines.

A total of ten interviews were conducted: three in Britain (Reading, Swansea and Norwich), four in Germany (Lübeck, Kassel, Erfurt and Würzburg) and three in the Czech Republic (Liberec, Plzeň and Ostrava). Looking at cities in more than one country alerts one to features of the discourse which might be invisible if one looked at just a single country and language, and allows one to look for common patterns. While the total number of interviewees is small in statistical terms (thirty-seven, all of them male) it is well suited to the close textual reading necessary for this kind of project. The countries were selected with (presumed) diversity in mind: Germany being a large, established member state of the EU, having land borders with several other countries; Britain being another large state but with a shorter and more troubled membership of the EU behind it, and an island status; the Czech Republic being a much smaller country, one which has recently undergone significant political change since the fall of communism and which at the time of interview had just recently acceded to the EU. The cities (approximately 100,000 to 300,000 inhabitants in size<sup>153</sup>) were generally chosen with geographical spread in mind, although Erfurt was selected more specifically so as to include a former East German city: this meant having, as well as variation by country, something of an east-west axis, intended to act as a brake on thinking instinctively in national terms. Capital and second cities were avoided on the assumption that taxi-drivers there were more likely to be recent arrivals from outside the

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<sup>152</sup> See e.g. Rosemary Crompton, *Class and Stratification: An Introduction to Current Debates* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998).

<sup>153</sup> Ostrava, at around 300,000 inhabitants, was the largest. Reading, Lübeck and Erfurt have populations in the range 200-250,000; Swansea, Norwich, Kassel and Plzeň have c. 150-200,000 inhabitants; Würzburg and Liberec, depending how one measures them, are sized 100,000 to 150,000.

country or to be part-time workers (e.g. students). One does not really know of course how much and what kind of impact such factors might have had, but they were generally felt to be more of a bad than a good thing. Whilst a small handful of participants in the study were internal migrants or first-generation immigrants, all had been living in the city of interview for at least a decade.

Full details of the recruitment process and the factors which may have affected it can be found in the Appendix, but a brief introduction of the participants and the cities of interview can be made here.<sup>154</sup> The first interview was carried out in October 2004 in Reading, a city approximately forty miles west of London and a commercial centre for the Thames Valley region. Over its history it has had strong industries in the production of cloth, beer and biscuits, and has benefited from its location on the main route from London westwards towards Oxford, Bristol and Wales. The four participants were drawn from the taxi-rank at the main train station, soon after lunch, and taken to a pub across the road. They were: Murda, second-generation Pakistani background, early thirties; David, white, mid-fifties; Shafeek, first-generation Pakistani background, mid-fifties, resident in Britain since the 1960s; and Habstunder, second-generation Pakistani background, early thirties. The second interview was conducted a month and a half later in Swansea, a coastal city approximately forty miles west of Cardiff, near the old mining and copper industries of south Wales and once a maritime port of some significance. Unlike further north in Wales, English is generally the first language of its inhabitants. The participants were recruited – with some difficulty – at the taxi-rank next to the Quadrant shopping centre and taken to a nearby pub just as it was opening at 11am. They were: Lee (white, early thirties); David (white, early thirties); Andy (white, early forties); and Martin (white, late forties). The third interview was conducted a few days later in Norwich, an old Anglo-Saxon town in East Anglia with historical connections to continental Europe based on trade (mainly wool) and migration (including the arrival of large numbers of Walloons and Huguenots in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries), and a history until recently of producing clothes, shoes and chocolates. The participants were Mickey (white, mid-forties), Barry (white, early fifties), Leyton (white, mid-fifties) and Gavin (white, mid-forties), all of whom took little convincing to take part.

The German interviews took place in March and April 2005. The first was in Lübeck, one of the old Hanseatic towns near the northern Baltic coast, famous for marzipan and Thomas Mann. Recruitment began early in the morning at the main train station and was

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<sup>154</sup> Some of the names have been changed.

met with considerable enthusiasm, some drivers expressing great regret that they were unavailable. Those who participated were: Jürgen (white, mid-fifties); Wolfgang (white, mid-fifties); Ali (first-generation Iranian, early forties); and Nicholas (white, mid-thirties). The second interview was held a few days later in Kassel in central Germany – a city bombed heavily in World War 2, today known mainly for hosting every five years the Documenta exhibition of modern and contemporary art. The participants were drawn, easily, first thing in the morning from the large taxi-rank at the city’s modern out-of-town station, Kassel Wilhelmshöhe, and interviewed in an upstairs café overlooking the station. Included in the discussion were: Dieter (white, mid-fifties); Sebastian (white, mid-thirties); Peter (white, mid-fifties); and Hans (white, mid-forties). The third German interview, in early April 2005, took place in Erfurt, an old, well-preserved city in the former East, long famous for its connections to Martin Luther, who attended university there and lived on for several years as a monk. Taxis were rarer here, despite the rain, but after an hour of searching three willing volunteers were found and taken to a café opposite the station. They were: Hans-Jürgen (white, mid-fifties); Uwe (white, mid-forties); and Mike (white, late-thirties). Ten minutes into the discussion a fourth participant was added: Andreas (white, mid-thirties).<sup>155</sup> Recruitment for the last of the four German interviews – in Würzburg, a wine-producing city in northern Bavaria, heavily bombed in the Second World War – was very difficult. Possible reasons for this are discussed in the Methodological Appendix. The taxi-rank at the main station, a large one with a swift turnover rate, looked promising. For several hours though only the enthusiastic endorsement of one driver had been secured – Rainer (white, early fifties). He left occasionally to take jobs, returning each time to see how things were progressing, to restate his interest and to try and cajole some colleagues. Long after the researcher’s lack of success had become a joke, a running joke, and beyond a joke, Rainer was able to win the participation of Oliver (white, mid-thirties). Oliver subsequently enlisted by mobile phone a third driver, Uwe (white, mid-thirties).

The Czech interviews were conducted in August 2005. The first took place in Liberec, a city in northern Bohemia which enjoyed wealth in the nineteenth century on the back of its textile industry. It was at the centre of the Sudetenland dispute in the 1930s (when its population was mainly ethnic-German), and large numbers of ethnic-Germans were expelled at the end of World War 2 in accordance with the Beneš decrees. The participants were gathered easily at the main rank in the town centre and taken to a large, upstairs

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<sup>155</sup> For details on Andreas’ late arrival, see the Methodological Appendix.

restaurant just as it was quietening down after the lunch-hour. The participants were: Václav, (white, early-forties), Zdeněk (white, early-fifties), Radek (white, mid-thirties) and Onřej (white, late-twenties). The second Czech interview was in Plzeň, a relatively prosperous business and industrial centre about half-way between Prague and the German border, famous for its *Pilsner Urquell* beer. Experiencing considerable difficulty in recruiting, the researcher alternated between the two main ranks in the city, one on the main square and one at the bus-station. Neither had much of a turnover. Eventually one keen driver appeared, Petr (white, early-thirties). He came and went for a while until the participation of Míra was secured (white, late-twenties). Míra rang up a driver who was off-duty at the time, Román: (white, mid-twenties). By that time it was early evening; the discussion was had in the only place quiet enough to make a recording, a rather grand, Habsburg-style café in the centre of town, in which the drivers and the researcher were the only customers. The third and final interview was conducted in Ostrava, a former mining and steel-making city in the east of the country, close to Poland and Slovakia, which has recently seen most of its industry closed down. It was probably the poorest of the cities interviewed in, and – despite also being the largest – it had barely a taxi-rank anywhere. In the city centre, the square where a few taxis would normally park was being dug up, so they were displaced. Fortunately there was still a taxi hut there, and inside were three very willing drivers: Marek (white, mid-thirties), Zdeněk (white, mid-forties) and Josef (white, late-fifties). There was no fourth driver easily available. It was mid-morning; their local pub (*pivnice*) turned out to be closed, so a decision was made for the hotel brasserie across the road.



# Chapter 3

## The Political Common

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Chapter 1 gave a brief outline of the idea of a political bond. In such a perspective it is substantive political problems which are made the focal point for the collective bond, in substitution for alternatives such as interests, cultural markers, values or principles. It would, in this perspective, be the sense of shared predicament that arises from facing problems in common with others that would act as the basis for collective ties. One of the first questions this raises, and one with some significance for contemporary democracy more generally, is whether the capacity and inclination to articulate matters of common concern can be found in contemporary populations. Is there the willingness to voice problems that relate to ‘us’ rather than just ‘me’, a sufficient level of engagement in affairs that extend outside the private realm, or are ordinary citizens too incompetent or too ‘depoliticised’ for this to be taken seriously as a starting-point? Can one, to resume the vocabulary introduced in Chapter 1, speak of there being a ‘political common’ – that is, the assumed existence by members of the collective of important common problems in need of address? And if so, how best does one characterise its composition?

It is this first element of a political bond which is explored and developed in this chapter. A theoretical perspective from which to understand the commonality of problems is elaborated, based on some of the ideas of the preceding chapter, and the empirical material is studied to examine how far common problems are constructed in discussion. The chapter identifies a series of problems which were articulated and developed in each of the country-groups – Britain, Germany and the Czech Republic – and, to put this in context, notes also a number of problems were articulated rarely or not at all. Then, picking up the idea of ‘problem domains’, we look at how certain problems were assumed to ‘go together’ and tended to be clustered together in discussion. The analysis suggests three domains of particular importance – *Economics, Society and the Law*, and *Relations between Peoples* – and points to a fourth set of problems, to do with *Quality of Life*, which, though they were articulated with a degree of frequency, tended to be marginalised in these discussions. With

these observations one has the contours of a political common, both as a theoretical concept and as an interpretation of one body of discursive practice. This forms the basis for an exploration in subsequent chapters of the kinds of group positioning one finds with regard to these problems, the extent to which these problems are assumed amenable to organised address, and more generally the possibility of a political bond supportive of a European polity.

### Problématiques, Problematisations and Common Problems

Let us begin with the format of the interviews. Once each group of taxi-drivers had taken seats around a table, introduced themselves and ordered their drinks, the discussion was opened by directing attention to a series of topic cards which had been spread out on the table. There were seventeen of these, each consisting of two images and a verbal caption, and each designed to refer to a topic with some connection to public life.<sup>1</sup> The English-language captions were as follows: Peace & War, Treatment of Outsiders, Overseas Aid, Medical Care, Education & Training, The Legal System, Policing, Health & Safety Standards, The Environment, Science & Research, Transport, Money & Prices, Purchase of Property, Markets & Production, Taxation, Corruption, and Work. These were the researcher's own creations, intended to combine breadth of coverage with openness to interpretation. The list covered the major topics which it was felt participants might be inclined to develop, and excluded a number which in other spatio-temporal contexts one might wish to include (abortion in the US, for instance). No such list can be comprehensive of the full range of conceivable substantive fields of politics, and it was fully expected that the cards might be of unequal interest to the participants; the intention was to provide a starting-point from which discussion could begin. Some further blank cards were provided so that participants could add to the seventeen cards any extra ones which they felt were missing, but this generally proved unnecessary.

The participants were invited to look at the cards for a few minutes, and then as a group to arrange them in piles according to 'what goes naturally with what', justifying their choices as they did so. This tended to result in ten minutes or so of discussion. As a second step, the participants were asked, for each of the piles of cards which they had created, to

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<sup>1</sup> See the Appendix for reproductions of the cards. The card exercise is inspired by Anthony Coxon, *Sorting Data: Collection and Analysis* (London: Sage, 1999).

provide a title which summed up why those cards belonged together. Again, roughly ten minutes of debate followed. The third step, which then constituted the bulk of the discussion, consisted in participants selecting certain problem-areas to talk about in more detail. They were encouraged to focus on the problems and issue-areas which they considered to be most urgent, although each topic was touched on at least briefly, in some cases at the very end of the discussion at the prompt of the researcher.<sup>2</sup>

In the Wittgensteinian tradition, rule-based behaviour is understood not in terms of the application of theoretical rules to given situations but rather as competence in practice, the capacity of ‘knowing how to carry on’.<sup>3</sup> This competence is understood as a social phenomenon, as a basic convergence in practices and the capacity for successful coordination and adjustment among peers, rather than individual distinction on an absolute scale.<sup>4</sup> Competence in conversation, by extension, can be seen as the ability of individuals mutually to coordinate their talk based on a certain convergence in discursive practices: to make interventions which others can respond to, and to carry on from what others say, so as to achieve some level of ordered and sustained interaction. This is an important idea for the purposes of this chapter. By convening participants in an interview environment, supplying them with prompt cards, and asking them to justify the choices they make with these cards, one is creating a situation in which participants must ‘carry on’. The cards themselves could by no means determine the discussion, any more than a collection of cards referring to equine diseases could structure the discussion of an unremarkable group of political theorists. Some of the political topics on the cards would most likely ‘mean nothing’ to participants and would be neglected, whereas others might be the starting-point for a detailed and enthusiastic conversation. Only if the participants were sufficiently competent to handle at least some such resources, and to ‘carry on’ by reaching beyond the situation to knowledge which they already had, could an ordered discussion emerge. Tacit knowledge of this kind is crucial.

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<sup>2</sup> Opinion surveys often ask respondents what they consider to be the ‘most important problem facing the nation’. There is a danger that this approach overlooks those aspects of life which respondents consider important, but not problematic. (Cf. Christopher Wlezien, ‘On the Saliency of Political Issues: The Problem with ‘Most Important Problem’’, *Electoral Studies*, 24 (2005).) In introducing these interviews a combination of wide formulations was sought such as ‘problems in public life’, ‘important issues’ and ‘things that need addressing’, so as to avoid narrowing the range of the discussions from the outset. However, as will be made clear below, the focus in the analysis is on those things described not just as important but as a source of concern, since these are what tended to be articulated in discussion.

<sup>3</sup> Amongst the interpreters of Wittgenstein what follows draws in particular on Barnes, ‘Practice as Collective Action’; and Schatzki, *Social Practices* (Chapter 2, in particular pp.49ff.).

<sup>4</sup> N.B. The word ‘competence’ may be prone to misinterpretation: it should be understood to refer not simply to an elitist judgement by the researcher (‘have the participants got their facts right?’) but as the capacity of participants to coordinate successfully with one another, using the cards where necessary as tools. This point is picked up at the end of the chapter.

Likewise, in open discussion, participants would require a certain amount of know-that and know-how in order to respond to each other's points and to develop them. Without this competence, one would probably reach silence, or a fundamental shift in topic. It is one of the considerable advantages of conducting *group* interviews that one is able to study the ability of individuals to mutually coordinate their talk in this way.

Before looking in more depth at some substantive findings, it is worth clarifying some of our terminology. The words and images on the cards can be understood as *symbols* which may or may not be received meaningfully by an observer. To competent observers, who know how to read them, they refer – by convention – to a series of practices, material objects or situations which henceforth may be called *problématiques*.<sup>5</sup> For example, 'Taxation' refers to a set of practices which involve, roughly speaking, the State extracting a certain amount of money from its citizens. When a *problématique* is talked about, and is talked about in negative terms (e.g. 'How dare the State take that hard-earned money!', or 'Why don't those people pay higher taxes?'), one can say that it is being *problematised*.<sup>6</sup> Of course, not all *problématiques* will tend to be problematised. But those which are one can then refer to, in the everyday language sense, simply as *problems*. Whereas 'problématiques' are abstract and undisclosed, 'problems' are formulations of a more specific sort; they come with a certain spin. Nonetheless, they can be more specific or less specific: both 'war' in general or the 'war in Iraq' might be treated as problems, and it would be a question of judgement whether one sees them in the relation of category to item. Problems, one may say, can be articulated in a plural but not unlimited number of ways. To suggest there is just one way would be to revert to an ideal-language perspective, whereby the stuff of *problématiques* (practices, material objects and situations) can be problematised either correctly or incorrectly. On the other hand, to say that there is an *unlimited* number of ways in which problems can be articulated would be to disregard the conventions of language usage and the historicity of discursive repertoires.

Our terminology, though slightly 'p-heavy', serves to remind of the relational and constructed character of problems: the 'real world' does not consist of a collection of pre-existing problems which individuals subsequently discover and ponder, but rather it consists in raw, ambiguous things which can be read in different ways and for the interpretation of

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<sup>5</sup> This term is preferred to the everyday word 'topic' used above, since 'topic' is strongly discourse-centred, whereas *problématique* may be taken to imply an experiential and situational basis as well.

<sup>6</sup> Of some relevance here, there is a small literature in social and political science on 'problem definition' – see e.g. Roger W. Cobb and David A. Rochefort (eds.), *The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

which individuals rely on transpersonal resources. Problems are the things which emerge from an act of engagement with the world. When, in the analysis that follows, something is referred to as a ‘problem’ (e.g. the ‘problem of immigration’), the implication is that it is *treated* as a problem, not that we – as the authorial voice – consider it necessarily to be a problem. One is not obliged – at least when engaged principally in analysis – to reach a position oneself on how accurate or appropriate each act of problematisation is.

Fortunately, these intricate distinctions do not need to be continually invoked in the course of the analysis. What one encounters when studying discourse is not *problématiques* but problems (understood as problematisations). Once individuals grasp at a *problématique*, sensing there is something important there, and once they put it in words and treat it as something problematic, already one may say that they are talking about a problem. Therefore for much of the empirical analysis in this and the following chapters, it will be possible to speak simply of ‘problems’: participants were invited to talk about ‘problems’ and their articulations can be referred to as problems. But even if one does not have to invoke it frequently, it seems that one could not do without the concept of *problématique*, since the project involves the act of drawing comparisons between different discussions, and different sections of a single discussion, something which requires that the analyst be able to say, at least occasionally, ‘they’re talking about the same thing.’ When two groups complain about ‘asylum-seekers’, for example, both are problematising the *problématique* one might call ‘immigration’. That they are both doing this is, of course, an act of interpretation rather than objective observation, and depends on the researcher himself being a competent participant in the same language-games as those used by his interviewees. The necessary familiarity has, one hopes, been built up over the course of the interviews, multiple readings of the transcripts, and life more generally.<sup>7</sup>

A political common would have to be formed of ‘common problems’. Here it can be made clearer what is meant by ‘common’. Again, the choice of *group* discussions is crucial. The essence of conversation, one can argue, is sense-making. Participants in conversation try to make sense, to ‘carry on’ in a meaningful way, and they must expect their partners in discussion to do the same, so that some kind of conversational development can take place. As H.P. Grice famously noted, there is a *cooperational* basis to conversation, such that

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<sup>7</sup> Here one encounters the ‘Mauss problem’ which was alluded to in Chapter 2.

participants always orient themselves to the interventions of other participants.<sup>8</sup> Conversation is, in this sense, a question of agreement in discursive practice and of mutual coordination and adjustment. By convening group interviews, one creates a conversational environment in which all interventions are subject to the judgement of peers. Participants are encouraged to say things which they assume others in the group will be able to react to and develop, since ensuing silence is widely assumed to be the mark of a weak intervention. Successful interventions in the group interview, one may say therefore, are characterised by their public relevance. Participants generally do not seek to make interventions which are highly idiosyncratic and which other participants would not know how to react to or develop: even autobiographical narratives must, in the group context, be presented in such a way that they hold common significance. And should a participant diverge from this pattern and say something which appears 'strange' to the others, this oddness is likely to be evident. The intervention may explicitly be rejected as odd, or more likely it will be ignored, resulting in another participant taking the conversation in a more meaningful direction or, in the worst case, resulting in silence and the need to 'restart' the conversation.

This is what allows one to say that those problems which are successfully introduced into a group discussion are, almost by definition, the kind of 'common problems' which can be associated with a political common. They could not be purely private problems, problems affecting just 'me', since those problems will be screened out as the conversation develops; rather, they are likely to be the kind of problems which affect 'people like us', where the 'us' is some kind of we-formulation which may differ according to the problem at hand. The use of 'we' pronouns is important, but crucial is not so much their occasional appearance – this may be due simply to an individual speaker wanting, for whatever strategic reason, to position himself as part of a larger group – but their acceptance and development by certain or all other participants to the discussion. This is what expresses the common. Likewise, when certain problems are repeatedly linked together in discussion, and when participants accept and develop the linkages which are made by others, one can treat this as indicative of a more basic convergence in discursive practice concerning what topics go with what.

Clearly what is needed at this point then are some criteria by which to assess whether interventions in discussion are successful and thus whether the problems described can be considered common. Indicators of 'success' which are used to select passages for analysis

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<sup>8</sup> On the 'cooperative principle' and its attendant sub-principles, rendered in the form of 'maxims', see H. Paul Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', in Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 3, *Speech Acts* (New York: Academic Press, 1975), pp.45-7.

include the following. Evidently, where problems are talked about and developed in a considerable amount of depth by more than one participant, this indicates their common salience, particularly if all participants are active; likewise if the same problems are pursued in depth in more than one interview. Significant is when interventions are closely tied to one another, in particular when one sees the joint construction of an argument by more than one participant. The presence of cross-references in discussion is also important: when participants want to 'go back' to an earlier passage of discussion, or when they simply make a link to something which was said earlier, this implies the significance of that intervention and that the problem in question is closely interwoven with others. Descriptions which draw on more than one source of information (for instance, both the media and personal experience) may indicate the importance of the problem in question. Shared affective responses, such as more than one participant expressing a sense of injustice or frustration, or a particular enthusiasm to discuss a certain problem, can be indicative.<sup>9</sup> Together with this, expressions of *opinion* about a problem, particularly when this occurs early in the interview when participants have been non-committal so far, can be an indicator – as long as this statement of opinion is then followed up (even if just to rebut) by at least one of the other participants. In the discussion in Norwich, for example, the card-arranging exercise at the beginning of the discussion was interrupted for some time by an irrepressible flow of interventions from Mickey, Barry and Leyton about the (in)adequacy of the police and judicial system in dealing with local crime. In effect, the prompt-card was so successful that even this loosest of interview formats was disrupted.

Many problématiques were problematised in all or most of the interviews, and these are the ones that will be focused on below. Principal among them, to list them briefly in our own words, were: unemployment, crime, immigration, relations between majorities and minorities, extremes of wealth, military conflict, prices, wages, culture clashes, education, anti-social behaviour, the quality of policing / justice, corruption, taxes, debt, and regulations. It is the articulation of problems related to these that will be treated as the core features of a political common. It is not proposed that these be treated as distinctly 'European' or 'EU-oriented' problems. In how far, and in what way, a European dimension is evoked in their discussion is something that will be considered in the following chapters. Nor is it argued that these problems are distinctly 'European' in the sense that interviews with taxi-drivers in

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<sup>9</sup> On the last two, see Gamson, *Talking Politics*. These criteria subsume the two axes of centrality commonly spoken of in political psychology – 'cognitive' and 'motivational centrality' – though no strong distinction is made here between the two.

other parts of the world would not generate a similar array of concerns: our focus of attention is always on the possibilities which are held out by the discursive practices, rather than on the extent to which they are exclusive to a particular set of people; or, to recall the earlier distinction, on the potential for a collective bond rather than on membership criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

Importantly, several of the problématiques referred to on the prompt-cards were very little talked about, something which confirms that the presence of the cards could not determine the course of the discussion. Topics were chosen with selectiveness. For example, almost nothing was said in the open discussions that could be linked closely to ‘Science and Research’, and, in contrast to a card such as ‘Money and Prices’, it was never referred to, pointed at, or tapped during the discussions. ‘Health and Safety Standards’ was talked about rarely (there was some discussion amongst the Plžen group about who had a fire extinguisher in their taxi, but not much more). ‘Medical Care’ was rarely problematised: none of the participants told of experiences with hospitals or doctors, although the economic aspects of healthcare (e.g. who contributes to its funding, and who gets it for free) were regularly discussed.<sup>10</sup> Occasionally in the discussions one participant would deliberately try to bring one of these ‘neglected’ cards into the conversation – possibly in a spirit of politeness towards the researcher – but such a move would barely be met with follow-up interventions from other participants. For example, in the Reading group, David made an intervention which he linked to the cards ‘Science and Technology’ (thus adapting the card’s title, ‘Science and Research’) and ‘The Environment’. He began talking about how an old mill in Oxfordshire (Sonning Mill) was about to upgrade its power source so that it would run on hydroelectric power generated by the flow of the Thames, saving electricity for the

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<sup>10</sup> Broadly speaking, the frequency with which different problems are articulated in these interviews corresponds to the findings of other studies. Cf. in particular OPTEM, ‘The European Citizens and the Future of Europe’, pp.7-8, where the concerns found to be particularly prevalent amongst the populations of the 25 EU member-states in 2006 include: employment and working conditions, economic aspects of globalisation, decline of the welfare state, prices (including house prices), widening wealth inequalities, immigration, terrorism, petty crime and antisocial behaviour, and occasional mentions of environmental threats. (Such data say little of course about how concerns may be connected to one another, which is the question we turn to below.) The low salience in these ten interviews of healthcare as a medical rather than economic issue however may seem surprising, since polling data often suggest the opposite (see e.g. Sara Binzer Hobolt and Robert Klemmensen, ‘Responsive Government? Public Opinion and Government Policy Preferences in Britain and Denmark’, *Political Studies*, 53/2 (2005), and a poll by GfK NOP in August 2006, which cites healthcare as the greatest priority to U.K. citizens: [www.gfknop.co.uk/content/news/news/Challenges\\_of\\_Europe\\_UKrelease.doc](http://www.gfknop.co.uk/content/news/news/Challenges_of_Europe_UKrelease.doc).) This could be to do with our all-male sample – conceivably men express less concern on this issue than women. Alternatively, it could be that healthcare is seen as an important issue (a ‘priority’), but that its provision as currently stands is treated as unproblematic. Another interpretation would be that, because opinion polls can say nothing about opinion formation, they fail to distinguish between those issues such as healthcare on which respondents are merely registering a basic concern (‘ticking the box can’t hurt’), and those which are of day-to-day significance to them.

company which ran the mill and doing something good for the environment at the same time. The other participants, who just seconds before had been engaging actively with him on the problem of unemployment, made no effort to respond here. David started to ramble, and the anecdote became increasingly personal: 'I used to deliver corn there when it was a mill, I used to deliver corn there ... yeah, two and a quarter in the rape sacks of corn ... I used to go in there with an old Bedford lorry ... years ago ...'. Murda made a joke about David's age, everyone laughed, and then there was silence. It fell to the researcher to restart the discussion by asking a question which referred back to the passage of conversation on unemployment which had preceded David's 'tangential' intervention; conversation flowed again.

Of course, one must be careful not to take such reasoning too far in a counter-factual direction: the fact that such problématiques were little developed in the interviews does not rule out the possibility that in further discussions they might be problematised a little more. The point is a comparative one: certain cards, and anecdotes framed in certain ways, tended to be developed much *less* than others. One should add that the participants, in this group and generally, were by no means averse to anecdotes drawing on personal experience: these were a regular feature, and could successfully generate plenty of discussion. David, for example, told another autobiographical narrative a little later in the discussion, but this time it seemed to meet far better the criterion of common relevance. Murda was discussing burglars:

M: ... The problem that I think is ridiculous, right, say like you've got a trespasser on your property, you know, burglar or something, that comes into your house ... and he's probably got the intent that, if he's caught, if he's got a gun he'll shoot you. But in the process of it all, if you were to shoot that person, if you were to harm him, or GBH, ABH him, any of those, in any way, you could actually be sued. I mean, I find that ridiculous. The fact that you can't protect your ... [D: That's always been, funnily enough ...] Well, it hasn't *always* been ...

H: You've got an example [points to David], you've got an example for this [chuckles] ...

D: Yeah, just exactly what he said. [M: Oh OK, I didn't know ...] Caught a man in my house ... The dog was going absolutely raving mad, we'd gone to bed ... we have this fox that walks along the wall, this fox ... he knows when it's there and he goes mad ... I'm laying in bed and the dog's going absolutely bananas ... 'whatever's up?', I've got to get up and stop him barking, I've got up, come through into the kitchen, there's a big French window there and there's a bloke out there. The dog's going mad at the window and there's this fella stood there. I couldn't undo the door, my missus always locks it ... couldn't ... in the mad panic ... 'Christ, if this bloke's got a knife' ...

This is an anecdote which David was able to continue at length with the full engagement of the other participants – note that Habstunder was already familiar with the story and was

encouraging him to narrate it. Habstunder would subsequently steal the punchlines. Key points in the narrative became clear: it turns out the police, when they arrived, were too casual about the incident, they were more interested in having cups of coffee, it took seven hours for them to collect David's statement ('That's ridiculous though,' says Murda), and a detailed group discussion follows concerning the problems of law enforcement and what should be done about them (to which Chapter 5 will return). In this case and many others, a personal anecdote was picked up and developed at length, indicating that the problem in question was not an idiosyncratic one but rather the kind of common problem liable to affect 'people like us' more generally.

### Problem Domains

The card-arranging exercise, in which participants were asked to place cards together in piles, brought out various assumptions about certain problems naturally belonging with one another. The resultant card arrangements in themselves were instructive, and often one would find the same three or four core groupings of cards, along with other groupings which varied from interview to interview. Perhaps most instructive was the accompanying discussion, in which participants justified to one another their suggestions and in which they discussed how best to summarise each group of cards with an overarching category. The flow of the subsequent discussion also suggested that certain problems and ways of speaking might naturally cluster together – particularly evident in those moments when participants made links to earlier parts of the discussion, when they agreed that a certain set of problems had already been covered, or when they felt that it was time to 'move on' to a new topic. Observations of this kind suggest that, rather than treating all the problems discussed as separate from each other, each with a distinctive repertoire of assumptions and typical acts of positioning, it is possible to speak of them as clustered together in 'problem domains'.

Domains can be thought of as groupings of problems (understood as problematisations of problématiques), the concepts which are used to link them, and the patterned ways of speaking which are available to speakers as resources with which to discuss them. They are the substance of a political common. We shall approach them as features of discursive practice rather than of the speakers' psychology, although it is true that various participants used vocabulary suggestive of domain-based cognitive frameworks (e.g. 'problem-area', 'field', 'group', 'packet'). By 'patterned ways of speaking' one should

understand not strict repetition and regularity, in the sense that certain problems are *always* talked about in a certain way, with particular assumptions and we-formulations attached. This would be a crude and social-determinist perspective. Individual speakers are always capable of innovation in the way that they articulate a problem, and it is always possible to draw unexpected links between one problem and another with a suitable amount of creativity. Rather, these patterned ways of speaking should be seen as brought together following the principle of ‘family resemblance’, just as Wittgenstein suggests is the case for those things to describe which we use the word ‘game’, which we treat as linked in some way but for which a single set of common properties does not exist.<sup>11</sup> As Schatzki observes, ‘the unity of a discourse does not lie in the repetition of the same objects and concepts, but instead in the possession of delimited diversities of them.’<sup>12</sup>

Of course, an alternative conceptual move would be to treat ‘ways of talking’ as separate altogether from particular substantive issues. Domains could be thought of, in principle, as just sets of problems in themselves, discussed in unpatterned ways. Likewise, they could be thought of as patterned ways of speaking applied to any number of different problems: one could for example take as organising principles ‘class’, ‘morality’ and ‘race’, or one might speak, like Boltanski and Thévenot, of different ‘orders of worth’ or value, and make no particular link between these and specific situations of concern. However, this approach can be rejected for several reasons. Firstly, given that problems are treated here as constructed phenomena, as *problematizations* rather than unambiguous material facts, it would be quite meaningless to conceive them as separate from the discursive formations by which they are constructed. Only *problématiques* could be treated in this pre-discursive way, but then the question of what links are made between them, and hence of domain-clusterings, would not arise. Secondly, treating domains only as patterned ways of speaking without any association to substantive problems would not be suited to the overall purposes of this project, which include conceptualising the collective bond in an explicitly problem-oriented fashion, and exploring the polity implications of the types of decision-making authority which are invoked in connection with these problems. Focusing only on the orders of worth which speakers invoke, without foregrounding the problems in connection to which these are expressed, would be an approach more of sociological than political-theoretical interest. Thirdly, there are strong empirical grounds, and not just in our own data, for suspecting a link between the two. In an interesting study of citizenship in the US based on focus-group

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

<sup>12</sup> Schatzki, *The Site of the Social*, p.13.

interviews with lay people, Andrew Perrin looks at the different ‘logics’ which citizens apply in discussion of political topics, where logics are conceived in terms quite similar to the work of Boltanski and Thévenot. Important logics highlighted include notions of interest, of morality and justice, and of feasibility.<sup>13</sup> While Perrin notes that there is no intrinsic connection between these and particular political topics – economic issues for example need not necessarily be discussed according to the logic of interests, and discussion groups with differing socio-demographic make-up may vary somewhat in the frequency with which they apply different logics – his main conclusion is nevertheless that ‘by far the strongest influence on how citizens talk in the focus groups was *what they were talking about* – the scenario they were discussing.’<sup>14</sup> Problems and ways of speaking are found to be quite closely linked. A domain-based approach which links the two is empirically as well as theoretically attractive therefore.

This perspective does not discount the possibility that some problématiques may be problematised in more than one way, such that they can be talked about as a problem of one domain or a problem of another. The concept of ‘affordance’ is useful here. Harré notes that ‘the same material thing may have a great many different possible ways in which it can be used. Each is an affordance. ... Thus a floor affords walking, dancing, placing furniture; a window affords a view of the lake, an escape from a threat, a view for a peeping Tom; a knife affords cutting, threatening, opening a window catch, and lots more.’<sup>15</sup> Likewise, problématiques may be thought of as having varying degrees of affordance, such that some may be articulated as problems in multiple ways. A problématique such as ‘violence’ seems amenable to problematisation in more than one of the domains that will be outlined below. However, as suggested earlier, given that the focus here is on talk and that talk features problems rather than problématiques, these considerations are ornamental to our work.

On the basis of an analysis of the interview material, three problem domains in particular can be identified. These can be considered central aspects of a political common and are treated as tenable categories for all of the countries studied, though with some important variations. These domains will be considered in turn.

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<sup>13</sup> Perrin, *Citizen Speak*, pp.60ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p.102, p.131, and Chapter 7 in general.

<sup>15</sup> Rom Harré, ‘Material Objects in Social Worlds’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 19/5/6 (2002), p.27.

## 1. Economics

‘That one is easy,’ says Onřej in the Liberec group as he points to the pile of cards which the group has formed out of ‘Money and Prices’, ‘Taxation’, ‘Markets and Production’, ‘Work’, ‘Health and Safety Standards’ and ‘Purchase of Property’. ‘That one is easy, it’s a question of everything to do with finances. It’s the cost of living, it’s consumers, it’s prices ... it’s everything to do with finances.’ His comment finds a receptive audience in the other participants around the table, who make their presence felt not by disputing his point but by modifying it. A brief debate ensues as to whether the best title is ‘financial problems’, ‘financial situation’ or ‘financial system’, but agreement forms quickly that ‘they’re basically the same’. ‘Financial Situation’ is adopted and the discussion moves on. This experience can be considered typical of the groups interviewed, and the first domain which we propose can be called the *Economics* domain.<sup>16</sup>

The initial card exercise offers strong grounds for this reading. Often the first cards to be put together (the ‘first pair’<sup>17</sup>) subsequently became the basis for a pile labelled ‘economics’, ‘finances’ or something of this sort. A brief look at how the interview in Lübeck developed should serve to clarify this point. Having had the protocol for the discussion explained, the participants were invited to think about how best to order the prompt-cards:

JW: Perhaps you could spend a couple of minutes thinking about how these cards might go together. If you had to make little groups out of them, how would you do so? There’s no right or wrong way, whatever seems natural.

J: How many groups should it be?

JW: Up to you, up to you. [90 seconds of general contemplation]

J: So, what would I say ... start with the economy, with Taxes ... they belong together, right, Markets and Production are directly linked with Taxes because taxes can strengthen or weaken the economy. And ... Science and Research ... also has something to do with the economy, because innovation strengthens the power of the economy.

W: Yeah, I’d also put those together. And Work too ... [J: Work too ...] Work too ... [J: Work too ...]

The vocabulary on the cards is not being clumped together aimlessly, it seems: Jürgen creates a small narrative to explain the relationship between them, and his narrative is validated by Wolfgang’s interventions, which are in turn accepted by Jürgen. When asked to summarise

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<sup>16</sup> For a visual summary of the card exercise, see the table at the end of the Methodological Appendix.

<sup>17</sup> Coxon, *Sorting Data*.

the collection of cards with a title, the group considered 'Markets and the Economy', 'Working Life' and 'Financial Security', but considered each to be too narrow: 'Occupation and the Economy' was the title eventually chosen, so as to express the link between daily life and more distant processes. Of further interest is what happened a few minutes later: the card 'Money and Prices' had for some reason ended up in a different pile, but questions started to be raised as to why. Jürgen said that he felt at the beginning it should have been placed with 'Occupation and the Economy'; Niklas, Ali and Wolfgang agreed, and it was moved over. The episode suggests the momentum generated by the placing of cards is not so strong that it cannot be overturned by arguments that appeal to common expectations of what goes with what.

When asked to go into further depth on the problems considered most significant, Jürgen invoked once more 'the economy' and, with the active support of Wolfgang and Niklas, used it to link together a whole series of concepts which had not been written on any of the cards:

I think the biggest problem here in Germany at the moment is the economy. [W: yeah] The economy and work of course. Unemployment and ... zero economic growth, or hardly any economic growth, and the unemployment which goes with that. Domestic purchasing power, the lack of domestic purchasing power. Also under this heading with money and prices I'd say the introduction of the euro is very relevant, because the euro – due to the exchange rate – has brought disadvantages in purchasing power, considerable ... [N: price rises] ... Yeah, it's led to price rises, and so also the purchasing power, the domestic demand, has gone down, because people have less money at their disposal.

Some notion of 'the economy' or 'economics' clearly comes across here as an organising concept, a core element in the political common along with the more specific problems associated with it. A later cross-reference (this time by Wolfgang) suggests the naturalness with which the participants orientate themselves in discussion using the concept of 'the economy'. The conversation had been looking at the problem of inadequate contributions to the system of health insurance: 'The easiest solution for this problem would be full employment. If there weren't five million unemployed people there, if they were paying into the pension and health insurance, then we wouldn't have all these problems ... [N: yeah]. We're back to this first subject again – the economy. It all links together.' A passage from the Plzeň group is similar, in that a cross-reference is made which can only be meaningful to more than one participant (as it evidently is) if there is a shared understanding that certain problems are linked by the concept 'hospodářství' (the economy). Román says: 'Markets and Production, we've talked about that, that's generally ... [P: I think ... yeah, the economy,

certainly ... ] We talked about work, we talked about investment, what's that, that's the economy. We can still talk about the economy of the Czech state as a whole, how it manages its resources.'

One sees here a distinction being made, as it was in other groups too, between the more daily or personal aspects of economics and the larger-scale or more remote aspects, though these were generally closely enmeshed in discussion. Not all groups, when asked to label the card piles formed at the beginning of the interview, used the word 'economics' or its functional equivalent in the relevant language. A range of candidate titles was generated, perhaps all with a family resemblance to the word 'economics', but with enough variety to suggest a plurality of ways of constructing the domain. The Reading group had no doubts that the pile they had formed using the cards 'Markets and Production', 'Work', 'Purchase of Property', 'Money and Prices' and 'Taxation' was 'all to do with money', and this was taken as the title. Likewise for the Würzburg and Plzeň groups, it was 'all to do with money' or 'all to do with finances': the Würzburg group explored 'commerce and 'economic policy' as possibilities before settling on 'Economy and Finances', while Plzeň quickly opted for 'Finances'. In Kassel, 'Political Economy' (*Volkswirtschaft*) was chosen over 'Economy' on the grounds that 'it affects the whole people, not just the economy alone but more deeply.' In an interesting twist, the Erfurt group explicitly rejected one participant's suggestion of the label 'economy' for the three cards 'Markets and Production', 'Taxation' and 'Purchase of Property', opting instead to call it 'Capitalism'. Although they did not create a card pile with this title, Ostrava also invoked the term readily.

One concludes that an important domain of problems making up the political common has, despite the nuances, something more or less to do with economics. Certain problems were articulated more frequently in some discussions than others: the banking system was an important issue only in the Czech discussions, and corruption (which, as several groups pointed out, straddles various areas of public life and which for analytical purposes will be discussed both as part of this domain and the following one) was given particular prominence by the Czech and the Erfurt groups. However, there was a considerable number of economic problems which were articulated frequently *across* the groups, without noticeable variation according to nationality. These included wages, taxation, unemployment, social security and insurance, prices, debt, relations between rich and poor, privatisation, the decline of local industry, and the adequacy of the education system in equipping people for employment. These can be treated as the core problems that we shall be dealing with when studying the *Economics* domain. Not only were they

articulated frequently and followed up by several participants, but they tended to be discussed in language that was impassioned. One had little difficulty in identifying what Gamson has referred to as a sense of injustice when these problems were discussed.<sup>18</sup> See for instance Mickey and Barry from the Norwich group, discussing rich rock stars who cling to their money:

M: You look at Bono, who's stood in front of Blair and Bush, he fucked off on his private jet ... [B: He's got a castle in Dublin.] Bono, fucking get a life. Strip yourself bare, strip yourself bare and leave yourself with a million. Give the rest away, you toss-pot. [B: Yeah, that's right ...] [...] Elton John, at least he gives away his wealth. He did, you know, he gave away his wealth. That bastard McCartney earns £520,000 ... [B: He earns £60 a second ...] How much money does one person need?

Comments such as 'that's not right' and 'it shouldn't be like that' were common, as when Dieter in Kassel spoke of the problem of personal debt: 'mobile phones for example, it's a real problem for young people, there's children of 13, 14 or 15, they're already in debt because of the payments, it's a trauma, something like that really shouldn't be happening. There should be regulations so that something like that doesn't happen.' As will be seen in Chapter 5, the sense that a situation was unfair or intolerable by no means meant that clear remedies to it were identified, or even expected. The 'should' was not always accompanied by a 'could'. But the inclination to problematise, and to treat these problems as affecting 'people like us', was widely evident. A sense of involvement, rather than 'cynical chic',<sup>19</sup> was the dominant tone.

## 2. Society and the Law

None of the groups spontaneously offered the heading 'Society and the Law' to describe an arrangement of cards or as a point of reference in open discussion. Both 'society' and 'law' were freely invoked in almost all discussions, and the clustering of problems and discursive resources suggests a strong overlap in the semantic range of each, but to label this domain 'Society and the Law' is an interpretative act. Moreover, a plurality of perspectives is being covered under this heading. Similar words carry different connotations in different countries, and aside from the core problems and motifs whose clustering is evident in all the

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<sup>18</sup> Gamson, *Talking Politics*, p.7.

<sup>19</sup> Nina Eliasoph, 'Political Culture and the Presentation of a Political 'Self'', *Theory and Society*, 19/4 (1990).

discussions there are some important variations according to country. Treating ‘society’ and ‘the law’ as constituting a single domain should serve to illuminate some of these differences.

The articulated problems which can be considered to be at the heart of this domain are those of neighbourhood behaviour, crime (including corruption), policing, the justice system, and education – the latter here understood as a social good which benefits the community as a whole rather than the economic prospects of individuals. All of these can be thought of as having something to do with rules, morality, or the institutions by which rules and morality are enforced. For the discussions in Britain the concept of ‘law and order’ captures these rather neatly, as this passage from the Reading group indicates:

M: And then we’ve got here [looking at the card pile that the group has formed out of ‘The Legal System’, ‘Education and Training’, ‘Policing’, and ‘Corruption’] ... I suppose that’s more along ... Law and Order isn’t it, law. Cos the policing, everything, is law [...] it’s either you’re against it or for it ... Corruption’s against it, Policing is for it, Education and Training obviously ... and the Legal System. Law?

JW: How do you feel? What’s the general consensus?

S: They come together ...

D: In a way, yeah ... I mean that’s law [points at bulk of pile] but that’s corruption [points at ‘Corruption’ card; chuckles] ...

M: Corruption yeah but it’s *against* the law isn’t it, so it comes under the same sort-of umbrella of law.

D: Well ... in a way, I suppose, you could say, yeah ...

JW: Education you’re keeping as part of the law as well?

D: Well, inasmuch as that’s where you’re first educated about all things. You’re told off by your mum from the day you do something wrong, aren’t you, so I’d connect it.

M: And also, if you do something wrong out there the police pull you over and what do they say, ‘ignorance is no excuse’ or whatever. You’re supposed to know it. So you have to be educated and you have to be trained in certain aspects ... everyday things ...

JW: Sure, sure. OK, so are we deciding on ‘Law’ for that group?

D: ‘Law and Order’, ‘Law and Order’ I’d say, ‘Law and Order’ ...

M: Yep, no problem with that ...

If the police and the legal system are taken to be the institutions of enforcement (the ones who ‘pull you over’), corruption is taken to be a breach of the law, and education is presented as the means by which law-abiding people are raised. Clear consensus is displayed: Murda and David exchange points smoothly, and at the end David reaffirms Murda’s original

heading 'Law and Order'. The discussions in Swansea and Norwich are in keeping with this, as should come through in the course of this chapter. Swansea generated the heading 'Justice / Law' to describe the corresponding card pile; the Norwich group made the same link between education and the law, emphasising the problem of discipline, and bringing in the concepts of 'public disorder' and 'antisocial behaviour' (including drug and alcohol abuse) to characterise the challenges facing the police. The notion of 'society' that comes through in these British discussions is a fairly restricted one: the extent to which fellow members of the population are, in the legal sense, rule-followers rather than rule-breakers. Crime is a very central problem in the British discussions, and the healthy society is the crime-free society.

This is a little different from what one finds in the German discussions. While these groups do generate headings like 'Legal Security' (Lübeck), 'Legal Order' and 'Legal System' (Kassel), and 'Rule of Law' (Erfurt), problems of crime and inadequate policing occupy a smaller proportion of the discussions. At the end of the Lübeck discussion, the group was asked specifically whether they had day-to-day difficulties with the police, a question which would have been provocative in the British context. Niklas concedes merely that 'there are occasionally a few small problems ...'. Jürgen and Wolfgang talk briefly about speed-cameras before concluding that it is difficult to think of any other particular problems, and Ali concurs. Nor was this a particularly mild group – Kassel and Würzburg are very similar in this respect, the latter explicitly so in their views on policing, as will be seen later. Rather than discussing crime and crime prevention, amongst the German groups there tended to be much more talk about other aspects of conduct in society. Adhering to the rules is about showing concern for others and for public spaces, and the healthy society is the one in which a sense of community feeling has been retained, a society which has not descended into selfishness and egoism. In this 'social sphere' or 'social realm', as the Würzburg group terms it, the emblematic villains, as will be seen in the next chapter, are not just the criminal law-breakers but the people who spit out their chewing-gum on the pavement, and the passive onlookers who fail to speak out against this kind of offensive behaviour.

In the Czech and the Erfurt discussions there is a particular emphasis on corruption and social hierarchy, and the police and the justice system are given prominence as institutions which embody these. (The participants in the Erfurt group appeared much more sceptical of the police than the western Germans, referring to them as 'the poor dogs'). Corruption is considered so omnipresent that it is a reliable basis for jokes and sarcasm: Román in Plzeň declares to general laughs: 'but please, that's not a problem in the Czech

Republic!’ while Marek in Ostrava exclaims on seeing the relevant cards ‘Corruption! My God, that’s a wonderful topic! ... Legal System – basically that doesn’t exist here!’ Along with this unquestionable assumption, in the Czech discussions one also finds a much tighter clustering with the law-making process, something which is perhaps consistent with there having been a weaker distinction between the legislative and the judiciary under communism. Hans-Jürgen in Erfurt talks of politicians being ‘people who are elected and are supposed to build up the legal system’, and a passage in the Liberec discussion moves swiftly from ‘bad laws’ to ‘the legislators, the parliament, which functions really badly.’ A discussion of corruption in the police and the judicial system can thus merge with a discussion of corruption amongst elected politicians. While there is repeated mention in the Czech groups of society (*společnost*) and the law (*právo*), the hierarchy motif of the former is never far from the rich vs poor motif of the economics domain, and the latter always carries overtones of state authority in a quite broad sense.

Amongst all the groups, this range of problems to do with the following of rules tends to be described as being experienced in a very local environment. Much emphasis is given to the city, and in particular ‘the streets’. David in Reading describes those ‘who don’t fit in’ and who ‘don’t want to most of the time. That’s why they’re like that. ... You see them sitting on the streets, they’re outsiders, they’re drug addicts, they get into a system and they can’t get out of it and they need it ... and they thieve and they do all the things ... then you see them laying all round the town don’t you. They’re outsiders, cos you wouldn’t want them living next to you cos you’d be frightened to tread on their needles or whatever, you know. [...] You don’t want to be horrible, you say “oh I’ll give him a pound”, but you wouldn’t really want to touch his hand would you?’ During the discussion in Ostrava, Marek sees something happening outside the window. He uses it to extend a point he is making about the thoughtless behaviour of those further up the social hierarchy: ‘Here’s a beautiful example of that. The Mercedes here. Along comes Mr. Businessman, lets out the children and parks so that no-one can park in the next space next to him. That’s ... you can see this guy wants to show off, “I’ve got a different kind of car, a Mercedes, and I’m going to put myself here.” It’s a display. And now the kid sees it, the kid ... I don’t know how old he is, but in ten years he’ll be doing the same. Because “that’s how Daddy did it, so I can do the same.” That’s Education and Training.’ Offensive behaviour is evident in the smallest things and the environment is intimately proximate. This is a theme which will be encountered further in the following chapters.

### 3. Relations between Peoples

With a great deal of indignation, Lee from the Swansea group recounts the following experience: ‘I took a soldier home in the week, he’d just come back from Iraq, seven months over there, and it’s five boys in his platoon, or battalion or whatever you call them, Welsh Fusiliers they were, and they’re based in Aldershot. And they’d been back about three or four days and they’d lost a couple of their close friends, and they jumped in a taxi with a Paki, and the Paki started shouting “you lot ...” – he knew they were in the army, he was taking them back to the base – “you lot there ...” you know, giving it all that ... And they pulled the Paki out, and they warned him two or three times “we’ve got close friends over there who’ve been killed, we don’t even want to be over there ourselves”, and he kept on and on, “you lot ... you’re all over there killing innocent people” and all the rest of it. Well, they pulled the Paki out didn’t they and leathered him. They did him, and now they’re in prison. So it goes back to them again doesn’t it.’ Apart from being rather shocking, this anecdote is interesting in several ways. Two social groups seem to be implied here: that of the soldiers (and their close friends), whose Welsh/British identity is foregrounded and with whom Lee seems inclined to associate himself by expressing sympathy with their fate, and the Pakistani taxi-driver who associates himself with the civilians who have been killed in Iraq. Lee’s sense of injustice seems to be premised on the unwillingness of the Pakistani driver to distinguish between the soldiers and the orders they are carrying out, and on the fact that the soldiers end up in prison, simply, as it were, for defending themselves. Treated as perfectly natural is the willingness of a Pakistani person to associate with the plight of Iraqis; indeed it is the fact that he is one of ‘them’ (last line), ‘giving it all that’ as they do (you know) which makes sense of the whole anecdote. Thus an episode in a taxi is framed as part of a confrontation between groups. This kind of discursive construction of ‘peoples’ and the relations between them is based on a distinctive set of interpretative repertoires, and these make up our third domain.

Certain problems in the *Economics* domain and the *Society and the Law* domain prompt references to minority groups, as we shall see: the supposed economic cost of refugees, for example, or the supposed willingness of immigrants to steal. But there are a whole series of problems and patterned ways of talking about them which are not reducible to the logics of these two domains, and where one finds different acts of demarcation with regard to shared predicament, and different understandings of the potential for agency. The core problems in this domain are threat and intimidation as represented collectively by other

peoples; conflict, whether in the form of wars between nations or configurations of nations, or non-military conflict in the course of daily encounters; and the need to accommodate different cultural practices, and the perceived erosion of practices considered distinctive of 'our' way of life. Each of these is discussed at least to some degree by the three country groups interviewed, albeit with nuances. In the Czech discussions this domain is less central than in the British or German ones: the assumption seems to be readily made that the Czech Republic has little significance on the international stage, and these participants are able to draw on a more limited range of personal encounters with resident non-Czechs since the country's ethnic-minority population is small. It is significant that both the Liberec and the Ostrava groups explicitly decide to leave discussion of these problems until last, preferring to focus first on the themes of the previous two domains. Their discussion of Roma/gypsies tends to be framed according to the *Economics* and *Society and the Law* domains, although not exclusively, as will be seen. The British and particularly the German groups, on the other hand, tend to discuss the problems of this domain rather early on, and make frequent digressions and interruptions so as to return back to them. A further issue of salience in the British discussions is terrorism (and this well before the London bombings of July 2005); the German groups meanwhile devote considerable time to reflecting on their country's history and the legacy of that history for today. Despite these variations, one finds a core set of basically similar problems being articulated across the country groups.

Historically, the problems associated with this domain would probably be assumed to be distant ones rather than a part of daily life. Conflict between peoples would perhaps have seemed a remote idea, the kind of thing undertaken by soldiers in far-away fields and resolved by diplomats in smoke-filled rooms. To some extent this impression lingers – various participants speak of these problems as 'not really affecting us here' – but there is a counter-perspective, usually mentioned by someone else in the discussion, which emphasises the very proximity of these issues. When David from the Reading group proposes the heading 'Affairs outside our environment' for the card pile consisting of 'Peace and War', 'Treatment of Outsiders' and 'Overseas Aid', on the grounds that 'we're not at war particularly here in our environment if we're looking at us sat here in the town. So ... that's sort-of overseas affairs, I mean, I can't do nothing about,' Murda responds that 'Treatment of Outsiders is not overseas affairs – it's even in Reading itself.' Titling this domain 'Relations between Peoples' is intended to capture the link which is so commonly made in lay discussion between what the political scientist might call 'foreign policy' or 'international relations' on the one hand and 'race relations' in a domestic context on the other. The link is

fairly evident in Lee's anecdote above, and can be seen as the Erfurt group discuss a heading with which to categorise the pile they have made consisting of the cards 'Peace and War', 'Overseas Aid' and 'Treatment of Outsiders':

U: I'd say ...I'd say ... 'Foreign Policy', or something like that ...

H-J: Yeah, it's ... here I'd put ... you see, it's not just foreign policy. For me it'd be 'Humanity'. I'd have 'Humanity' as the title.

M: ... With the person being in the foreground ...

H-J: ... 'Overseas Aid' ... yeah, that belongs there too. They all belong together somehow. Yeah ... but if I put that here then ... 'The Person', or 'The Future', or something, it depends ... [U: 'Future Prospects' ...] Yeah, but you have that over here too ... [U: 'Human Togetherness' ...]

M: Sure but humanity one could have here ...

H-J: Yeah ... need to think through carefully ...

JW: You said foreign policy before ...?

H-J: Yeah, foreign policy belongs in there. But 'Treatment of Outsiders' I see as something not just abroad but here too ... [U: Here ...] That's a problem right here in Germany too. Everywhere really, because in my view there's nationalism everywhere. Everyone has a certain national pride, and nationalism develops out of that. Quite simply. So that's why it's hard to order the cards. These things ... [pointing at cards] ... If there's none of that [Peace and War] then there's none of that [Treatment of Outsiders], and without that then none of that ...! [laughs]

U: If that was OK [Peace and War] then you wouldn't get immigrants ... [H-J: Exactly ...] If the poor countries weren't so poor then people wouldn't come to us, they'd rather stay at home. They're driven away by war and so they come to us. That's why foreign policy is crucial.

'Humanity' is a word which appears frequently here, and 'Human Foreign Policy' is a category heading which they consider a little later in the discussion. Their (self-imposed) challenge is to express why foreign policy and immigrant populations in Germany are issues which 'go together'. When, for the sake of simplicity, they settle on 'Foreign Policy', it is stressed that this should be understood 'keeping in mind the human dimension'. 'Culture' is another key word which recurs, for instance when examining the rights of Muslims to build mosques in Germany. It links together what happens in the local environment with places more distant: 'When we're abroad,' says Uwe, 'in an Islamic country, we're meant to conduct ourselves in a reasonable way. Women are supposed to cover their arms and not wear shorts. But we have to build mosques here and everything for the Muslims. That's not right. With us it's always expected that we behave in a reasonable way, but here everyone's allowed to behave however they want.' The Lübeck and Würzburg groups both choose 'Foreign Policy' as their heading for the two cards 'Peace and War' and 'Overseas Aid', but

in discussion link to these the question of immigration (the card for which was put with the piles ‘Internal Security’ and ‘Rule of Law’ respectively); for the same two cards, the Kassel group considers ‘Global Interaction’ and ‘World’ (‘it’s a topic which really spans the globe’, says Sebastian, with Hans’ agreement) before settling on the title ‘Inter-state Relations’. For the Norwich group the appropriate heading is ‘the World’, whilst in Reading the participants, after a lengthy discussion which will be looked at later, choose ‘Conflict’, Murda explaining ‘because, you know, you’re going to have conflict with outsiders; because of conflict at times you have to have Aid, and Peace and War is obviously again is conflict ...’ In Swansea, having arranged the cards such that there is a pile consisting of ‘Peace and War’, ‘Treatment of Outsiders’ and ‘Overseas Aid’, the group is so eager to start talking about asylum-seekers that the category-generating exercise is put to one side. In the Czech groups, as might be expected given that the domain appears somewhat less central to them, participants do not arrange these particular cards together with the same consistency, and the category headings are hence rather disconnected: ‘Security’ for the Liberec group (referring to the cards Peace and War and Treatment of Outsiders), ‘Global Problems’ for the Ostrava group (referring to Peace and War, Overseas Aid and the Environment), and a rather amorphous category for the Plzeň group based on the concept of Education.

The link between ‘foreign affairs’ and domestic ‘race relations’ which comes through during these discussions of the cards, in particular amongst the British and Germans, is a spontaneous feature of the discussions as a whole. Perhaps the most obvious example is the link made between Jews and the Israeli state, as visible in a passage from the Lübeck discussion:

J: ... But it troubles me sometimes when *Spiegel* [a news magazine] – it’s *Der Spiegel* isn’t it, where the guy at the top is a Jew? – when they always come out with this stuff, when they raise the finger and say to us Germans ‘you evil ones have done something bad again’ ... [A: ... Yeah, he’s the financier ...] ‘We need to remind you of your past, otherwise you’d forget it again ...’

W: Yeah, and what are they doing with the Palestinians ...?

J: Yeah ... yeah, naturally you’re not allowed to bring that into the equation ... [W: ... yeah ...] what they’re doing there. The German press is naturally pro-Israeli ... [W: ... yeah ...]

In the Würzburg discussion, Uwe makes a point about the British public’s reaction to the Iraq war: ‘There was certainly a lot of outcry about the war in Britain. Have the English still got soldiers over there ...? [R: I think so, yeah] ... But ... this policy isn’t much liked there either.’ Oliver then makes the link to minority groups: ‘It’s led to domestic problems there too, because there are lots of Muslims living in Britain [R: ... yeah ...] and they’re putting

the British under fire because of Iraq. They still have it under control, and Blair is trying at the moment to extend his hand to them a bit.’ In a discussion of the Balkans conflict of the 1990s and the refugees who left there for Germany, Andreas points to the Serbian café across the road as an example of how the Serbs have unjustly prospered while it was the Albanians who were the legitimate refugees.<sup>20</sup> Wider conflicts are played out and are visible just by taking a walk around town. Lee in Swansea tells Andy to watch his words because there’s ‘a Paki’ in the pub: ‘in Swansea now, in a local pub, and you’ve got to watch what you’re saying. [...] Shouldn’t have to.’ The local pub in one’s own town is, it seems, the kind of place where these problems of intergroup relations should not have to be faced: the outrage is exactly that these problems are being encountered within the local environment. The same immediacy comes through in a passage from the Kassel group:

D: [...] And there’s not going to be war between countries any more, instead war takes place between people(s),<sup>21</sup> who sit directly next to each other but which have completely different cultures from each other, and I think ...

H: It seems to me that ... your own fears are coming out there ...

D: Yeah, they’re certainly there, they’re there ...

P: I mean ... you can see it, just go out in the street and have a look ...

H: That’s ... that’s exactly what I mean. The fears aren’t just with you, the fears are also with exactly those people that you’re suggesting are threatening. Why isn’t it possible for the reason that we’re all human beings to go over to them and enter into dialogue with these people? [...]

P: Germans, they don’t stick together. Foreigners – just go along the *Holländerstraße*, if you hit a foreigner in the face there ... [D: yeah] ... within five minutes there are ten of them standing in front of you. If you hit a German in the face then ten minutes later there’s still no-one there.

Dieter’s reference to ‘war between people(s)’, which seems to be endorsed by Peter, is not accepted by Hans, either in this passage or in other sections of the discussion. The grounds on which he rejects it however are generally that conflict is not inevitable rather than that such ‘peoples’ are a misleading construct. His notion of ‘dialogue’ clearly postulates two entities, to be encountered ‘on the street’ as well as further afield.

A final point of importance concerning the composition of this domain is the assumed relationship between a country’s government and its people. It was visible above that Lee (and presumably also the soldier who told him the anecdote) makes a distinction

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<sup>20</sup> While this example might seem to blur the demarcation against Muslims which we shall see to be characteristic of this domain, there is no indication in this passage that Andreas or the rest of the group considers Albanians to be Muslims; even if this knowledge is available to them, it is given no weight.

<sup>21</sup> Original: no longer ‘zwischen Ländern’ but rather ‘zwischen den Menschen’.

between the views of the soldiers who have been based in Iraq and of the government which sent them there, whereas he naturalises the identification of the Pakistani taxi-driver with Iraqis. A general pattern seems to be that for parts of the world considered geographically or culturally 'proximate' a distinction between states/governments and peoples is readily made, whereas for more 'distant' places they tend to be treated as one.<sup>22</sup> Thus in the Norwich group one sees Mickey criticising US treatment of Ethiopia and explicitly drawing a distinction between government policy and the people by saying 'don't get me wrong, cos I like America, I think the average American is fine,' whereas one sees Barry making no distinction at all between the government and the people when referring to an African country, even one whose government is acknowledged to be repressive: 'the biggest rip-off at the moment, we're actually paying overseas aid at the moment to Zimbabwe, where you've got the worst dictator ... Certain parts of Africa deserve it for the treatment of AIDS and poverty, but I'm afraid Zimbabwe don't. Mugabe is a dictator ... he's got torture chambers – any opponent is oppressed. So I'd abolish that one for him.' That AIDS- and poverty-relief should be withheld because the country's *leader* does not deserve it indicates an elision of people and government in perception of this more distant location. How the boundaries of the 'proximate' and the 'distant' are drawn is one of the first questions which will be considered in the next chapter.

These three domains – *Economics, Society and the Law, and Relations between Peoples* – can be taken as important components of the political common, whose existence they in turn serve to confirm. Participants across all the groups were able to talk in depth and to coordinate well with one another in discussion of the problems associated with these domains, drawing on patterned discursive resources to do so, and – as will be seen further in the next chapter – they tended to articulate these as problems that were liable to affect 'people like us'. This does not mean that all participants necessarily linked themselves to them as individuals: as taxi-drivers, none of the participants was unemployed or liable to be made unemployed in the immediate future, certainly not by the factory closures which were so often mentioned. It was not a problem liable to affect 'me', but it was nonetheless a problem that could affect 'people like us'. The political common is shared not in the absolute sense of problems shared by all at all times, and with the same opinions held, but in

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<sup>22</sup> The tendency to emphasise the homogeneity of out-groups and the heterogeneity of in-groups has been well documented in social psychology. See e.g. John Duckitt, 'Prejudice and Intergroup Hostility', in David O. Sears, Leonie Huddy, and Robert Jervis (eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

the sense of a set of reference-points linked according to the principle of family resemblance and invoked as a means by which to carry on the discussion.

Roughly the same kinds of problem emerge across the set of interviews, and they are linked together using concepts which can be considered as functionally equivalent. The way these domains are described here is not the only possible way. There would be some grounds in the interviews for conceptualising the analysis according to institutional domains rather than problem domains, with headings such as ‘national government’ (perhaps even just ‘politics’), ‘local government’, ‘European’, ‘global’ and ‘private’. A domain along the lines of ‘State Provision’ would have been a natural one with which to read the Czech and the Erfurt texts (i.e. those from the post-communist cities): both the Ostrava and Liberec groups brought together ‘Transport’ and ‘Medical Care’, using the headings ‘State Sector’ and ‘State Services’ respectively. Likewise there would be some support for adopting a principle of immediacy, with domains such as ‘day-to-day’, ‘emergency’, ‘past’ and ‘future’. These were sometimes offered by participants, though less regularly than the thematic division which we shall take as the crucial one, and hardly at all were discussions structured along these lines. In the analytical reading we shall follow, guided by the concept of a political bond, questions to do with political institutions are approached separately in Chapter 5 in terms of the plausibility of a *political project*, as distinct from the substantive problems which such a project might address. Questions to do with immediacy are integrated into discussion of problem-salience.

The three key domains – *Economics, Society and the Law*, and *Relations between Peoples* – should not be thought of as spheres with sharply demarcated boundaries, or as closed systems. The most appropriate metaphor is that of the constellation. Picking up what was said earlier, some problématiques (‘comets’, one might say) can be problematised in terms of more than one domain. Take ‘immigration’ for example. This problématique – the permanent or semi-permanent movement of people across state borders – certainly does not have to be treated as a problem (it can be welcomed as something positive), but if it *is* problematised then this can be done in more than one way. For example, it can be talked about as something which costs ‘people like us’ our money or job security, or as something which makes ‘people like us’ more vulnerable to criminal behaviour, or as something which forces ‘people like us’ to live next to those who are culturally different to us. Immigration in other words can be articulated as a problem in terms of the *Economics* domain (along the lines of ‘they’re a burden!’), in *Society and the Law* terms (‘they’re all criminals!’) or in *Relations between Peoples* terms (‘they’re completely different to us!’). These different

kinds of framing will sometimes be contested, a fact which reaffirms the dynamic relationship between speakers and the resources upon which they draw. When participants articulate a problem, they are talking about a problématique in a particular way, and are drawing on particular discursive repertoires, with associations to particular discursive domains, to do so. As suggested above, one can suppose that the relationship between problématiques and discursive resources is not a free-floating one – certain problématiques do, it seems, tend to be problematised in certain ways, and one can usefully inquire into these – but at the same time there is scope for some flexibility in the process of problematisation. At an analytical level, this means that occasionally there can be difficulty in deciding how a particular passage in a transcript should be read and with which domain(s) it should principally be associated. This does not mean however that the domains merge into one, rendering the concept redundant. Many everyday concepts have precisely this radial structure, and an analogy can be drawn with the domains used to talk about the weather – the seasons. A sunny day – equivalent to a problématique – can be a feature of summer, autumn, winter or spring, resulting in occasional uncertainty as to how to talk about a particular phase: are these two days of sun the beginning of spring, or just a brief respite from the gloom of winter? In the face of such difficulties, we continue to talk of the seasons, without feeling that we make ourselves absurd. Domains are to be thought of in a similarly pragmatic spirit.

Interviewing groups other than taxi-drivers would no doubt have resulted in some different problems being brought to the fore and certain others being marginalised. The participants in this study were exclusively male: one may speculate that a study involving female participants might involve not just the invocation of supplementary we-formulations applied to the same set of problem domains, but a clustering of problems distinctive enough to suggest the conceptualisation of a domain based on gender-related problems. This is not a thought which we are in a position to pursue. The supposition, based on the reasons for which taxi-drivers were chosen as the subjects of study, is that their discourse is likely to feature many of the problems and discursive patterns that would arise in discussions composed of different social groups, and that the domains which have been conceptualised here would be tenable descriptions more widely, notwithstanding the significant variation one might find at the more ‘superficial’ level of opinions.

*Economics, Society and the Law*, and *Relations between Peoples* are the domains which will be carried forward for further analysis then. They are comprised of the problems which were talked about in greatest depth and with greatest frequency, and which were often

described by participants themselves as the most important problems. However, that they are not comprehensive of all the problems discussed in these interviews, and that they should therefore not be considered as definitive of the political common, can be made clear by looking briefly at a fourth, more marginalised, set of problems which one might treat under the heading *Quality of Life*. We shall return to this set of problems in Chapter 6, when discussing how the political common might evolve over time.

#### 4. Quality of Life

In the course of the initial card-arranging exercise, several groups created a card-pile which they titled Quality of Life comprised of cards such as ‘The Environment’, ‘Health and Safety Standards’, ‘Medical Care’, ‘Science and Research’ and ‘Transport’. Passages from the Lübeck and Würzburg discussions provide an indication of the links made between these issues. In connecting environmental problems with transport pollution, the Lübeck group refers to a story which was in the news at the time of the interviews about the dangers posed to human health by ‘fine-particulate pollution’ (*Feinstaubbelastung*):

N: Transport is of course an issue for environmental problems ...

W: Yeah, there’s a lot of talk right now about fine-particulate pollution from diesel vehicles, amongst other things ... [N: Mmm, yeah] And I think where we are we’re certainly hit by traffic and environmental problems. As far as traffic goes we’ve got the pollution from the A20, and until that was there the environmentalists spent ten years trying to block it.

J: Transport produces, as has been said, a lot of pollutants, and there are increasing attempts to cut back on the pollutants with technology that’s supposed to block them, like electric motors and ... hydrogen motors and so on. So in that sense ... the Environment and Transport certainly do have something directly to do with one another I’d say.

The Würzburg group also links pollution, transport and health when narrating how the introduction of a road toll for lorries on the Autobahn has led to heavier traffic in the city as drivers switch to smaller roads to avoid the charge. The interweaving of problems one sees here suggests one might want to speak of a domain called ‘Quality of Life’, ‘Care’, or ‘Health’.

U: It’s got something to do with quality of life, hasn’t it. Also with transport. Just here in Würzburg yesterday there was a report on ‘Antenne Bayern’ [a radio station] saying how hard people in Würzburg are hit by pollution due to this toll on lorries, how the whole city is afflicted. It was on

the radio. [O: It's certainly very visible ...] Definitely ... the middle orbital ... [R: The middle orbital is the main problem, all the through-traffic of lorries ...] In Germany we've got a toll on lorries now on the Autobahn ... you can save 3.50 euros and half an hour if you cut straight through the city and join the Autobahn again on the other side, and a lot of lorry-drivers have realised that – much to the sorrow of local residents. It's a problem we notice quite a bit too.

R: It's very noticeable when you drive on the middle orbital how many lorries there are there. It's always blocked, the whole day long, it's very striking, makes you think because it's a municipal road but it's one lorry after another.

O: [...] The residents are hit by the exhaust fumes ...

R: There isn't the same problem in Britain because Britain's an island, it's situated on the periphery, whereas Germany's right in the middle of Europe ... [U: yeah, exactly] Everything crosses through here in all directions, there's a lot of foreign lorries involved – every second one probably. There's a need to get to grips with the problem. [...] The law says every kilometre on the Autobahn has to be paid for ... [O: ... Takings of 3 billion euros, I've heard ...] [...] The people in the villages, in the towns, they tremble and groan under the noise, the pollution ... [O: ... the exhaust fumes ...] ... the fumes ... [U: Quality of life is what's at stake ...] That's what this problem ... this problem-area's about, everything we've been saying, I'd say.

However, despite passages such as these, which indicate a clustering of issues, such problems were generally not discussed in much depth by any of the groups. Amongst the British groups they were hardly mentioned at all. Amongst the German groups they were mentioned a little more. Amongst the Czechs groups they were mentioned a little more still, pollution in particular, perhaps because the experiences of adaptation to the demands of EU membership acted as a spur to problematisation (a point that will be returned to in Chapter 6). But generally they were strongly marginalised in discussion. One expression of this marginalisation is simply the avoidance of talking about them, as one sees most clearly with the British groups. When Mickey in Norwich is looking for a heading to describe the two cards 'Environment' and 'Science and Research', he suggests 'Try Not To Think About It!' One of his few remarks on the subject is presented as a joke: 'things like brushing your teeth – Proctor and Gamble, they make a lot of coal for that stuff [toothpaste] and they blind puppies, but I try not to think about it when I'm brushing my teeth!' Barry agrees that the environment is a subject 'for the future, really'. In the case of the German and Czech groups, where there was slightly more talk about these issues, marginalisation takes the form of downplaying the significance of environmental problems compared to the problems encountered in other domains, most notably *Economics*. One sees this in a passage from the Lübeck group. The discussion has followed the proposed building of a technologically pioneering high-speed rail-link ('Transrapid') which was to have passed near Lübeck but which was scuppered by environmental concerns. Wolfgang and Jürgen interpret this as part of a broader pattern:

- J: In France they've got the TGV, which goes even faster, over 300km/h ... Here we just have the ICE which ambles along ...
- W: That's right, but that's also because ... in France, for example, the Greens have no influence, or hardly any influence. If the Greens in France had the same kind of support or lobby that they have here then it wouldn't have gone through.
- N: I think it's also to do with the fact that Germany is so densely populated and that so many villages are passed through ... [W: yeah], and on open land you can also build faster.
- J: That seems to be the case. Although I also think that the Greens and the environmental parties have a great deal of influence on the economy. And they've throttled the economy and have created lots of problems. If one thinks for example of the airport here in Lübeck, the Greens and the environmental associations have always put a lot of spanners in the building process. There were these toads or something, a family of toads living nearby and the building project had to be stopped because of it, and ... And so a large number of jobs couldn't be created. Because a pair of cranes had built a nest there ...
- W: Protection of the environment is very important to us, but ... you can't live off grass and nature alone. We're not cows who can just feed off grass. And we can't live just off tourism here either.
- JW: Why are the Greens so strong here?
- W: They began as a protest party ... back at the end of the sixties ...
- J: I think with the Greens, there's a lot of people there who have protected positions ... [W: yeah] ... officials or teachers, or professions like analyst, judge, psychiatrist and what not, and they don't have many worries about the future ... [W: right] because they're financially protected or because they've got the economic circumstances that allow them to afford it. A father who's got two children and both he and his wife are unemployed, he's simply not going to understand that sixty jobs can't be created due to a pair of cranes. And the same holds for the whole country, it's not just in Lübeck.
- N: But as a counterweight I think the Greens aren't bad at all. It's a good thing that not everything's paved over and sacrificed to economic interests.
- J: Sure, there are other opinions ... Personally this is my opinion, but that's democracy, there are different views ...
- N: I certainly don't agree with everything. The pair of cranes is completely irrelevant. But I do think that one mustn't sacrifice everything to economic interests. It's important that nature is ... you need to weigh it all out. The Autobahn that's being laid out now in the south of Lübeck ...
- J: The A20, the Autobahn that goes all the way to Poland, that's taken ten years, and it's extremely important of course for the infrastructure of eastern Germany, that all the lorries can speed through and don't have to come into the city ...
- W: The alternative to the Autobahn would be to build a new wall, twice as high, to seal oneself off. So, everything which comes from the forests, not just Poland but places beyond, Russia and the Baltic states, all of that runs along this Autobahn and around Lübeck. All the heavy goods used to pass through Lübeck, it was a major problem. We see it very clearly today, particularly Monday mornings and Friday afternoons, in some districts of the city there's hardly any traffic any more. Previously you needed half an hour to go three kilometres on some streets because they were all blocked with commuters and heavy-goods vehicles passing through.

The interventions of Wolfgang and Jürgen here both work to downplay the significance of environmental problems compared to economic ones, with the toads and cranes symbolising the triviality of environmental concerns next to human unemployment. Only those who are

sheltered from economic realities – those with protected jobs – would take environmental problems seriously. Niklas tries more than one counter-argument, but neither Wolfgang nor Jürgen really engages with what he is saying, and the discussion of the Autobahn with which the passage concludes involves economic arguments only. Problems to do with pollution or environmental destruction make no further appearance in the interview.

The marginalisation of these problems in this way is evident across the German and Czech interviews. Uwe and Rainer in Würzburg, discussing measures mentioned on the radio to reduce fine-particulate pollution, immediately think about what their impact will be on the economy, of ‘all the euros that’ll have to go on that.’ Peter in Kassel meets Dieter’s approval when he argues that the media have blown the issue of fine-particulate pollution out of proportion: ‘The problem with fine particulates – we’ve had that for ages. It was never talked about and now all of a sudden the EU has introduced some regulation – which isn’t backed up with fines, so it just limps along ... But now suddenly everyone in all the newspapers, in all the TV news reports, everywhere fine-particulate pollution is being talked about, a Sunday car ban is suddenly mentioned, etc. etc. ... [D: There’s been this EU regulation since 1999] Now after six years it all blows up because a few values have been overshot, values which were always being overshot anyway ...’. Sebastian subverts the problem with the surprising information that ‘a smoker who smokes at home breathes in more fine particulates than someone on a heavily used road.’ Regulation is considered by all participants as ‘sensible’, but there is a sense that one should not make a drama of the problem. When Zdeněk in Ostrava talks about the visible improvement in pollution levels in the city, he concedes it is ‘terribly important’ but feels that the Green Party rather exaggerates the problems; Marek follows this by arguing that the reason for these improvements is the decline of local industry, with all the unemployment this involves: ‘That’s connected to the fact that lots of firms and factories doing manufacturing and heavy industry have died out, and no-one has come in who could employ those people. Like Josef said, 80% of people here worked manually. They’d carry on working but they’ve got nowhere to go. Nowhere to go.’

Whereas the significance of the problems associated with our three principal domains – *Economics, Society and the Law*, and *Relations between Peoples* – is never seriously doubted by any participants in discussion, the seriousness of these problems to do with what one might, if it were better developed, call the *Quality of Life* domain tends to be doubted by at least some participants whenever they are mentioned. One sees this particularly clearly in

the German and Czech cases; in the British case, so little problematisation of this kind takes place in these interviews that the marginalisation is almost total.

## Overview

The argument of this chapter has been that, when invited to talk about problems in public life and when given a few prompts to react to, our interview participants were able to develop a coordinated discussion using a series of shared concerns to orient them. There was considerable consistency across the groups in the kinds of problem evoked, and evidence of widely shared discursive competence for at least three domains of problems. It has been argued that the fluidity seen in the articulation and discussion of these problem domains was in contrast to the rather more disjointed efforts to be found in connection with other problématiques, as visible in the ignoring or the awkward acknowledgement of certain prompt-cards and peer interventions. This diversity of outcomes makes it possible to distinguish with some confidence a series of problem-areas which may properly be thought of as ‘common’, and therefore to claim considerable empirical plausibility for the idea of a ‘political common’. To be sure, this political common is by no means a definitively determined entity, and the problems associated with *Economics, Society and the Law* and *Relations between Peoples* undoubtedly do not exhaust the ways in which common political problems might be constructed. There are problems which were articulated only sporadically in these discussions, such as environmental pollution, and aspects of life which were not discussed at all, such as gender relations, which amongst different social groups or in different spatio-temporal contexts might be problematised in depth. There are also the ambiguities of interpretation which are characteristic of all empirical study, in particular the study of discursive practice. It is, however, a political common with enough clearly defined features to proceed to explore these in greater depth.

The consistency with which common problems are put forward in these discussions seems to speak against an assumption of citizen apathy. ‘Depoliticisation’, it seems, cannot be understood simply as indifference towards matters of common concern.<sup>23</sup> Grievances

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<sup>23</sup> In their study of the US, Hibbing and Theiss-Morse suggest that ordinary citizens care deeply about political *processes* but that their preferences on *policy* are quite weak (John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse, *Stealth Democracy: Americans’ Beliefs about how Government Should Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)). However, this second category of theirs (‘policy preferences’) fails to distinguish between views on the policies to be adopted and views directly on the substantive problems deemed in need of

remain easily articulated, and they are assumed to be shared with others rather than merely private. Nor does one find reason to support a Schumpeterian account of the incapacity of non-elites to engage in substantive political issues.<sup>24</sup> As has been suggested, and as should become further evident in the following chapters, one does not need to be of the inclination to romanticise ‘everyday life’ or ‘real people’ in order to find a considerable degree of political competence in these discussions – if one understands competence in the way we have chosen. In the political-psychology literature, competence or ‘sophistication’ tends to be understood in ways that are easily quantified: in terms of cross-topic and cross-temporal consistency in polling responses (ideological constraint, and the presence of ‘attitudes’ rather than ‘non-attitudes’) or in terms of the capacity to demonstrate knowledge of the purely know-that kind by reproducing elite messages and publicly recognised facts.<sup>25</sup> Treating competence as an individual phenomenon, and one to be measured against the standards of the ‘elites’, these approaches tend all too easily to lead to the abandonment of any meaningful idea of popular sovereignty. Even scholars who wish to emphasise the capacity of ordinary citizens to hold opinions tend to take as their puzzle how this is achieved *in spite of* their lack of relevant knowledge.<sup>26</sup> If there is a puzzle at all, one might see it rather as why certain individuals are willing to denigrate the competence that they do have by declaring themselves too busy to keep track of political issues. In the face of a rich ability to articulate common problems, this would be the more surprising phenomenon.<sup>27</sup>

Rejecting competence as it is understood in political psychology, one may likewise distance oneself from the tendency amongst deliberative democrats, albeit less individualistically and generally with less resignation, to conceive competence against an

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address. In our interviews the richness of the latter comes through clearly, while the former will be dealt with separately in Chapter 5.

<sup>24</sup> Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*, p.257 and p.262, that for the average citizen, ‘mere assertion, often repeated, counts more than rational argument,’ and that the typical citizen ‘drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyzes in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again.’ For a review of such arguments, see Lynn M. Sanders, ‘Against Deliberation’, *Political Theory*, 25/3 (1997).

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion in Chapter 2. Relevant examples are Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*; Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1996); and the statistics-based contributions to Stephen L. Elkin and Karol Edward Soltan (eds.), *Citizen Competence and Democratic Institutions* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the literature on heuristics, e.g. Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, *Reasoning and Choice*.

<sup>27</sup> The definitive study on this is Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics*. In our interviews some such comments arose – Ali in Lübeck was not alone in declaring that ‘we’re so busy I think with our own lives that we don’t have time to follow foreign and domestic news ... we’ve got hard work to do, 14 or 15 hours a day, and families to think about.’ For further consideration of how participants and non-participants reacted to the word ‘politics’ itself, see the Methodological Appendix.

ideal which rarely manifests itself. This too can have elitist implications, discrediting styles of argumentation which do not conform to a certain model of rationality.<sup>28</sup> Instead, taking competence as the capacity to elaborate discussion in coordination with peers – practical knowledge of the know-how as well as the know-that kind – one does not run up against the need to validate what one finds against an absolute standard, and can join those who adopt a talk-centred approach to citizenship in suggesting that ‘people aren’t so dumb’.<sup>29</sup> This is not, of course, to propose that one accept uncritically whatever is to be found in lay discourse. But to the extent that one objects to the kind of discursive practice that one observes, either on moral or political grounds, the task is then, as will be argued further in Chapter 6, not to seek its exclusion from the political process, but to engage in a political endeavour to remould it.

The intention in speaking of a *political* bond was to investigate whether substantive problems may be substituted for alternatives such as interests, cultural markers or values as the focal point of the common. What has been observed in this chapter lends some backing to this perspective, in that the capacity to articulate and elaborate common problems in need of address seems evident in the empirical material. The next chapter explores how the concept may be taken further.

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Sanders, 'Against Deliberation'.

<sup>29</sup> The phrase is from Gamson, *Talking Politics*.

# Chapter 4

## The Political Subjects, Their Opponents and Counterparts

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If the articulation of common problems is to form the basis for a collective bond, it is clear that special importance is attached to the kinds of social grouping invoked in discussion of such problems, and the relationships posited between them. Problems bring people together and push them apart, and both dynamics need to be accommodated in a political conceptualisation of the bond. This question of *collective positioning* forms the focus of the present chapter. Our interest is in the various social categories which arise in connection with each domain, and the associations made with these. These are discursive patterns in the same sense as described in Chapter 3 and, in theoretical terms, Chapter 2: routinised ways of speaking which, though always susceptible to renunciation by individual speakers, nevertheless recur widely across the discussions, and whose adoption is generally ‘taken for granted’ rather than marked by hesitation or reflexivity.

The discussions, as always, are treated not so much as a glimpse at individuals (though naturally names will become familiar) but as a site of discursive practice. What gets said is interesting not because it indicates the ‘identities’ of participants, but because it is a pool in which one finds accumulated some of the discursive resources commonly drawn upon for collective positioning, and whose political implications one wants to study. Two broad questions are of interest in particular. The first is whether these acts of positioning are consistent with a political bond of any kind – that is, whether they exhibit the basic tolerance of ‘the other’ which is necessary for a democratic political community. The second is whether they are supportive of a European polity – that is, whether they carry a transnational dimension, and in how far this is specifically ‘European’. Following the logic of exploratory research, the aims are double: on the one hand to use the empirical material so as to further develop the concepts associated with the ideal of a political bond; on the other hand to use these same concepts to make a reading of the contemporary situation so as to consider how far it corresponds to that ideal.

## Sensitising Concepts for the Study of Collective Positioning

An extended extract from the interview conducted in the Czech town of Liberec provides a starting-point for laying out the concepts that will be used. At the point where we join it, the discussion has been running for approximately fifty minutes, with regular interventions from each of Václav, Onřej, Zdeněk and Radek. The focus has been on problems of unemployment, job insecurity and the inadequacies and possible abuse of the benefits system – issues that can be associated with the *Economics* domain. Problems to do with wages and working conditions are drawn into the discussion over the course of this passage. An intervention from Onřej conjures up the figure of an unemployed person faced with the dilemma of whether he should accept a low-paid job:

O: ... You've got to remember though, if someone gets CK4500 on benefits or CK6000 in wages, that's a difference of just 1500. Who's going to ... what will-power is going to make you work for 6000 if the state gives you 4500?

Z: That's exactly it, a young person is going to prefer to be on support than to go out and work for 6000. As a young person he'll still get hold of a side-job. So he's better off like that than if he went out and did something, isn't he.

V: And on top of everything he'd have to get up at 6 in the morning. Like this, he doesn't have to get up at all. [Z: Hang on, at 6 he needs to be at work already ...] So he gets up at 5 then ...

O: But it's the same with everything. Working time, which in the Czech Republic is now 181 hours a month ... [Z: Yeah, we've got plenty of hours ...] We have the most in the whole of Europe. But the problem is, like all of us know, it's 181 hours which are obligatory and then on top of that you have overtime. People have to go and work at the weekends too ...

Z: ... Those supermarkets etc., they run non-stop, right, from Monday to Sunday, it's non-stop ...

R: ... People don't get much pay for it at all ...

O: ... Of course, it's not enough pay to live on ... [R: ... It's not ...]

Z: ... They've got a bit of security, but not much ...

V: Well, in exchange for that security they've got masses of hours to do. [O: ... Of course ...]

Z: Nothing's for free. And all these entrepreneurs who've come in from outside, they know we're a cheap source of labour ... [O: ... Of course ...] so therefore they throng to the country. They make sure the wages don't go up fast so they don't have to dip into their pockets.

R: Exactly, and there are companies where when they're behind schedule they give you the chance to do overtime, so you do get more money but you're still not going to get what you'd need to satisfy you. And there are some companies which ...

Z: You don't have to do overtime and they pay you fairly, but you have to have qualifications ...

R: My wife for example, works in BabyCup, and if they don't get the goods ready and send them out ...

- Z: They'd get a salary, but not as high as if they got the goods out on time ...
- R: ... Basic wages, but they don't pay them overtime. And I say: 'Why are you working there so long? I wouldn't do it, I'd go home at 3.30.' And they whisper, 'if you don't like it ...'
- Z: There's another five or ten waiting at the gate ... [R: ... yeah, exactly ...] That's always the way it goes, cos that's how it is here.
- R: The bosses don't value people. If they valued them, they'd give them 50% higher wages.
- Z: Why should they value them if they know that outside there are another 15 or so waiting for each job? [R: ... Exactly, that's why ...] Why would they cry for you?
- O: They should pay workers holiday-time like in the west ... [Z: Yeah, that too ...] [...]
- JW: Can these problems be prevented somehow ...?
- O: No ... first of all, these are companies from abroad which have come here to make a profit out of the cheap labourforce. And as soon as that cheap labour runs out, they'll pack up here and move on.
- Z: Because that's not a factory that manufactures ... That's the problem, they just assemble here, they don't produce anything. If they produced something then you'd have some certainty they weren't going to run off ...
- O: It's a clear example ... the mistake is the government's, because they give them tax holidays. There are firms here which ... Škoda, my suspicion is that it's been only this year that they've started paying taxes, I don't know ... it's ten years that Škoda-Volkswagen have been running, isn't it ten? ... [Z: Because they expanded, yeah.] So in order to get Volkswagen to come here for Škoda, they got a ten-year tax holiday from the state and Škoda doesn't pay a crown in tax, for ten years. That's a huge amount of money. So clearly they enticed them over, they paid, but if they do that for every company then the state really isn't going to make any money. And then they behave towards people ... [Z: Yeah, it's the same in the Mošnov industrial zone ...] It's the same. They get given so many subsidies ...
- Z: They can pick and choose now in the industrial zone, they don't want to employ Czechs any more, Slovaks go there now, to Denso<sup>1</sup>, it's all just Slovaks.
- R: Yeah, Slovaks do it for a certain amount of money ...
- Z: ... Under their conditions ...
- O: ... Yeah, there isn't as much work where they are as there is here ...
- Z: ... Because there they haven't got work and those conditions suit them, since that way they get more than if they were still over there. [R: ... yeah ...] [V: Thanks to the exchange rate of course ...]
- O: The problem is, here there's 10% unemployment, and there's plenty of people who aren't even registered ... [Z: ... registered ...] And politicians don't admit to it ... [Z: ... That's just the tip of it, those 10% ...] That's just the tip of it. I'd calculate that here there's 12% or 13% unemployment, definitely. There are plenty of people who don't even go to register at the job centre. [Z: Yeah ... look how many homeless people there are, they're not registered anywhere.] Those are things which the state doesn't admit, they just show off numbers to the world. [Z: Of course.] For them it's clear that every number which is visible, whether it's 20% or however much – which would be awful ... they assume there's no hidden people there, they take it as a clear figure for unemployed, that it's definitely 10%, so they say 'yeah, people are doing fine,' but the reality is completely different.

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<sup>1</sup> A manufacturer of advanced technologies for the car industry.

We shall postpone until the next chapter on the *political project* two issues which are very much to the fore in this text: how the problems under discussion are explained, and how far they are assumed susceptible to remedy. Instead, the focus here is on the references one sees to those affected by these problems, and to those who stand as their opponents. As regards the first, several instances in this passage highlight the difficulties of those in low-paid and insecure jobs, forced to work long hours with badly paid overtime. Factory work is highlighted, with Radek's reference to his wife forging a direct link to the participants themselves. Onřej's parenthetical 'like all of us know' positions the group as sharing in the problem of long hours and overtime, and the connection is affirmed by the usage of 'we' and 'you' pronouns. These people, it is suggested, live in the real world, where low wages and unemployment are major problems, rather than in the artificial realm of state statistics. They are without special advantages, and do not have the qualifications with which to find more attractive work. Though in this extract they are not summarised in a single term, one could easily adopt the term which Onřej uses elsewhere, 'ordinary people'. The 'we' also has a national dimension: Czech workers are distinguished from Slovak ones, though both represent a 'cheap source of labour', and both face the problem of being constrained to take undesirable jobs.

Those described in this way as being affected by the problems articulated can be termed the *political subjects*. They are the social groupings that speakers construct so as to define their relationship with the problems under discussion. While they do not constitute 'the identity' of the participants (since speakers invoke different subject-positions at different moments in discussion as they move from one set of problems to another), they are categories and implicit groupings towards which the participants orient themselves. The subjects are *political* in several senses. Firstly, they are defined in relation to the problems of the political common which were set out in the previous chapter. These are problems which are treated as shared rather than purely individual, and for which speakers demonstrate a transindividual competence when handling them in discussion. The subjects are thus political by association with the shared substantive problems that could form the basis for political community. Secondly, the subjects are political in the sense that they are the kinds of imagined groupings that political actors (such as parties or social movements) might want to use to mobilise people to their cause, or which they might seek to redefine so as to make everyday discursive practice more compatible with their cause. The subjects, as common discursive formulations, represent a political resource on the basis of which collective

political action may be organised – though the success of this will depend also on the kinds of discursive resource to be examined in the next chapter.

The construction of political subjects involves at the same time the construction of those who differ from the subjects. ‘We’-description is always an act of positioning, and requires the evocation of ‘others’ so as to clarify and give meaning to the ‘we’. Demarcated in this passage as *opponents* of the subjects, one sees in particular the entrepreneurs and companies which ‘come in from outside’ and offer bad conditions to their workers. Supermarkets and manufacturers are mentioned, taking advantage of the attractive situation which the state affords them in the form of subsidies and tax holidays. There are ‘bosses [who] don’t value people’, as expressed by the low wages and lack of holiday-time they offer, and by how they compel their workers to do overtime. They are in control and they know it – they only have to ‘whisper’ a reminder of this. These companies are here to make a profit, to fill their pockets. As soon as the profits dry up ‘they’ll pack up here and move on’. Because such companies are only assembling goods, they are always liable to ‘run off’, leaving people unemployed. It is the actions of these opponents which exacerbate or cause problems for the subjects, and it is only through some kind of settlement with these opponents, consensual or imposed, that the problems which are articulated may be addressed.

The possibility that others within the political community may be positioned as opponents, without this being fatal for the collective bond, is one of the essential characteristics of our political-bond ideal. Such a bond maintains the possibility of accommodating political disagreement and the absence of diffuse solidarity, so long as this disagreement does not lead to calls for the banishment of opponents from the community altogether. It is a perspective which draws on Mouffe’s ‘agonistic’ conception of politics, in which the life of the political community involves multiple acts of the construction of an ‘us’ and a ‘them’. Unlike in Carl Schmitt’s conception of the political, this is understood not in terms of a binary distinction between ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’. For Mouffe, a key distinction must be made between two kinds of positioning of opponents: that which casts them as enemies, with whom a purely hostile, antagonistic relationship unfolds, and that which casts them as ‘adversaries’, with whom an agonistic relationship is maintained and with whom the life in common is possible. ‘[A]gonism is the we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognise the legitimacy of their opponents. They are “adversaries” not enemies. This means that, while in conflict, they see themselves as belonging to the same political

association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place. We could say that the task of democracy is to transform antagonism into agonism.’<sup>2</sup>

The distinction between two kinds of opponent, enemy and adversary, is a useful sensitising idea for our purposes, though we appropriate it in a certain way. It seems fair to assume that Mouffe’s distinction is elaborated with movement politics in mind, and is intended to conceptualise how the holders of opposing political ideologies must regard one another so as to be consistent with agonistic democracy, and the kinds of ideological position which can be ruled out as anti-democratic. Although her concept of exclusion is not always clear,<sup>3</sup> and although her terminology refers explicitly to categories of *people* (friends, enemies and adversaries), her perspective focuses mainly on the inclusion and exclusion of *ideas*, and of people only insofar as they associate themselves with these ideas.<sup>4</sup> This is a little different from the kinds of positioning which one finds in everyday discourse of the kind we are looking at, where it is very often descriptions of people and their actions, not explicitly their ideas, which are to the fore. In the extract above, for example, it is groups such as ‘bosses’ or ‘entrepreneurs’ which are positioned as opponents, rather than political ideas concerning how the life in common should be organised. Indeed, it may be that this linkage to categories of people makes possible, or at least augments, the very sense of injustice with which these problems of the political common are articulated. To ‘put a face’ on a problem is to make it tangible, to give it urgency, and to suggest courses of action which might be necessary to remedy it, whereas to treat it as an abstraction (such as ‘poverty’ or ‘hardship’) may be to neutralise and normalise it.<sup>5</sup> We shall thus give a rather literal sense to the categories of friends (political subjects), enemies and adversaries which accepts them as categories of people. While this suggests we are using Mouffe’s terms with a slight difference of emphasis, this does not do violence to the political philosophy in which they operate. After all, the ideas-people distinction is a fuzzy one. In particular, whenever social categories are invoked, an array of category knowledge is brought with them (e.g. concerning ‘what bosses do’, what they ‘represent’, under what conditions they thrive, etc.), and it is in

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<sup>2</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political*, p.20.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Arash Abizadeh, ‘Does Collective Identity Presuppose an Other? On the Alleged Incoherence of Global Solidarity’, *American Political Science Review*, 99/1 (2005).

<sup>4</sup> Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> See Gamson, *Talking Politics*, p.7 for a similar point.

these clusters of assumptions, and the broader domains in which they are embedded, that ideas return to the fore.<sup>6</sup>

In empirical terms, determining whether in a given text those positioned as opponents are being treated as *adversaries* or as *enemies* is always a matter of interpretation. Some guiding criteria might be as follows. Where the behaviour of the opponents is assumed to be contingent on particular circumstances and therefore potentially susceptible to change or ‘correction’, the sense that they should be engaged with is likely to be stronger, and so one may infer their status as adversaries. Where on the other hand the behaviour of opponents is essentialised, such that it is assumed that their conduct will always be the same because it is a function of their fundamental nature (perhaps with connotations that this nature is not rational), this is likely to be accompanied by the sense that there is little point in trying to engage with them, and therefore their status as enemies may be inferred. Relatedly, the level of threat associated with the two kinds of opponent may be distinguished: those that compromise the well-being of the subjects, and about whom a sense of irritation is conveyed, can be thought of as adversaries, in contrast to those from whom the threat is of a more fundamental, existential kind, who are described more with a sense of fear than irritation, and of whom there is the sense therefore that they need to be banished. In this passage from the Liberec group, the opponents (the companies and their bosses) are portrayed as causing hardship rather than a threat to existence. There is also the sense that they are merely doing what any rational subject would do in their position, that is, taking advantage of a favourable situation. Notice Zdeněk’s comment in response to Radek (to which Radek in turn agrees): ‘why would they value them [the workers] if they know that outside there are another 15 or so waiting for each job?’ There may be little that can be done to tackle the opponents, but that is because of the assumed nature of the circumstances (wage competition, an accommodating state, etc.) rather than because of the assumed nature of the opponents themselves. The category of ‘adversary’ therefore seems to be a more appropriate one here. As will be seen below, this is characteristic of the *Economics* domain more generally.

Mouffe’s account of the political conjures up a rather sparse terrain peopled by friends, adversaries and enemies. For the ontological reasons put forward with Ernesto Laclau in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*,<sup>7</sup> she places a very strong emphasis on social and political conflict. Her definition of ‘the political’ points to ‘the dimension of antagonism ...

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<sup>6</sup> Conversation analysts have shown particular sensitivity to how speakers’ selection of social categories draws accompanying ideational features into the discussion. See e.g. Charles Antaki, 'Identity as an Achievement and as a Tool', in Charles Antaki and Sue Widdicombe (eds.), *Identities in Talk* (Sage: London, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 2001).

constitutive of human societies’,<sup>8</sup> and the role she assigns to democracy is that of the ‘taming’ or ‘domesticating’ of such conflict.<sup>9</sup> Though their existence is not explicitly ruled out, there are no fourth groupings of political importance in her account, beyond the friend and the two kinds of opponent. The emphasis is on alliance and opposition, and the container within which the agonistic struggle takes place is generally unproblematised. The notion of a political bond, on the other hand, does raise the prospect of at least one other politically significant kind of grouping. This would be what one might call the ‘counterpart’. Counterparts, strangers living outside the home environment, would be linked to the subjects in that they are assumed to be confronted with the same problem(s). They share in the same predicament, though they live ‘there’ rather than ‘here’ – with these locations being a matter for definition in the text. The bond between subjects and counterparts is not necessarily one of active solidarity, nor are they necessarily engaged together in collective political action – the counterpart is something less than a ‘friend’, though may become one – but nor is the relationship between them assumed to be of a ‘zero-sum’ kind whereby the one can benefit only at the expense of the other – the counterpart is something more than an enemy or adversary, though again may become one if circumstances change. The significance of counterparts, from a political-bond perspective, lies in how their assumed existence serves to make sense of the political community. The evocation of counterparts broadens the reach of the political common, such that the problems of which it is comprised are seen to be facing not just an immediate ‘we’, an ‘our party’ quite narrowly defined, but a larger, more dispersed ensemble of ‘people like us’. Where counterparts are assumed to exist, a wider political bond becomes a possibility.

A political bond in the European context would require then that at least some of those living outside the home environment, in other EU countries let us say, be assumed to be facing the same (or basically similar) problems. This assumption of shared predicament would not have to extend to ‘all Europeans’ of course – for this would be to do away with the agonistic dimension all together – but it would have to extend to at least some groups associated with other European countries. If counterparts were assumed to exist only within the home environment (in ‘our country’, for instance) but not elsewhere, then people in other countries would most likely be seen either as wholly irrelevant – no bond of any kind would

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<sup>8</sup> Mouffe, *On the Political*, p.9.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, p.100: ‘if we accept that relations of power are constitutive of the social, then the main question for democratic politics is not how to eliminate power but how to constitute forms of power more compatible with democratic values.’ And p.101: ‘The novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of this us/them opposition – which is an impossibility – but the different way in which it is established.’

exist with them – or as enemies to be excluded from the community, or as permanent adversaries against whom the struggle is constant. While the existence of adversaries is by no means contradictory of a political bond, if they were always demarcated in national categories then a political community coextensive with the EU would be unlikely to have common-sense plausibility.

The notion of the ‘counterpart’ is a conceptual one which does not translate easily into readily discernible features of the text. Lacking the immediacy of friends, enemies and adversaries, counterparts are not often explicitly constructed in discussion (though they do appear, as will be seen in the course of this chapter). While ‘counterpart’ does seem to serve a useful sensitising function, a more empirical phenomenon for study is the nature of comparisons and references to places. An important precondition for the assumption of counterparts is that other countries in the EU be treated not just as unitary *actors* but also as *environments*, as locations where events unfold. Whenever, in the discussion of substantive problems, other countries are mentioned as actors (France or ‘the French’, for example), without internal differentiation, then the speaker is emphasising territorial boundaries which cut across the EU and treating these as the relevant facts in play. While such a perspective of course does not necessarily lead to the fragmentation of political community – indeed, it is likely to have a place in any federal or decentralised polity – it would need to be counterbalanced by other acts of positioning which do not foreground these territorial divisions, else any sense of the common would be lost. Moreover, not only must other EU countries be treated – at least in part – as environments, but they must be treated as *comparable* environments, in which problems arise and are encountered in a *similar* fashion to those experienced by the subjects in the home environment. Reference to the conditions found in other countries only for the purpose of *contrast*, i.e. to emphasise dissimilarity, would again be to undercut any sense of the common. Only where there is this assumption of similar environments does the conceptual notion of the counterpart become possible, and thus the political bond as a basis for political community.

By highlighting the importance of comparisons, one can make a link back to the empirical material. One can look at the places with which comparisons are drawn because experiences ‘there’ are held to be largely similar to those ‘here’ within the home environment with regard to a particular problem or set of problems.<sup>10</sup> In the Liberec passage above, the

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<sup>10</sup> In scientific language or formal logic, comparison involves three elements: X is compared to Y with respect to Z. In everyday talk comparisons are likely to be looser in appearance, but the principle is much the same: a location X is compared to a location Y with respect to a problem Z. One needs to remember that spontaneous

home environment seems to be the Czech Republic, as indicated by the figure for hours worked and the suggestion that companies are ‘thronging’ to the country. Emphasis is particularly on developments in the neighbourhood of Liberec itself, with a number of references to local industry. One sees some comparison with conditions in Slovakia, and a numerical comparison with ‘Europe’ on the question of hours worked, but neither is much developed. Here are two further extracts from the Liberec discussion:

- O: You’ve got the state boasting about economic figures, how the economy is prospering, how we’ve got lots of exports rather than imports, how everything’s functioning as it should, but the problem is, a particular section of people, whether it’s firms or entrepreneurs, keep hold of that money for themselves, and it only gets through to the working class [Z: ... which is the majority ...] awfully slowly. For us, the level hasn’t gone up in the last three years. I’d say it’s gone down. The official figures say that we’re getting better, but unfortunately that’s not what people are seeing.
- Z: They say that wages are going up, but whenever someone gets into my car they’re complaining about how little money they’ve got ...
- O: Exactly ... the average wage is meant to be CK18,000 ...
- Z: But that’s too high because they take the average from the highest strata, not overall ...
- O: ... You have to be a director or something, where the wages are completely different. I don’t know how it is in the west, but I think this difference in wages like we’ve got here is really bad.
- R: They raise the price of everything, but they’d never align the wages that normal people get. [...]
- V: Now Ireland for example, that was a really poor country and it got into the EU and look at them now, they’re doing well. They’re rich now. [O: Wait ...] Even those who work in factories ... I went there to pick apples ... the rents are high but they get by ok. They’re even able to buy cars. You’re not going to get a car here.
- R: Here you have to save your whole life in order to buy a car ...
- O: There’s a programme on television now, ‘Here in Europe’ [*U nás v Evropě*] – I don’t know whether you’ve seen it – where they show how families in Europe live. They showed Austrians, now they’ve shown French. They get an income of CK150,000 per month, and 28,000 goes on food alone. Those are sums which you don’t see here, they’re really somewhere else. And leases and rents on a tenement flat are €1500, that’s CK40000, that’s only a quarter of the 150,000. Here, to get a lease and a tenement flat, it’s more than your wages ...
- R: Yeah, you wouldn’t have enough even to mortgage. [O: ... It’s just wrong ...] They don’t give you loans, nothing ...
- Z: Here no-one gives you anything if you haven’t got enough to give security for it. [...]

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comparisons generally have a performative aspect: speakers are rarely making just an objective assessment of how the home environment compares to others but they are *positioning* the two, stressing similarities or differences as they would *like* these to be noted. In social psychology there is a literature on ‘social comparisons’ – see for instance Jerry Suls, René Martin, and Ladd Wheeler, ‘Social Comparison: Why, with Whom, and with What Effect?’, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 11/5 (2002); Serge Guimond (ed.), *Social Comparison and Social Psychology: Understanding Cognition, Intergroup Relations and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Applications of this to the question of transnational comparisons within Europe have been few, but for one example see Rupert Brown and Gabi Haeger, ‘“Compared to What?” Comparison Choice in an International Context’, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 29/1 (1999).

JW: You were talking about Ireland ... what's the comparison ...?

V: It's impossible to compare them, it's impossible ...

O: To compare with the Czech Republic ... I think it's impossible to compare any west-European country with us. We can compare ourselves at most with the old eastern bloc, like Poland, Hungary, Slovakia ... [Z: ... Though all of them are starting to overtake us ...] They're all starting to have it better, all the eastern countries. Of course, Belarus and those countries certainly not, but the Poles and the Slovaks are starting to draw away from us. [R: I think so too.]

Z: Even though they have lower ... [O: ... A lower standard of living ...] ... the crown is a bit stronger than theirs ...

O: But generally, I go to Slovakia, I've got family there, and I know that the Slovaks have a standard of living which is even lower than ours, but again the numbers say that it's better. I think the better the numbers are, the worse it is for ordinary people.

Here one finds several references to the transnational context. But before examining them, let us look at what happens a little later in the discussion when Václav picks up his reference to Ireland again, and once more draws the opposition of Onřej and Zdeněk:

V: They got into the EU and look where they are today. I've been there, I know. [O: But to compare Ireland with the Czech Republic ...] I'm saying, I've been there, you understand, and I'm comparing it with here in Czechia. [O: But it's different ...] It's very different! ...

O: If you think they're doing so well because they're in the EU ... [Z: It's not that ...] It's not that. [...]

V: I'm saying, I've been there and what they're able to buy with their wages and what people here who work in factories buy ...

O: You don't need to go to Ireland, it's enough to go to Germany, France – states which are really ... [Z: States which are right next to us ...] ... all those western countries. Whether the Irish have it a bit better than let's say the Spanish or the Portuguese or those states, you can't compare them in economic terms, those are massive differences compared to when you go to the east, to Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and further down. There's plenty of countries you can compare with each other – the Swedes, the Finns, northern countries ... you might think there'd be a lot of poverty there ... [Z: Gets a bit cold there from time to time...] but they're amongst the most advanced countries. ...

Z: Except they've had 50 years to work with and we've only had 10 years ...

O: Of course, but what's worse is that those ten years haven't been positive ... [Z: ... yeah, yeah ...] In fact, we're mostly complaining about these last ten years. If things were always improving it'd be fine, but if we look at the 1990s, it was one great fraud here ...

Z: Whoever had sharp elbows, he ladled it in and then went off to sunbathe.

O: Now it's stabilised a bit, but the gap I'd say is twenty years. If western Europe stood still then I'd say it'd still be twenty years before we're on their level.

In these passages one sees two kinds of positioning taking place. On the one hand one sees repeated contrasts with the economic conditions projected onto western Europe, where it is

assumed that certain familiar problems do not exist, or exist in much reduced form. Income levels in western-European countries are assumed to be far higher in relation to the cost of living than they are 'here', and factory workers are able to live comfortably to the extent that they can buy cars. Economic corruption is implied to be much less of a problem in these countries, whereas 'here' the story has been of 'one great fraud'. 'Here' the subjects are most unlikely to be given a loan when they need one, with the implication (voiced elsewhere in the discussion) that in western countries loans are easier to secure. Overall, the economic gap with those countries is as much as several decades, and differences *between* those countries are played down (see Onřej's comment that 'whether the Irish have it a bit better than let's say the Spanish or the Portuguese or those states', the 'massive differences' are with the east). All participants seem to be agreed on this point. Even Václav, who presents his interventions as comparisons rather than contrasts with western Europe, seems just as keen as Onřej and Zdeněk to highlight how fundamentally things are different there. It is explicitly rejected that membership of the EU makes all these countries alike.

On the other hand, in a second act of positioning, other countries in central / eastern Europe are mentioned as places more worthy of comparison, in particular Poland, Hungary and Slovakia. These are places that one 'can compare' with the Czech Republic.<sup>11</sup> They are linked together explicitly by Onřej as 'the east' and 'the old eastern bloc', and implicitly by the contrast-based references to the west-European countries on the one hand and 'Belarus and those countries' on the other. There is some agreement that 'the Poles and the Slovaks' are starting to do better than 'us', but also the sense that there are 'ordinary people' in Slovakia who have a standard of living comparable (though lower) to 'ours', and who may be victims of deceptive official statistics just like 'we' are. This evocation of places worthy of comparison with the home environment because conditions are generally similar is very much of the sort that one looks for as the basis for a political bond. What is problematic from a European perspective of course is that the range of 'comparables', while transnational, is rather less than coextensive with the EU: an east vs west division is emphasised. This, as will be seen, is quite typical of the patterns of positioning one finds amongst the Czech groups in the *Economics* domain.

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<sup>11</sup> Note that the idea that you 'can compare' two things tends, in everyday speech, to imply their assumed similarity, and the idea that two things are 'incomparable' implies their fundamental dissimilarity, despite the fact that logically when one makes a contrast one is doing so also on the basis of a comparison. To some extent we shall follow this everyday usage of the term ourselves: for instance, we shall occasionally use 'comparable' as a noun to mean an environment which, for the problems in question, is held to be *similar* to the home environment.

Over the course of this chapter, we shall look at the three domains *Economics*, *Society and the Law* and *Relations between Peoples* in turn, analysing them for the appearance of subjects, opponents (adversary and enemy), comparable environments and counterparts. The emphasis will be on the common features of the texts from the three country-groups, though inter-country variations are highlighted where these are marked. In addition to the quotations in the main text, supporting quotations which further illustrate a point are included in footnotes.

### Collective Positioning in *Economics*

#### ***A) The Political Subjects and their Opponents***

The formulations for the political subjects noted in the Liberec discussion recur widely across the groups when problems to do with *Economics* are articulated. ‘Ordinary people’ is an expression one finds in several of the discussions. A second formulation which recurs across the interviews appears in the following extract from the Norwich discussion. In focus here are the problems associated with supermarkets reducing their prices by importing goods from abroad. The discussion is moving briskly with all participants contributing. Mickey is using Barry to make a point about prices:

M: If Barry here made his own shoes and they were £5 more expensive than the ones that Asda buy in ... Asda, all these supermarkets, are our great friends [sarcasm] aren't they, buying all this cheap produce. What they're doing is, they're crushing, they're crushing people like us, and we don't ever win ...

B: ... The little man, no, he never does, does he ...

M: ... Because the simple fact is, if the little man doesn't have the money he can't get in our taxis, can't afford to go out. If they don't go out, can't afford to get a taxi ... [L: It's an ongoing thing ...] Yeah, so what I'd rather do is I'd rather buy Barry's shoes for £5, £10 more, knowing that I was helping a little man ...

B: Yeah, go to the corner-shop.

JW: When you talk about cheap stuff coming in, where's it coming from?

M: Well what it is, people like ... strawberry farmers, yeah, all the promises from the buyers, from Morrisons ... Now Morrisons are the biggest criminals for doing this, by the way, I'll go on record, and they turn round, what they do is they go up to these people and say 'right, I'll give you x amount for this, that and that, yeah ... You have to make it exclusive to Morrisons for six months, a year, two years, whatever, you have to make it exclusive to us.' They even did it to Bernard Matthews. They went down there – and I've had these people in my cab – they went

down there and they squeezed, squeezed, squeezed. So Bernard Matthews just want to get rid of their stuff. Bernard Matthews isn't going to take a loss on revenue, so what he does is he puts an extra couple of hours on the day, gets rid of the overtime rate, worst working conditions, so these people suffer even more. But they can't just pack their jobs in, they've got wives and kids to feed, or they've got children to feed, or whatever, they've got mortgages. So they carry on working for Bernard Matthews, thinking he's the bastard, when he's not, it's these big supermarkets with their big car-parks that you can never get parked in.

JW: How are they able to get the prices so low?

B: Importing cheap jeans from abroad. China, Taiwan, eastern Europe. We had a big chocolate factory – Mackintosh's – that was sold out to Caleys-Mackintosh, then what did it become after Mackintosh's? Rowntree? ... no.

G: Just given up and shut down.

B: Yeah. You see, we've produced chocolate here for a hundred years, but eastern Europe do it a lot cheaper ...

M: They used to smell lovely as well, didn't they ...

B: Yeah. So that was, again, someone rich has made the buck, moved it totally ... Dyson the cleaner, he's done it, he's moved from Swindon to eastern Europe ...

M: ... Eastern Europe, yeah ...

L: Norwich Union is the same isn't it ...

B: Yeah, the call-centres ...

M: I cancelled everything I had with Norwich Union. Everything.

JW: Do you blame them?

M: Yes I do.

L: I tell you what I think it is, just say for argument's sake they make one million pound this week, they're looking for one million two hundred next week, and that's how they go ... [M & B.: Shareholders.] And they have to find that money. And they don't care how they do it or where they get it from, whether it's produce or whether it's any kind of product whatsoever, they need to find that much more money.

Here the main formulation for the subjects is 'the little man'. The little man comes in various guises: examples seem to be the taxi-driver ('people like us', who have 'noticed a down-turn in our trade'), the person who can no longer afford to get in the back of a taxi to go out, the small producer such as Barry would be if he made shoes, and as represented by Bernard Matthews (a local turkey-producer), or the workers for small producers who end up doing longer hours in worse conditions for less pay, or without a job at all. The formulation is a rather passive one, and the little man is very much a victim – he gets 'crushed', he never wins, and he has a vulnerable family to look after. He is also local (you would find him in the corner-shop), perhaps suggesting his reality and relevance to 'people like us'. The little

people, it seems, also need to look out for each other, hence Mickey's willingness to buy from Barry.

'The little man' and 'the little people' are common formulations for the subjects in the *Economics* domain. In a similar fashion to Mickey, Uwe in Würzburg talks of how the lack of work in the city affects 'us small guys' because 'the little people' in the city generally no longer have enough money to go out, take taxis and give tips. Oliver summarises with a comment based on a simple binary opposition: 'what's happening is the little people are being burdened more and more with costs while the big guys are being relieved of them. The gap's going to widen too.' Amongst the Czech groups, a binary opposition of rich and poor people, or rich and 'normal people', or even just rich and 'people', is common, and a polarisation of the two is often stressed. The Liberec participants use this distinction when talking about the difficulty of getting a mortgage:

R: I wanted a loan, I wanted CK200,000 [c. €7000]. But if you can't show that you get more than CK300,000 in income each year they won't give you anything, because they can't be certain you'll pay it back, even if you yourself know that you'd be able to pay it back. They just won't give it. That's really bad, they don't give people any chance.

O: [...] At the moment there's a rich layer and a poor layer being produced. The middle is disappearing, it's disappearing really quickly. Because someone who has a bit of knowledge and a bit of education swings himself up to the rich ones, and someone who doesn't falls down below. That's what I see ...

R: The rich layer push him down, they don't give him a chance.

Z: It's the same in other countries. There's rich and poor.

The little people lack economic advantages.<sup>12</sup> The little people also, as we have seen, live in the *real* world as opposed to the unreal world of numbers. 'What is money at the end of the day?' asks Mickey. 'It's only figures on a computer screen isn't it. ... Obviously ... when someone gets in the cab we take money to pay our bills, cos that is the real world. Everyday-person-view world. But when you go on a global thing, it's only figures on a computer screen, it's only gold bullion.' 'The western world really only hears what is presented, how those eastern states are going up economically,' says Onřej. 'They really don't realise, because they come here and see we have shops full of goods, but that's completely misleading. If they think Czechs are going out and buying smoked salmon, well they're not.'

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<sup>12</sup> Amongst the Czech groups this includes the option to emigrate: Onřej in Liberec suggests that 'someone who has education and knows different languages can go wherever they want.' To Germany, to Austria – 'to those states', adds Zdeněk. 'We can go to Russia', says Onřej dismissively, reaffirming the difference between east and west.

When the subjects are cast as the ‘little people’, ‘ordinary people’ or ‘normal people’, it is in contrast to those with money. In the Norwich extract above one sees demarcation against ‘the rich’, private companies (the supermarkets Asda and Morrisons, sarcastically referred to as ‘our great friends’) and ‘shareholders’. Barry describes shareholders as ‘different people to us’, and points to the hotel chain Travelodge to illustrate a fellow subject being conned out of her money by the rich: ‘they pay minimum wage, and yet you stay there at £70 a night, and they fill up the hotel and you’ve got some poor girl there who’s on £3.50 an hour. So where does the money go? Shareholders, rich people at the end. Always the same.’<sup>13</sup> ‘This is a great country,’ says Mickey from the same group, ‘I love my country, my heart bleeds red, white and blue, and that’s as simple as that ... But it’s only the working-class people. The rich people, the financial institutions, they turn round and say “how much money can I make from these poor people?”’ Mickey hates McDonald’s: ‘I hate everything they stand for ... They employ spotty-faced teenagers, treat them like crap, promote another spotty-faced teenager who can treat them like crap for the minimum wage, so they can feed us crap.’<sup>14</sup> In the Ostrava discussion, the positioning as regards economic conditions is also frequently versus the Prague elites, who enjoy the profits of a tourist industry and the jobs provided by state institutions. Across the groups, as in the Norwich extract above, large corporations are singled out as one of the main opponents the political subjects have to face. Peter in Kassel demarcates the subjects against ‘the high-up guys’ (*die Hohen*), and observes: ‘everyone keeps harping on at the little man, “you must have less holiday, you must get ill less often, you must accept less money ...”. The companies are earning billions, they’re earning more and more, and they don’t want to surrender any of it. They say “yeah, we’ve made a profit of only 150 billion this year, so we need to lay off another 600 ... no, 6000 people.”’ As he adds a little later, ‘today companies just want to sell things and everything else is irrelevant to them. And the loser is always the little man.’ Hans confirms: ‘Yeah – he pays for it ultimately.’

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<sup>13</sup> Murda in Reading talks of the money which Britain has invested in fighting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq: ‘if you had any money in any of the arms factories, any shares, your shares would have gone up there,’ he says, reaching up to the ceiling, ‘so you’d have made loads of money ... But unfortunately the likes of you and me didn’t have any shares.’

<sup>14</sup> Notice the description here of the worker too: as a ‘spotty-faced teenager’ they cut a pathetic and helpless figure. This is positioning against both those ‘above’ and ‘below’ – more on this below. Mickey describes unskilled immigrants with a similar sense of pathos in an analogous act of positioning: ‘The rich people used to send kids up chimneys and they’re still sending kids up chimneys, but the bigger kids, d’ya know what I mean? ... I tell you what, you find a farmer, not your average “I drive a tractor” farmer, I’m talking about your big concern, they bring these people over, they know they don’t have the right documents, they put them in caravans, they put them in tents. They don’t give a toss, as long as they can make more money ...’.

We have seen then that the subjects are often cast as the little people in opposition to the economically more powerful who are able to dominate and exploit.<sup>15</sup> A second type of formulation, also very common, sees the subjects described as those who *contribute* or who are economically productive, in contrast to those who just ‘take’. The formulation ‘working people’, which carries the connotation of those who undertake their share of labour, is common amongst the British groups. When Andy from the Swansea group talks about the rising costs for running a taxi, he explains: ‘we’ve had to put our prices up. The insurance has gone up, the fuel’s gone up, that means we’re passing it on to the working man like us.’ This formulation based on the idea of contribution is a more active one than that of the ‘little people’, and one with which participants readily associate themselves. In Norwich, Leyton talks of how ‘all our money goes in the pot, and it’s all shared out with people that are taking it.’ The rich are occasionally cited – they give little to charity, says Mickey: ‘for every pound that’s collected for charity, the working-class people give 83p. 83%’ – but cited more frequently, particularly amongst the British groups, are those in a weak economic situation who live at the expense of the state. An extract from the Reading discussion illustrates the sense of injustice expressed when those who do *not* work are given financial help, whereas those who *do* work are left to face their economic problems on their own:

D: ... But generally to blame for what’s going on now, it’s the government. To allow people, as he says, to have a lovely bungalow with parked five or six cars and all that, and he deals in drugs and he don’t go to work and the government’s giving him money.

M: If somebody is fit and healthy, they shouldn’t be getting any help. If they’re, like, handicapped, if they’re old-age pensioners or something like that, or single family – like a woman on her own or something – fair enough. But normal healthy people, if there’s nothing wrong with them physically and mentally, they can’t take hand-outs. They have to go and work! So really the government should discourage, and not even give to anybody who’s, you know, fit and healthy.

D: And when you work all your life and retire you get a kick up the rear end at the end of it all, because what they give you is pittance money for a pension. And I can tell you cos I’ve just started it.

It is the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor. One sees it replicated in the following passage from Norwich, which begins with Mickey expressing his anger at the neighbours two doors up, ‘the ming-mongs, scumbags. She doesn’t work, she’s got two kids by two separate fathers, and neither contribute a penny’<sup>16</sup>:

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<sup>15</sup> Note that this pattern extends across the groups and is to be found amongst the British as much as amongst the Germans and Czechs. Lamont notes a similar pattern amongst her French interviewees, but finds it to be much weaker amongst her American ones. Michèle Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class and Immigration* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p.239.

<sup>16</sup> The word ‘ming-mong’ can be read as ascribing idiocy and pathos; it does not have a racial aspect.

- M: Take, take, take. The whole family. They all get disabled packs, they all get ... seriously ... [L: ... I can believe it ...] [G: ... They know the system ...] They know the system. They bleed, they bleed ... we're talking about one interbred family, right, there's about twelve of them, put their friends in as well and we're talking about a group of about twenty people, times by a hundred pound a week each, times by no council tax ...
- L: And that's just one family. There must be hundreds and thousands of them all over the place. You know. And you wonder why the National Health Service won't work.
- B: 1997, I voted for Mr Blair because he said 'Education, education, education'. I had two kids in the system then. Plus he said 'welfare is not going to be a way of life', it's got to be a support system. Which I believe in. When you're injured, you should have welfare. [M: Don't get me started on that ...] But, we don't get it. These people, I don't know if you saw Evening News last night, separate issue, you know Harvey Road, up Biker's Lane, and there's a paedophile, which is nothing to do with it but they had an interview with all these mothers and their kids ... All these mothers – big picture of them – and they were all single mothers. It's all ... [M: Social Security.] Social Security. [...] The ones at the bottom get it, the ones at the top have got it, and us in the middle are subsidising both.

As the contributors, the political subjects are liable to be conned by those who have learnt how to avoid paying their share, and to be let down when they are in legitimate need of help. The obligation to contribute falls on everyone: Mickey himself is a single parent, and frequently implies that he is living proof that single parents can still contribute. The last line indicates a motif found with some frequency in the British discussions: that the subjects are those 'in the middle'. It evokes a sense of reasonableness (the subjects are not one of the extremes), also that they have opponents both 'above' and 'below' them on the economic ladder. 'You see, we're caught in the middle, people like us,' says Barry, 'because you've got all the scumbags who make life a misery, and you've got the rich at the top, who make your life misery. Basically us in the middle, we subsidise everybody and we pay the penalty for everybody. You know, the rich don't see the scumbags, the scumbags don't see the rich, but we get penalised.' Leyton agrees: 'do you know, it's always the working people that suffer the most. Always.'<sup>17</sup> The 'working people' are not what one might call proletarians (or the working *class*) stationed at the bottom of the hierarchy: they are positioned between those above who have the money but do not contribute, and those below who have neither the money nor a willingness to contribute.

One does not find the term 'working man / people' with the same frequency amongst the German and Czech groups as amongst the British, nor do these groups refer quite so

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<sup>17</sup> Also in opposition to the contributors, the Swansea group puts students: 'there are some genuine cases,' suggests Lee, 'they study and knuckle down and get their degrees etc. etc., but a lot of them are just on the piss-up.'

trenchantly to the ‘scumbags’ below them – this tripartite scheme is not found.<sup>18</sup> But a distinction between contributors and non-contributors, or productive and non-productive, is certainly used. The Würzburg group points the finger at those who have money but who choose to sit on it, such as the elderly, who in Uwe’s words ‘simply don’t spend the money, for security reasons. I mean, I get that a bit with old people too when I drive them, the really very old ones, they still hoard their money. You notice it particularly with this old people’s home, that’s where the ones with lots of money live, these old people don’t give a cent in tips. I mean, I often have the feeling with these people, not with all of them but with a lot of them, that they could take it all to the grave with them, all the money. As though everything carried on six feet under ...’. In the Erfurt and the Czech groups, the non-contributing rich are often equated with the corrupt, and those in a position of public authority are equated with both. In Erfurt, Uwe follows up a comment from Mike with this: ‘And if they’re elected twice and are in the Bundestag for eight years then they go off with a big pension. They need to be 28 years old and then they get a pension, 16,000 euros per month for the rest of their lives, plus they carry on in business, on supervisory boards, they carry on making something on the side, they earn themselves silly. Whereas us, we have to save, save, save, while they’ve got their pockets so full of money.’

On a number of occasions the opponents are cast in national or ethnic terms, with immigrants and minorities often marked off and criticised for not contributing. (Note that the criterion of evaluation here is that of contribution and productivity; criteria to do with cultural otherness and collective security we shall come to when looking at *Relations between Peoples*.) The idea of national funds being drained comes through strongly in the Lübeck discussion: ‘when a Turk comes here,’ says Jürgen, ‘he brings five Turks with him. The children, the wife, perhaps the grandparents ... And all that adds nothing to the GNP [W: yeah]. And they’re not even allowed to work in the first period, are they. So that means they get social benefits, or Hartz IV.<sup>19</sup> And naturally that puts a burden on the public purse [*die Staatskasse*], through taxes. So to that extent it’s not going to pan out well in the long run.’ Wolfgang continues: ‘Exactly, and this is where we come to the question of health and public health. It puts a burden on public health as well. The contributions which the employer and

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<sup>18</sup> A similar distinction is noted by Lamont when comparing how American and French workers position themselves in economic terms: the French tend to draw weaker boundaries towards the poor ‘below’ them than the Americans. Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men*, p.239.

<sup>19</sup> Hartz IV was the name given to a batch of changes to the German labour market proposed to the German government in 2002 by Peter Hartz, a Volkswagen executive, and which started to be introduced around the time of these interviews. The changes included reductions in unemployment and social-security benefits, and new restrictions on eligibility.

employee have to pay end up rising. The costs go up, and today you can hardly afford a set of teeth or a pair of glasses because you receive practically no subsidies from the public purse. And then things which really do your head in – family dependants who aren't employed but who are co-insured for free through those who are working or receiving social benefits.'<sup>20</sup> It is always the contributor who is directly affected: Mike in Erfurt notes 'that's also the problem, that Germany for the last sixty years has felt obliged to take in these foreigners, right, and to support them, so that they come here and then bring their whole clan with them and they too have to be all given social insurance and the State has to pay for all that ...'. Hans-Jürgen interrupts him: 'Not the State, you!' 'Of course, from my taxes!' The tax burden, here and elsewhere, is treated as falling equally on all the contributors: that some might – legitimately – contribute more or less than others is a notion rarely voiced.<sup>21</sup>

Only certain immigrants and minorities are demarcated as opponents in the *Economics* domain: 'eastern Europeans' are a common reference-point across the groups; 'Turks' recur in the German discussions in this context, but not for example 'Arabs' or 'Muslims' – terms that will be found later in this chapter. Immigrants from east-European and central-Asian countries are highlighted in this passage from Ostrava:

Z: They don't know how to work. They know how to say [Russian accent]: 'I'll let you do the work, and you can give me money for it.' ... They're not hard-working ... they won't work like they should.

J: I'll give you an example, I drove recently to the asylum home, about 40km away. There's Ukrainians there and those who've fled the former Russian republics ... [Z: yeah, yeah] Turkmenistan and those places ... and I drove one of them and we understood each other a bit, he was speaking Russian, I took him from the main station to the asylum home, and I went past the collieries, past the mines where they do the coal – big mine, three thousand people work there – and I said to him as a joke: 'What are you going to do, are you going to work here in the mines? That's hard manual work.' And he said to me: 'No, I'm not going to do that work.' Not him – he's already admitting that he's not going to work here. He doesn't have work and he's coming over ... But one of our people, if he goes abroad, to Belgium or whatever, then he'll work in the

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<sup>20</sup> David in Swansea notices the good work of the contributors being undone by non-contributing outsiders: 'like, your father, or my father, or your grandfather or their grandfather, they pay taxes all their lives. And now it's coming to the stage where when we come to retire in twenty to thirty years' time there's no pension funds is there, for us like. State pension and that. [A: That's right.] Well where's all the fund gone? How come all of a sudden can it be drained, like? And then you've got all these asylum seekers coming into the country, like.'

<sup>21</sup> An indication of the strength of the assumption that non-contributing immigrants benefit at the expense of 'people like us' is suggested by a short exchange elsewhere in the discussion between Murda and David at Reading: Murda remembers meeting a friend a few years ago who was offered council housing, 'this lovely house, beautiful back garden ... length and width of it fantastic ... hadn't done a day's work in his life ... And just for the record, he was white. He wasn't even black or Asian. [David: 'Yeah, I know what you're saying.'] Lots of townspeople say "oh, they get the housing" but not necessarily. I mean, they probably get a house down in Junction, right, which is a two-bed little terraced two-foot by two-foot ... This guy had a nice place, man. But good luck to him, you know [laughs].' Comments made during the Swansea discussion suggest Murda has gauged the common-sense assumptions well: Andy says 'they get a house straightaway, before us.' 'Furnished,' adds David.

mines, he'll work in the toilets, the bathrooms, it's all the same to him. But those who come in from over there, they don't want to do manual work. [Z: Just social benefits ...]

When Petr in Plzeň wishes to highlight the *positive* qualities of foreign students in the city, he evaluates them according to the same criteria of contribution and productivity: 'Here it's full of foreign students. We have plenty of experience with them. But those are people who are teaching themselves something, and as far as society's concerned the financial contributions to them are minimal. They go to school, they pay, they spend money, so they're contributing to society, and so for me personally they're not doing any harm at all.'<sup>22</sup> When the participants in the Norwich group want to speak positively about immigrants, they adopt the same approach: 'If they're decent people and they're prepared to work, that's fair enough,' says Barry. 'It's a great thing because [then] there's more money,' agrees Mickey. 'My view on them kind of people,' says Leyton, 'is that anybody can come here providing they do their bit. Like we have to do. And pay their bit, and not take.' Immigrants are by no means debarred from the status of subjects in this domain – providing they fulfil the duty to be productive and to contribute. As Mike in Erfurt puts it, 'in a pizzeria an Italian belongs, and in a kebab place a Turk belongs. If he works for his money then that's ok. [...] If they work for their money then they should be allowed to work, to earn themselves a living and to live here in an orderly fashion. [H-J: Exactly].'

The assumption that those who are currently opponents could be encouraged or coerced to make their contribution (by working) is important. It suggests that they are not positioned as 'beyond redemption' – their opposition to the political subjects is not an *essential* one, but one based on contingent habits of behaviour. One may perhaps be

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<sup>22</sup> David in Reading uses the same criterion for negative purposes: 'Again, ... if you go to Heathrow and look at all the buildings and places that are being built, the hotels that there's no-one can go on the top floors because they're all asylum-seeking people and that, the buildings they've built have been set fire to ... the *drain* on the economy ... and those people have been in the country years, haven't they ... they're sitting in the country years and they're sitting in a hotel ... that hotel on the M4, the top of that hotel is not used, it's taken over by the *government* [hostile tone] ... [H: But they're charging more money than the normal people ...] Yeah, yeah. And they get ... what sort of living's that? They're having it off, aren't they. It's like being at ... well I don't know what sort of holiday camp! I think a lot of them that come here should have a job at least to go to, instead of all piling in here ... And it's going to affect your pocket, it's going to make taxes go up, through having so much dead wood to carry ... I mean, they've got to live somewhere and you can't blame them for getting a betterment, but it's no good to this society that you're contributing to, such as the National Health, same thing ... Look at the beds you can't get, the operations you can't get and all the rest of it, it's insane, isn't it ... If you go to the doctor's you still pay your duty, your pay your National Insurance contributions, you're entitled to it ...' Notice the criteria of evaluation here: the 'asylum-seeking people' drain the economy rather than contributing to it, constituting 'dead wood' for 'us' to carry. On the other hand, if they had a job to go to then their presence might be more acceptable, and 'you can't blame them for getting a betterment'. Mickey in Norwich speaks in very similar terms: 'What we don't want – and we're all the same on this – we don't want people from the outside, who are not genuine, coming in and fleecing us. It's a constant drain. If next door were getting free electricity from me, I'm not going to take that, am I, I'm not going to pay their bills. And that's what we're doing, we're paying other people's bills.'

uncomfortable with Mike's easy reliance on certain category associations to position immigrants as legitimate, but it is nonetheless an expression of some tolerance. Even where there is a stronger adversarial dimension, these groups are treated as a cost rather than an existential threat, and it tends to be emphasised that if such people pay their contributions (taxes, health insurance, and so on) they are acceptable, but that they should not be allowed to refuse work and live off the state. This is true likewise for the rich and for the unemployed. Calls are not made for their expulsion from the country or for their imprisonment: their behaviour is treated as oppressive or as a drain on resources, but they are generally to be engaged with rather than banished altogether. In this sense, the opponents in this domain are best thought of as 'adversaries' rather than 'enemies'.<sup>23</sup> Adversaries are unlikely to be welcomed into the home environment, but if they are already there they are tolerated and engaged with. Of course, on the basis of interviews alone one cannot explore how such discourses might be applied in individual cases: one can imagine that a Turkish-German man might be treated as 'working for his living' when serving Mike a kebab, but as 'piling in here' when spotted at the airport in the passport-control queue as he returns from his summer holiday. The important thing, to begin with, is the availability of a discourse by which to legitimise his presence in the community.

### ***B) Comparables and Counterparts***

As these passages indicate, the extent to which the political subjects and their opponents tend to be constructed in national or European terms is limited. Certainly no speakers talked of economic problems which faced 'us Europeans'. But nor were there many economic problems described as affecting the 'British', 'Germans' or 'Czechs' in broad, undifferentiated terms: the 'people like us' tend to be demarcated with formulations such as 'the little people', the 'people in the middle', or the 'people who contribute', while their opponents tend to be evoked with formulations such as 'the rich', 'shareholders', 'big firms' or, mainly amongst the British groups, 'those at the bottom'. It would probably not be an abuse of the material to suggest that these are all class-based categories. National categories *are* sometimes entwined with these, but these are often used as shorthand for a narrower

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<sup>23</sup> The marginal case would be the 'ming-mongs and scumbags' that Mickey in Norwich identifies, but they are a feature mainly of his interventions alone, and mark an overlap with the *Society and the Law* domain which will be considered below.

group of 'people like us'. They may be applied to demarcate opponents, as seen with regard to problems of unemployment, where concern is expressed about 'cheap workers' from eastern-European countries – the East starting, for the Czechs, a little bit further to the east than for the British or Germans. But in these cases it is not the nationality itself which is taken to be problematic but the behaviour with which it is associated. Indeed, there is the idea that, if immigrants of this kind work for their living, under 'our' conditions, and pay their tax contributions, then their presence is acceptable. While one should not forget the performative role of such statements – they help to position the speaker as tolerant and fair-minded, and thus have a local function in the discussion – they are nonetheless quite different from the discursive patterns that will be encountered later in this chapter when looking at the *Relations between Peoples* domain, where a much tighter, essentialising link is made between the social category and a certain type of behaviour. For most problems to do with *Economics*, nationality is just one, relatively minor, element in the repertoire of demarcation.

One problem-area which *was* articulated predominantly in national terms, though it was little discussed, was overseas aid. Amongst the Ostrava participants there was a consensus around Zdeněk's point that 'we Czechs' are a little over-generous with the amount of money sent abroad, 'because we're such a little state and there are lots of big states which give less than our little statelet gives ...' Another issue which consistently drew country-based formulations was the finances of the EU. Amongst the British and German groups there was recurrent, dissatisfied talk of 'us British' or 'us Germans' being the major contributors. Even in this context, however, the subjects would often be cast not just as 'our country' but as a broader grouping of similarly economically-developed European countries. A succinct statement of the economics of the EU is provided by Jürgen in Lübeck: 'The ones who profit are the poorer countries with the low GNP. And the industrial countries, they basically have to step down from their level, surrender their achievements.' Later he says, to the full agreement of Wolfgang: 'As an industrial country, we can't expect anything there [from the EU]. They always try to make it palatable to us with the argument that our economy will then also profit because these countries can then buy things here. I don't know though whether that argument holds.'

This explicitly EU dimension will be returned to in Chapter 6, but the main point to note is that when other European countries are mentioned in these discussions, it tends to be less as rival *actors* and more as the *environments* in which problems arise, either where conditions are assumed to be comparable to the home environment or where they are assumed to be quite different. Although the economic problems discussed tend to be

described as affecting the subjects in a quite local home environment, a broader context is evoked by the frequent application of transnational comparisons. These tend to be connected to problématiques such as prices, wages and taxation rates – i.e. the most quantifiable of economic problems – but also (mainly in the German discussions) to consumer spending patterns, loss of social-security benefits, bureaucracy, and even macro-economic policy. They also tend more often to accompany the passive formulation than the active one. Such comparisons tend to be made with other nearby countries in Europe, with this meaning different things according to the groups in question. As was seen early in this chapter, in the Czech discussions the comparisons on economic problems tend to be with other countries in central and eastern Europe. Conversely, the comparisons made in the British and German discussions with regard to economic problems tend to invoke countries of *western* Europe. The positioning is rather the opposite in other words, with a strong division between the east and west of Europe being emphasised across the country groups. In the following extract, the Swansea group makes a series of typical comparisons between the home environment (Swansea and Britain) and comparable environments (various places in western Europe):

D: But again, the reason ... why is British fuel a lot more expensive than in other countries? It's all tax.

L: Well, why ... why is it 40p, as an example, 40 odd pence I think in Europe for a litre of fuel, interest rates is 2% ...

A: Well it's cheaper in Ireland and that's only across the water isn't it. It's cheaper in Ireland.

L: Cos they're all in the euro. [...] They say things have gone up in Europe, they will go up in Europe because they were a lot cheaper than in Britain anyway. Things can't go up a lot more in Britain, they can't put beer up £4, £5 a pint, people would never be able to afford a drink or whatever [...]. About eight to ten years ago over in Spain things were dirt cheap. Now it's a very reasonable, very similar price to over here. So all those countries that were cheap, they're not happy because they've joined the euro and their prices have gone up. [...]

D: You know, we say that we're more expensive than other countries in Europe ... France is a lot more expensive than here. For everything. I don't say so much property, I don't know, fuel is similar to ours, but you know food, and drink, it's quite expensive.

M: They say in Dublin and everything else as well.

D: You know, you go to Paris and you're talking 4 or 5 pound a pint. Go to London and it's three pound, three pound fifty. Well he lives in London, what's it in London ...?

JW: Yeah, near three pounds.

A: But your wages are better. And your mortgage is higher as well, so it's all relative at the end of the day.

L: Well, they do bloody forty-year mortgages and things like that. Which they've started ... that's never been known of in Swansea. But cos the house prices have gone so much they've even introduced that now. Thirty, thirty-five year mortgages.

D: For example, in Switzerland, Switzerland has got more millionaires for the population than any other country. And in Switzerland house prices are very expensive, and the majority of people in Switzerland only rent. And people who've got mortgages now, they've got these fifty-year mortgages, that if you die you get inherited to your kids. And they can carry on the term, like. If prices keep going like that here, they'll go like that here eventually, won't they.

Notable is how the participants entwine the experiences of people in Swansea and Britain with those in Ireland (and Dublin), Spain, France (and Paris), Switzerland, and 'Europe' generally. On the one hand people living in these 'comparables' are reported to be experiencing the same problems as those in the home environment; on the other hand people 'here' are held likely to encounter some of the problems (e.g. 'fifty-year mortgages') which are already apparent elsewhere. A high level of detailed knowledge is also on display, suggesting these comparisons come naturally to the participants.

Near the beginning of the extract one finds the notion that places which are close together ought to be similar to each other, at least as regards prices – 'it's cheaper in Ireland and that's only across the water'. This idea is quite common.<sup>24</sup> The groups do not always correspond substantively with one another on the comparisons they make: while David from the Swansea group downplays the cost of living in Britain, the Norwich participants suggest that Britain is 'one of the most expensive places' because VAT rates are high. But even if they voice different opinions, they agree on the places which are relevant for drawing comparisons – other nearby European countries – and there is clear recognition that certain economic problems are common to people in all of them. Interestingly, comparisons with North America and other industrialised parts of the world are very rare in this domain for all the groups. Occasionally the US is invoked as a contrast, as a symbol of the future and the extremes.<sup>25</sup> But one does not find comparisons drawn with the US on day-to-day things like prices and wages.

The notion of there being *counterparts* in other European countries comes through at various instances in the text. Barry in Norwich, for instance, comments that 'if we've all got the euro, all of Europe including us, then everything's got to be the same prices, like your petrol abroad, your petrol here, your fags, blah blah. And I'm pretty sure, whatever government is in in this country would never give up the revenue off cigarettes, beer and

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<sup>24</sup> For example, Murda and David in Reading agree that it is 'weird' and 'unbelievable' how the price of the same car can be so much lower in Belgium and France than in Britain.

<sup>25</sup> 'America lives everything ahead of us and we come along behind,' declares Peter at Kassel. 'We're heading towards American-style relations,' worries Rainer at Würzburg. 'The scissors are opening ever further, people are earning ever less, more and more are being socially marginalised ... and they're hardly in a position any more to make ends meet.'

fags. So we'd be getting the same wages as our European counterparts but we'd be paying more, so our standard of living would go down yet again.' There are conditions 'here' and conditions 'there', for 'us' and for 'our counterparts', and it would be the intervention of the national government which would prevent their proper equalisation. In Würzburg, Rainer talks of how German workers are facing cutbacks in job security and benefits: 'More and more cuts, more and more cut-backs. That was just the beginning. [...] I mean, many people think of the CDU-CSU as plainly being the alternative to the current confused policies, but what will happen to people then, what will happen to the little man? A lot of people don't seem to realise ...'. Uwe broadens the point: 'I think it's the same in Britain [...], and ... I mean, the English employee is not going to be too different from the German employee in principle, or the French one ...'. Meanwhile in Reading, Murda and David compare the differing reactions of the British and French to the problem of rising prices. The sense is clear of an 'over here' and an 'over there' where people are faced with essentially the same difficulties, even if they choose to respond to them differently: 'You watch though,' says Murda, 'over there, right, they're going to have riots. They don't have it. ... It's weird how most things, we just take it lying down over here. Like, the French, they won't. They'll have a revolution, get the guillotines out ...'. David chips in: 'Yeah ... Stop the boats, stop everything ... every single thing ... yeah ...'. Murda continues: 'But no matter what happens over here, you know, goes up another 5p, 10p, pound, "oh yeah, OK ..." Bit like sheep here in that sense aren't we, plod along ...'.<sup>26</sup>

In sum, for the problems associated with the *Economics* domain one finds a broad degree of continuity across the groups as regards the political subjects and their opponents. The subjects are generally cast either in passive terms as normal, simple, and real people, who have none of the special advantages enjoyed by the rich, or in more active terms as the contributors, those who – barring exceptional circumstances – work for their living and thereby assist the general economic good. The two formulations, it is worth noting, seem to differ somewhat in the extent to which they are accompanied by the evocation of a

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<sup>26</sup> When David talks about working conditions and consumer safety, a transnational comparison again comes naturally: 'In France, you can go to a taxi in Paris, right, and on the back window it'll say what time the driver started work, there'll be a little disc and he puts it on that he started work at five in the morning, and at five at night he's going to take you to Marseilles, say. But you look up there and say "huh, this bloke has been up twelve hours, think I'll get someone else ... been driving as long as that ...". It's sensible because that man *could* fall asleep, couldn't he, so the law says: "you've got x amount of hours, you can't do any more than a twelve-hour shift.'" The Kassel group, meanwhile, spends some time comparing house prices and rents in London with those in Germany, and the Lübeck group does so with those in neighbouring Denmark.

transnational context. The active formulation is generally elaborated in sub-national terms, with little reference to contributing counterparts in other countries. That to which the subjects contribute and others do not seems to be some notion of a national savings fund or balance-sheet, into which the tax system feeds and out of which social-security payments and other benefits are drawn. In the exception to this rule – when the finances of the EU itself are discussed and the purse is a European one – the contributors tend to be described as being ‘our country’ together with perhaps a few comparable countries of similar economic development. Neither instance invites a sense of transnational shared predicament. On the other hand, when the more passive formulation is foregrounded – the ‘little’ or ‘normal’ people, faced with opponents such as large firms – conditions in neighbouring countries (e.g. prices, wages, levels of unemployment) are invoked very readily. The assumption that there are comparable environments where the same kinds of problem are being faced is quite clear, with those cited mainly as western-European countries in the British and German discussions, but central- and east-European countries in the Czech discussions. With this transnational dimension frequently introduced, and with the ‘people like us’ being constructed not purely along national lines, there seems to be some basis here for a political bond supportive of a European polity. That the range of comparisons tends to be less than coextensive with the current EU, with an east-west distinction within Europe highlighted to indicate places of fundamental contrast as well as comparable environments, represents a challenge to such a bond, a point Chapter 6 will return to. Such a bond would also be compromised if the passive overtones of this formulation of the ‘we’ were accompanied by a more general sense of fatalism regarding the possibility of addressing these problems. This question we shall explore in the following chapter.

A second point which has been noted is that those positioned as opponents resemble adversaries rather than enemies. They are generally not treated as posing an existential threat to the subjects, rather they are a source of hardship and a drain on resources. They are disliked, but their presence is grudgingly accepted. When immigrants and minorities within the home environment are mentioned, it tends to be eastern Europeans and (in the German case) Turkish people. Note that there is little demarcation based on race or colour here. Gamson, in his study of lay discourse in the US, notes the ease with which ‘black means poor and white means rich.’<sup>27</sup> One can imagine that when boundary-formation draws on physical markers in this way then acts of ‘othering’ are much stronger and fundamental: there is less

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<sup>27</sup> Gamson, *Talking Politics*, p.103.

likely to be the sense that those who face economic problems, or those who rise above them, 'could have been me', and perhaps a stronger likelihood that those positioned as opponents are treated as enemies. Conversely, in the discussions we have looked at, the absence of a clear linkage of this kind is probably conducive to the softer positioning that one finds.

### Collective Positioning in *Society and the Law*

#### ***A) The Political Subjects and their Opponents***

In the domain of *Society and the Law*, the key problems include crime, antisocial behaviour, increasing egoism, and a general decline in 'standards'. The common thread is the attention which is given to rules, and how they should be approached and maintained. In this domain, the political subjects are best characterised as those who play by the rules and stand up for the rules. They are honest citizens. They are contrasted with those who break the rules (especially major rules), and in particular with those rule-breakers who are armed with excuses and do not have to face the consequences of their actions. They are also distinguished from those who are unaffected by such behaviour, or those who fail to enforce the rules properly, with the resultant unfairness a source of much frustration.

One sees these patterns in discussion of crime (i.e. the breaking of legal rules), to which much attention was devoted amongst the British groups in particular. A phrase often heard here is that 'it's one rule for some and another rule for others.' 'We've had enough of general yobbery,' says Barry in Norwich, and responding to the perceived vagaries of criminal sentencing he makes a plea which is typical: 'you know, enforce all rules the same. Basically, we all abide by them don't we.' The subjects are the ones who are willing to take a stand, and who look out for each other: 'If he [Barry] ever called me,' says Mickey, 'don't mind what time of morning it is, even if I have to put my daughter in a blanket, I'll come and help him. Because we need, as a society, to start standing up.' If the subjects themselves ever break a rule, it is likely to be an honest mistake and probably a very minor rule, perhaps even a bad one. These motifs are evident in the following extract from the Norwich group. This passage of discussion took place early on, almost as soon as the record-button had been pressed on the recorder. ('At the end of the day it's the most important subject,' Mickey later explained.) The card-arranging exercise could wait for a moment; Barry was ready to put

forward an opinion: 'well the legal system's in favour of the criminal at the moment.' We let the discussion flow:

M: The police are out there, doing the best they can, in general, yeah, but the legal system ... [L: ... is letting them down ...] ... the judges, handing down pathetic little sentences ... [B: ... Or none at all ...] We were promised 'three strikes and you're out'. Now, everybody is allowed to make mistakes, but when you got these people going round, burgling houses over and over and over and over again, and then they get a fine or a bit of Community Service, and then they're stuck back on the streets to go and make someone else's life a misery. And that puts the pressure back on them [the police] again to get them back in again.

L: That's right, very much so. I mean, policing is very, very good really, there's quite a lot going on round here, really top stuff, but when it comes down to them doing their job, it backtracks to this [taps the card Legal System] and they're failing in big ways. Big time, really. [...] Now I've had two incidents with the police, the police have been very good, and they've even sent up back-up, to talk it through .. but these [Legal System], you don't hear nothing. They [taps Policing] can't do nothing because of them [Legal System]. The sentences they do, either the kids are too young or something's not quite right.

M: And then you get a letter through the post which says 'we will not be pursuing the matter' ... [L: ... That's right, yeah ...] Because it's not important to them, because it didn't happen to them ... At the end of the day, if someone smashes your taxi-window, they get in and they steal your stereo and they steal your ... stupidly left my cash bag there one day, they took my cash bag ... Now that might seem like 'oh well, it's not the most important crime in the world' ... At the time my daughter was six ... It's a burglar, it's a man in a hood with a swag bag and arrows. That absolutely terrified her for weeks afterwards. All I get is a letter through the post – and it's not just me, a lot of people, and it stinks, absolutely stinks.

JW: Who do you blame for that?

B: The legal system, the magistrates, I don't think they take the fears of the – what his daughter go through – into consideration. When someone's burgled or mugged, they always try ... the defence lawyers always try that he had a hard upbringing, he was on drugs, he was whatever ... If you do a crime you do the time, that's the way it should be.

M: The problem with them lot is that they don't live in the real world. They literally live on Newmarket Road, yeah, which is just an example, every city's got a Newmarket Road, exclusive place to be, they live in a place like that, where they have big drives and they have big gates, and they sit behind there and they get taxis everywhere so they don't have to get public transport, they don't have to put up with these scumbags, yeah, and it's like 'oh, we know there's a drug problem because we read about it in the newspaper, we have it in the court every so often'. Every so often you *will* come across a magistrate who hands down a harsh sentence, and then the solicitors, who want more money, and I think a lot of it does come down to the solicitors, they want more money so they appeal on behalf of the scumbag ... his hundredth crime of the month. He goes back in again and they quash it and he walks free. And as soon as he's free he goes back up the Guildhall, every city's got a Guildhall ... [L: His solicitors are on him again ...] Scoring drugs, he can't get the money for the drugs so he goes and robs somebody else. Put them on a farm somewhere.

B: The really sad thing is, when you do get a hard judge or a hard magistrate who do give them five years, we all know they serve two and a half. They don't do the full time.

The subjects are those who expect – and were promised – a system of rules based on clear principles and fairly enforced. The subjects are perhaps passive and vulnerable, as the foregrounding of Mickey's daughter suggests. Their life can be 'made a misery'. Worse,

they may be unable to rely on the protection afforded by the institutions of law enforcement, because punishments may be light and barely served. The opponents are clearly demarcated. They are the decadent magistrates who live in gated communities, who take only private transport and who read about social problems in the newspapers, and the solicitors whose interest is to profit from these problems. The magistrates live on a different road, on Newmarket Road, the 'exclusive place to be', away from the 'real world' where the subjects encounter crime and misbehaviour on a regular basis. The opponents are also, naturally, the offenders themselves. Emphasis is on the repeat offender, the criminal who is 'burgling houses over and over and over and over again': not someone who has simply made a mistake (anyone can make those), he is someone who involves himself in a new crime as soon as he walks free. He tends to have excuses on his side, like a 'hard upbringing', but his principal characteristic is that he never learns. The only solution it seems is to imprison him. As will be seen further in the next chapter, one often finds the assumption that such behaviour can be corrected if caught at a young age with education. Opponents in this domain can be thought of as adversaries to the extent that they can be encouraged to 'mend their ways', but insofar as some will always be criminals and will need to be removed from society for the safety of the subjects, as enemies. 'Everyone's allowed to make a mistake, yeah,' says Mickey, 'in with the wrong crowd blah blah blah, whatever excuse it is, they're allowed to make a mistake. Second time, "tut-tut, you should have learnt by now but go on, I'll give you one more chance, this time you're getting five years". And then, the next time, "three strikes, you're out, ten years, hard labour, no remission, nothing, you're being done for it, learn your lesson." Get them off drugs for ten years. You know, whatever.'

A similar pattern of positioning is evident when discussion focuses on the breaking of social rather than legal rules – problems which are lingered on in particular amongst the German groups. The subjects are set up as the public-spirited people who play by the rules of proper behaviour, but also the ones who stand up for the rules. Their opponents are the transgressors, but also those who are indifferent towards the transgressors. Peter and Dieter in Kassel take the example of their colleagues on the taxi-rank who throw their cigarette butts out of the window, and who curse you if you tell them to pick them up; complicit in the problem are those who distance themselves and say 'that doesn't affect me!' Hans agrees, and argues that for that reason 'it's important that everyone's aware that it *does* affect them.' A passage from the Erfurt group, in which the social and the legal are entwined, gives a fuller flavour of this:

- A: ... I was on the tram, there were two small children around seven or eight years old, it was around 3pm. They were making a lot of noise on the tram, like they do. There was a woman there and she got really worked up about it. And then her mobile phone went off and she had a conversation, but *so loudly* that the whole tram could follow. And she was the one complaining about two small children making a bit of noise. That's simply bad manners and you need to tell these people that. You need to open your mouth and tell them that either children are not allowed to make noise or they must leave off ... Each person ... everyone must start with themselves.
- H-J: Sure, that's right. But also everyone's got to have enough education and intelligence so that they don't do certain things when they're not within their own four walls. In private they can do what they like.
- U: It depends how old people are ... old people don't do that kind of thing.
- A: I know of a guy, his mother was a teacher and his father was a professor, and what does he do all day long? He burps and belches.
- U: Consideration for other people, that's what it's about really ... [H-J: yeah, definitely], whether it's mobile phones or someone burping ...
- A: Or if I push to the front on the rank because colleagues are slow in moving up. [H-J: It's a whole load of things ...]
- U: Consideration for others ... [H-J: yeah, yeah ...], whatever you're doing ... Or giving up your seat on the U-Bahn for a grandmother. [...]
- H-J: It's no longer valued any more. It's a vulgarisation (*Verrohung*) of society, it can't carry on ... [A: That's it.]
- M: You see it with boys, the older ones, when they get in the cab, you get a twenty-year-old sometimes, he puts his feet straight up on the windscreen. That's just not right. I'm doing my work ...
- H-J: The respect for other people's work isn't there any more. [M: No ...] There's no regard for other people, no regard for property ... [M: All gone ...] All gone. You sit on the tram and the person opposite has his feet on the seats ... [M: It's not right ...] It's really not right. [A: And what do you do?] Well, I tell him to take his feet down!
- A: And there's too few people willing to do that. Too few. This goes back to the legal system. That case in Halle or wherever where the guy was killed, the guy who showed moral courage and asked whether the music could be turned down and then got knifed to death.<sup>28</sup> And what did the judge do with the defendant? [H-J: He freed him.] He freed him. And there, I mean, the judge himself needs to be put in ... [H-J: Put in court ...] put in court.

For all the participants, and clearly with some centrality, a whole series of problems are evident here, linked by the notion of falling standards. Hypocrisy, rudeness, inconsideration and indifference are all given emphasis, as well as the insufficiency of protection from the law. It is treated as beyond dispute that too many people are ignorant of the rules of social conduct, that there are certain things which one does not do when outside the four walls of one's home. There is no social determinism here: each individual has a responsibility to act

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<sup>28</sup> The case involved a man objecting to his neighbour's playing of loud Nazi music, leading to an argument in which the former was fatally stabbed. The judge reached his verdict on the defendant two days before this interview.

properly, and even those from the best backgrounds (child of the teacher and professor) can fail in this. Hans-Jürgen positions himself as one of the subjects, offended or irritated by the person on the tram who puts their feet up and willing to do something about it, and unlike the passive majority. There is even a word with which to capture the proper behaviour of the subject in this context: ‘moral courage’ (*Zivilcourage*). The positioning of the opponents seems to be more of the adversary- than the enemy-type. These people need to be shown the errors of their ways, they need to be reminded of what civilised behaviour entails, with the implication that they are not ‘beyond hope’ and that there is still the possibility of engaging them.

The criterion of playing-by-the-rules, whether legal or social, is liable to be deployed against immigrants and minorities. Lee in Swansea ‘know[s] of a copper,’<sup>29</sup> he says they’re too scared to arrest the blacks, because the blacks will turn on them and say automatically “he’s racial”.’ Moreover, these minorities ‘know it, they’re making full use of that.’ David agrees that non-whites have excuses before the law (‘they’re treated differently to us’), and for Andy: ‘Don’t give a toss for them as long as the rules are the same for everybody. [...] Seems at the moment they have the advantage over us.’ Amongst the German groups, ‘East Europeans’ and ‘Turks’ in particular are often viewed as corrosive of the social and legal rules, as having excuses to protect themselves from the consequences of their behaviour (of the legal system Peter in Kassel says ‘it doesn’t apply to Turks’), and their behaviour is to be assessed according to stricter standards. In a discussion about the criminal tendencies of those from Turkey, the Balkans and eastern Europe, Ali in Lübeck (who describes himself as of Iranian origin) argues that Germans have greater licence to break the rules because ‘that’s their homeland!’ Jürgen agrees that if he were living in a foreign country he would keep a low profile: ‘I’d start with simple ambitions [*dann würd’ ich erstmal ganz kleine Brötchen backen*].’<sup>30</sup> Oliver in Würzburg, with much agreeing from Rainer and Uwe, emphasises the vulnerability of ordinary law-abiding citizens by contrasting with the secure lives of politicians: ‘I think reality sometimes passes politics by. When for example a politician says “we need multi-culti”, he only knows multi-culti from the restaurants in Berlin. When he goes in they say “Ah hello, how are you? ... leave your money just there and you’re my good friend ...”. But your little citizen, if he has a son at school and along comes a Turk and says

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Copper’: a policeman.

<sup>30</sup> Hans-Jürgen and Andreas in Erfurt agree that ‘not all [Turks] are criminal’. Hans-Jürgen suggests: ‘It doesn’t matter a bit whether a Turk lives in Italy or a German lives in Denmark or whatever ... If he abides by the laws there then he can be a foreigner if he wants to be. It doesn’t matter at all what kind of job he does, that’s completely irrelevant. If you abide by the rules ...’ and Andreas repeats: ‘I must abide by the rules there ...’.

“give me money or I’ll smack you in the face”, well he’s really affected by it, the little citizen. But the politician stands there prettily and says “we’ve got multi-culti, we’ve made laws, they’ve all been naturalised ...”. Maybe there’s also votes in it, from Turks or those from other countries ... they want to raise their share of the vote. And at that point it’s irrelevant whether the little man has problems, whether his son gets smacked one in the face. There’s even protection money being collected in schools, and reality passes politics by, it’s that simple.’ Likewise, the criterion of playing-by-the-rules is quite frequently applied in the Czech discussions to the Roma (‘gypsies’). Petr in Plzeň argues that gypsies need to ‘integrate themselves normally into society and not go around robbing and stealing.’ In an anecdote which he says is based on his experience, he argues that if ten whites and ten gypsies took rides in his taxi (‘not Roma, for me there’s no such thing as Roma, I know only gypsies’), nine of the whites would pay their fare and three or four of the gypsies would pay theirs. ‘And as for how those three got the money, that’s another question.’ This demarcation against the gypsies is quite specific: the Czechs talk about a range of minority groups (eastern Europeans, as was seen for the *Economics* domain, and Muslims, as will be seen for *Relations between Peoples*), but it is principally ‘gypsies’ who are cast as adversaries of the political subjects in the *Society and the Law* domain.

There is another formulation of the subjects, one which seems particularly common amongst the Czech discussions, whereby the subjects are understood not so much as those who play by the rules but as those who break only the minor rules. The following extract from the Ostrava group provides a good elaboration on this theme. Note how the pronoun ‘we’ is used in connection with the willingness to break legal rules of various kinds:

Z: I wanted to add something on the question of the law. This is the typical Czech attitude: whenever there’s a law on something, a Czech person doesn’t think about how to comply with it but how to avoid it. That’s extremely important. Us Czechs are specialists at that. So if you tell me that I’m not allowed to do something then I’ll cross over to the other side and I’ll do it anyway. Regardless. I’ll change my path so as to get around the obstacle. That means there’s never a law which really prevents you doing something, it’s always possible somehow. In this country.

JW: Why do you think it’s like that ...?

J: It was like that here already under communism. There was always someone who wanted to get around something.

Z: You say to me: I’m not allowed to pass here, not allowed to, mustn’t enter. And I say: ‘Fine, I mustn’t, I won’t.’ But somehow I have to ...

M: So I enter through a different door.

JW: And that’s how it’ll always be ...?

Z: It's a national tradition [chuckles] ... Say I'm faced with a red light. I wait, I don't go, then maybe I try ...

M: That's how it is here. Beautiful example is what we see on the roads. I'm driving along, next to me there's a cyclist, we arrive at a red light, I stop, as a cyclist he's part of the road traffic, a driver, but the moment he sees the red light he goes onto the pavement, turns himself into a so-called pedestrian, but keeps on his bike and cycles across on green because the other traffic's on green, and then after the crossing he puts himself back in the lane and he's a driver-cyclist again. So ... we all do the same all over the place, it's in our temperament, it's in our temperament. [Z: So it's possible to cross on red ...] Yeah, that's how it works. Always. He's got to go somehow and that's how he does it. ... If a policeman sees someone doing that, well he has a little look upwards [lifts head] to see whether by any chance there happen to be some birds flying overhead ... [Z: He ...] He doesn't want to chase some cyclist, he's not interested, he doesn't see the point.

From an external perspective, the behaviour of the cyclist here is perhaps unremarkable, but the willingness to treat it as symptomatic of a 'national tradition' of rule avoidance in which 'we Czechs' are 'specialists' is interesting.<sup>31</sup> The disinterest of the policeman serves to normalise the rule-breaking – punishment is unlikely. The offence is a very minor one, of a kind hardly likely to generate outrage: if the subjects are themselves not always followers of rules, they are demarcated more by the pettiness of the rule-breaking in which they engage.

They are also demarcated by the kind of rule-breaking from which they are excluded due to their position in the social hierarchy. One sees this in the discussion of corruption. The subjects, it tends to be said, have nothing to do with major corruption because they are too 'small' to be involved. They hear about it on television, but they have no first-hand experience of it.<sup>32</sup> In the Ostrava discussion the innocence of the 'people like us' when it comes to major crime is emphasised: corruption takes place behind their backs, and they simply assume that 'there are trustworthy people at the top'. In the Czech and the Erfurt discussions there is a clear link made to the opponents in the *Economics* domain – the corrupt rich, the kind who are able to escape justice and are relaxing somewhere on a beach in the Bahamas. This ability to escape the consequences of behaviour is, in the Czech discussions, indivisible from the question of economic power. Marek in Ostrava explains: 'Here the legal system supports those who steal 100 million – they've got lawyers who they go halves with, he pays the judge and everything, and they have 50 million for themselves, they lose 50 million but that's not going to hurt a businessman. That's the legal system. And if you steal 10,000, they lock you up. That's how it is here. Or at the minimum you get some kind of

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<sup>31</sup> That a willingness to avoid or break the rules is – to a degree – normalised seems to be evident also in the Liberec discussion. When Radek suggests that physical punishment be used against criminals, Václav considers this inappropriate on the grounds that one might end up a victim of it oneself. 'Don't tell me you've never stolen something in your life,' is his response to Radek.

<sup>32</sup> Petr in Plzeň makes this explicit: 'For my part I've never seen any particular sign of influence, with the traffic police or whatever ... But certainly generally, on television and everywhere it's always being talked about every day.' And later: 'But as I say, probably none of us has had any close experience with that.'

penalty to pay. Someone small gets it, someone big doesn't.' The honest citizens break more minor rules, but are more likely to be punished for it.<sup>33</sup>

### ***B) Comparables and Counterparts***

Quite in contrast to problems to do with *Economics*, transnational comparisons for problems to do with *Society and the Law* are almost entirely absent. The problems of criminal behaviour take place on the streets of the city, perhaps under the gaze of a CCTV camera, and problems of rudeness and selfishness are described as taking place in trams, in theatres, in taxis, and on the pavement. The experiences are sometimes generalised as being symptomatic of conditions in the country as a whole ('every city's got a Newmarket Road'), but hardly ever do participants raise the question of whether similar problems of crime and bad behaviour are experienced in cities abroad. Probably relevant to this is that – as will be explored in the next chapter – most of the problems in this domain are explained in terms of factors exclusively within the city or the home country, such as the mentalities of local actors. This seems to diminish the relevance of the experiences of those in other environments.

The Würzburg group does at one point consider whether the breakdown in community feeling is any worse in Germany than in certain other European countries, but it is a contrast rather than a comparison which is made. At stake is Germany's descent into what they have characterised the 'elbow society':

R: Perhaps the German mentality again. Only recently I had this discussion, you always hear in other countries – it made an impression on me – that the Germans, very generally speaking, are very gruff with each other in their daily lives, that in other countries it seems they find people here very inconsiderate and gruff towards each other. On a daily basis, or in society ... that in other countries it's not so bad. And then naturally that expresses itself in the social domain. [...]

O: The more money there is in play, the more people get ripped off, I think.

R: But Italy, for example, I mean, it's almost the same economic level, almost the same living standard, if not the same. But I still get the impression that this southern mentality, that they're a bit more friendly and laid-back with each other than we are here. I think that has an effect.

U: They're very family-oriented, the Italians.

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<sup>33</sup> Míra in Plzeň also talks, with the agreement of his fellow participants, of how the rich-and-corrupt can buy justice: 'A poor person does something and they lock him up, and a rich person does something and he finds a good lawyer and he gets him out of it.'

R: Yeah, but that's something positive, that's ... a value in society. Here it's gone so far that one simply packs off old people, parents, older relatives and says 'we don't need them any more'.

The conclusion is that Germany is a special case, that there is a German mentality which either accounts for or embodies the decline of community feeling, and that people living in other countries are *not* facing the same problems as those in Germany. In some discussions the US is mentioned in this context, as the extreme of the broken-down society, where the streets are dangerous and where criminal sentencing is absurdly harsh.<sup>34</sup> Such contrasts are presented as curiosities however, without any suggestion that it really matters what goes on in the US in this respect. Corruption is the one problem which is generally not given a local emphasis (it takes place unseen, and away from the lives of ordinary people) and which sometimes provokes a few transnational comparisons.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps this is understandable given that it is a problem heavily entwined with the *Economics* domain, where as we have seen a transnational dimension is readily evoked. Corruption is exceptional in this sense though, and should not obscure the localism which is more generally evident.

Where speakers do wish to draw a comparison, it is more likely to be cross-temporal than cross-spatial. The past, as the era of effective discipline and a clearer delineation between right and wrong, is invoked quite frequently as a point of orientation. 'We used to get scrubbed and the cane at school,' says Mickey in Norwich, to Barry's agreement. Leyton joins in the reminiscence: 'I used to get the bloomin' cane, knuckles and everything! I learned, I learned properly. I feel sorry for teachers today, I really do.' 'Years ago everyone was afraid of the local bobby [policeman], weren't they,' adds Gavin. Of course, cross-temporal perspectives can be found regarding problems of *Economics* too, but they tend to have the flavour more of contrasts than comparisons. That the past was quite different in economic terms is treated as normal (technology was less advanced then, economies were less developed, etc.), whereas what is more remarkable is that contemporary conditions in

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<sup>34</sup> One sees a brief reference of this kind in a short passage from Liberec. Radek begins: 'My cousin was staying on holiday with relatives in America for a month just now and there no-one dares to steal anything because if the police catch you they immediately put you on an offenders' register, and if you apply for a job then they say "you've been an offender" and you've got no chance.' Onřej disputes there is a comparison to be made: 'To compare it with the US, that's a totally different place ... [R: I know but ...] First of all that's a police state, you can't even ... [R: But they've got order there.] They haven't got order. Radek, it's the worst state with the worst crime you can possibly imagine.'

<sup>35</sup> The Ostrava group is keen to locate the Czech Republic's position in the hierarchy of corruption amongst post-communist countries: 'in Russia it's even worse,' says Josef; Marek says the comparison should be made only with 'normal peoples', not with 'those fantastical countries' like Russia, Bulgaria and Romania. Poland is the main yardstick, with some debate about whether their corruption is worse than the Czechs' or not. Several times one finds the assumption that corruption, and disrespect for the law more generally, is not much of a problem in western-European countries; that the same problems are shared is explicitly rejected. Bulgaria, Romania, Russia and 'those kinds of states' are also mentioned as contrasts, as the ultimates in corruption, but these are mainly passing remarks.

nearby countries should be different. For problems to do with *Society and the Law* on the other hand, that the past was different is treated as anomalous: conditions ‘then’ and ‘now’ are pretty much the same, and human nature cannot have changed. But that experiences should be different, or alike, in other countries at the present moment is attributed barely any significance at all.

On balance, the kinds of collective positioning one finds concerning the problems of this domain conform partially to those associated with the ideal of a political bond. The positioning of opponents is generally as adversaries who may be persuaded, by various means, to change their behaviour or who, even if they cannot be changed, represent a nuisance more than an intolerable presence. Those who ‘do the crime’ will have to ‘do the time’, as the English saying has it – a perspective which allows for the possibility that punishment may be followed by reintegration into society. Nonetheless, there is a tendency to construct some opponents as requiring removal from the community, perhaps following the principle of ‘three strikes and you’re out’, and here one seems to have more of an enemy-type positioning, since little expectation is expressed that these dangerous and persistent offenders may later return as reformed citizens. They are essentialised as being ‘simply like that’. More specifically as regards a European polity, the reluctance to make transnational comparisons and evoke counterparts in other European countries clearly contributes little to a political bond on this wider scale – though nor is it incompatible with such a bond, given that one need not make a strong demand for coherence across problem-domains. Positioning of a localised kind in one domain would be consistent with such a bond provided it were augmented by positioning of a wider kind in other domains.

### Collective Positioning in *Relations between Peoples*

#### ***A) The Political Subjects and their Opponents***

Whereas the subjects were identified fairly easily for the two domains looked at so far, for the *Relations between Peoples* domain some further interpretation is required. Perhaps given that the open identification and judgement of peoples – which is central to most of the problems articulated in this domain – has come to carry a stigma in liberal democracies, due to its obvious association with racism, speakers generally do not make explicit their

assumptions concerning with whom they see themselves as sharing their problems. Insofar as there is racism, it is 'euphemised'.<sup>36</sup> Indulging however in some interpretation, one may say that the common-sense subjects for each of the countries studied are the national majority, often ascribed connotations of peacefulness and good sense, and often implied as being white (though the subjects themselves are 'not racist'). Of course, not all participants would have included themselves in such a description (some were non-white); the argument is rather that this would be commonly recognised by the majority if not all participants as the dominant assumption to be engaged with, the background against which any expression of opinions and arguments takes place.

A passage from the Swansea group takes us straight to the heart of matters:

M: Like I said, I'm not racist against blacks, but I'm frightened of, you know, the Arab people, the fanatics, the ones who're living in this ... the way they've been brought up as youngsters ... to me they're a threat, like ... the way they live and that ...

A: What was that fella in Clyne Park, look how long it took to get him off the street, and he was slagging people off left, right and centre. Threatening he was going to kill us and everything, know what I mean?

L: They only got him off the street in the end because he was behind the terrors, and there's a big thing now ...

A: But if you put your soap-box there and started gobbing off like that about Pakistanis and that, you'd be in and gone. [...]

L: Careful what you're saying now, there's a Paki behind over there ...

A: Bollocks. [pause]

L: Such a thing, you've got to say that ... You know, in Swansea now, in a local pub, and you've got to watch what you're saying. Going back to that. Shouldn't have to. And you're scared. Scared ... You know, you mention one wrong thing and you're going to be up in court.

M: You imagine how they feel, when they come over to this country, they must be frightened themselves. Got to be, haven't they.

L: Well why come over then?

M: Well, rather come over here than live out there.

D: Why do you feel that they feel threatened over here?

M: Well they're bound to, aren't they.

L: No I don't think so. I don't think so one little bit.

M: Because they know so many people are against them. And they do know it, don't they.

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<sup>36</sup> Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men*, Chapter 3.

The problem is that of ‘intimidation’ by outsiders. Clearly this is a different problem from those found in the *Economics* domain (although Andy’s reference to asylum-seekers might easily have taken the discussion towards a problematisation based on the ‘burden’ motif), and it differs from those found in *Society and the Law* in that the threat is perceived to be a group threat based on group difference, rather than an individual threat based on an individual’s choosing to break the rules. The subjects which emerge in this passage are the ‘white people’ who feel ‘intimidated’ and who are being prevented from saying what they want to even in their local pub in their own city. (‘It’s as if we’re becoming the minority,’ says Andy later.) Note that there is no debate about this: Martin, who is expressing sympathy for ‘them’ and who is challenging the arguments of the others, does not contest the reference to the intimidated whites; the clash of opinions takes place at a secondary level, on the question of whether ‘they’ also feel threatened and to what extent they have a right to feel threatened. The opponents are cast by Martin as ‘Arabs’ or ‘fanatics’, and Andy (quickly followed by Lee) connects ‘Pakistanis’ to them. What links them is their tendency to threaten the ‘people like us’. Elsewhere in the same discussion, their ‘fanaticism’ is highlighted by foregrounding their religion. Swansea again:

A: Well they walk round with attitudes. A lot of them ... gangs and things ...

D: Alarming people ...

L: The ones with ... all the old head-gear and the rest of it ... [D: ... You know, at the end of the day ...] There’s been a thing on in the schools recently, where they want them to, you know, show their faces, so that when the teacher’s talking to them they can see ‘em ... [D: Yeah, can’t just see their eyes, like ...] Whereas, you go to their country and you got to ... you can’t go out in shorts, you got to put things on. For instance, Turkey and places like that, when you go to special places ... and Arab countries ... you got to wrap up.

A: A mate of mine moved his daughter from Narberth primary school because they banned Christmas celebrations there, because there are so many Muslims there. They banned it all. He moved his daughter from school ... Well he shouldn’t have to move his daughter from school, cos he’s Narberth born and bred.

D: No, you know, we’re not in Iraq, so, in the British country ... British citizens ... [A: ... should abide by our ...]

M: Well it happened a few weeks ago didn’t it, with the Ramadan, when they blocked all top end of town off. Because it was their special day they stopped all the cars from coming into Swansea. [D: They caused congestion for two hours, like ... delays, like ...] Two or three hours, like. And they’re putting mosques and everything else over here: you try putting a church out there and you got no chance ... no chance at all ...

L: Going into racial and that ...

A: They’re more racist than we are.

L: You know, they say *we're* racist and all the rest of it ... *They* are more racist than anyone. I mean, they can say what they want to you, but you mention the word 'black', for instance, and you're in trouble. Big trouble, really, through racial and everything ... and they make everything out to be racial. 'Oh, he's racist, he's racist', you know. [...]

A: There's a couple of Pakistanis on the – well, more than a couple – on the taxi-rank over there, and they get out of their cars, and they stick to themselves, but they speak their own language. Well that's out of order. You're over here, speak our language. Do you know what I mean? Over here, should be speaking our language.

Opponents are conjured up using a number of terms – 'Pakistani', 'Arab', 'Muslim', 'black' – and although no clear reasons are provided for linking these it seems evident that they are assumed to be expressions of the same. These opponents are delineated from the subjects by their intimidating appearance ('the head-gear', their refusal to show their faces, even their eyes), and by their desire to impose 'their' cultural practices on the local people (putting up mosques, refusing to speak the local language). A racial dimension is foregrounded, and the friction between the subjects and opponents is internationalised by the reference to the demands on visitors to Turkey and Iraq. When, a little later, the group talks about the Iraq war, their discourse is remarkably similar: 'It's going to take years to clean it all up,' says Martin, 'because as I say, at the end of the day they're fanatics from a very very young age and it's been drilled into them ... They've sat down in school and read books, "this is this, that, this world we live in is a load of shit, it's not the right world, we shouldn't be here ..."'. 'They've been brainwashed haven't they,' continues Lee. 'You know, that they're going to a better place when they die, and they can't wait to die. And they're prepared to die.'

The discussion in Swansea was particularly explicit, but many of these discursive patterns occurred more widely. Across the interviews, 'Arabs' and 'Muslims' are cast for this domain of problems as the principal opponents of the subjects, with the latter understood to be something along the lines of the peaceful and sensible white majority. These are opponents who are very clearly positioned as *enemies*. They present an existential threat, (note Martin's comment that he is 'frightened' of them, and the multiple references to 'intimidation') and they are uncompromising. The religious element is often underlined. While 'Pakistanis' are mentioned briefly in the Swansea discussion, and 'Turks' occasionally in the German discussions, the category of 'Muslim' is much more common. They cover their faces and they do not speak 'our' language. As will be seen in the next chapter, the idea that mutual toleration is possible with such people tends to be rejected, and unlike for *Society and the Law*, there is general pessimism about the possibilities that education might hold: the differences are held to be essential. When opponents are constructed in this way, the reduction of mutual exposure is generally assumed to be the only answer.

A favourable interpretation would be that when speakers use terms such as ‘Muslims’ or ‘Arabs’ what they are positioning themselves against is not *all* Muslims / Arabs but only those who are especially ‘fanatical’ and uncompromising in their behaviour. If one could say that only the *extremes* amongst these categories are positioned as enemies then one could draw the conclusion that things are much as they should be: tolerance, after all, can be regarded not so much as a good in itself but as dependent for its value upon that which is to be tolerated, and speakers who express intolerance of the fanatical are perhaps simply speaking up for tolerance. Such an interpretation is hard to sustain however, since one sees little attempt to make distinctions of this kind: rarely for instance is there talk of a ‘milder majority’ of Muslims who might be engaged to combat the actions of a ‘dangerous minority’, and in the few cases where such distinction is made it tends to be to suggest that the majority is in league with the minority. Furthermore, the occasional direct references to race seem to run counter to the making of distinctions: they serve rather to emphasise the unity of the opponents. Here is Uwe in Würzburg on the subject of relations with ‘Arabs’:

They want to destroy the whole western world. Europe in many respects, but above all the arch-enemy the US. That’s the ultimate arch-enemy for them, and ... I’m definitely very critical of these people. I mean, the Arab mentality, it’s not everyone’s cup of tea. It’s just a rather different world from ours. It’s the same in Britain or France. If I meet an Italian or a British person or a French person, that’s my mentality, I’ve got no reservations with them, or an American, it’s all basically the same for me ... [R: yeah, yeah] But these people I do find completely different ... [O: A different culture ...] Completely different. And ... I have the feeling that Germany is being more and more overrun, with all this scavenging going on at the moment. Everyone comes in and everyone tries to extract the most for themselves. Now there’s simply no more left, it’s like a huge winter sale here in Germany ... [R: Yeah, yeah ...] That’s how it looks to me. Everyone just comes, especially from the east. From Britain no-one comes [R. chuckles], or from France, or Italy. But all these lot come here and want to suck the country dry until there’s nothing left. That’s how it looks to me. Little by little. So, I don’t see ... I say to my son too, ‘Son, Thomas, if you can, go abroad later. Because here it’s going to get much worse.’ I’m quite serious. I don’t know how it’s supposed to be sustainable. There’ll be one great mishmash, each group with its culture and each wanting to install its religion. After a while you just don’t understand it at all.

The group as a whole agrees that ‘Arabs’ (again, seemingly elided with Muslims, given the references to religion) represent ‘a different culture’, and Uwe is by no means the only one to invoke the category ‘the western world’ to describe the subjects. Innocence and vulnerability are alluded to with the introduction of Uwe’s son Thomas; the Arab mentality, by contrast, is an aggressive one, bent on destruction. Again, the positioning of the opponents is as enemies who pose an existential threat to the subjects. They have an intrinsic mentality which is constitutive of who they are. The way Uwe speaks scornfully of an imminent ‘mishmash’ in Germany, characterised by a plurality of cultural and religious groups, suggests that he understands ‘the west’ in its true form to be culturally and religiously homogeneous; a

reference to race is conspicuously absent, although one feels it is not far away – race, one might say, is being euphemised as religion, ‘culture’ and ‘mentality’, allowing the subjects to maintain the aura of reasonableness. What to make of Uwe’s reference to ‘the East’? One interpretation is that half-way through this passage Uwe begins to draw on the discursive resources of the *Economics* domain: note how his reference to those who ‘try to extract the most for themselves’ is reminiscent of the opponents of the subjects in that domain – those who take but who do not contribute – and note the explicitly economic metaphor of Germany as the site of ‘a huge winter sale’. As will be seen in the next chapter, the motif of ‘the cheaper East’ is a common one for talking about problems in the *Economics* domain, and is therefore a natural digression from what is here the main act of demarcation based on culture, religion and race.

Individuals occasionally seek to counteract these dominant acts of positioning, a fact which deserves to be highlighted so as to weaken any determinist implications in our argument. Hans-Jürgen in Erfurt, for example, in a discussion of whether mosques should be allowed in the neighbourhood, is emphatic in his defence, despite persistent objection from Mike: ‘One has to tolerate another culture. It’s a simple fact that they’re there, you can’t wish them away, and you can’t do away with them using laws and regulations either. They’re different cultures and anyone who wants to go to a mosque ... [M: But it can’t be right that the state builds the mosque ...] On the contrary... [M: ... That can’t be right ...] One has to tolerate it ... [M: Yes but ...] ... one has to tolerate it if they want to build up their own culture here.’ Such expressions were rare however, and tended to be made by individuals alone.

As well as against ‘Arabs’ and ‘Muslims’, the subjects are often demarcated against the extremes within the ranks of the national majority. In the German discussions, for instance, it is underlined that the subjects have nothing to do with the events of the Third Reich, nor with today’s skinheads, and nor do they wish to be associated with those who are excessively tolerant. The political subjects are the reasonable middle. In the words of Uwe in Würzburg: ‘it’s a problem here in Germany with all the Muslims and stuff we have. They’ve simply come over here and now they want to enforce their culture exclusively and they’re unwilling to toe the line at all. And the problem is that in Germany we tend to go in either for blind racism, with our skinheads who go around smashing everything up, or we have this complete deference towards foreigners, “our dear foreigners”, this super-tolerance,

which is equally bad. So I'd want to see things change a little – and I'm no racist [laughs], I simply don't understand it.<sup>37</sup>

Germany's past is a crucial element in the construction of the subjects in those discussions. It informs the notion that the subjects are barred from talking openly about the problems they face, something which seems to be felt even more strongly amongst the Germans than amongst the British. One sees it at several moments in the discussion in Lübeck. Ali, recognised by all present as being of Iranian origin, at one point makes a strong statement which seems to make the others uncomfortable: 'But the Jews have the money! It's clear, the Jews have the money. Look, who's the head of Deutsche Bank? A Jew. All the power in the world, it's held by Jews ...'. On its own this is just a provocative utterance, but what is interesting is the reaction which follows, more indicative of collective assumptions: after a few silence-breaking chuckles, 'Ali, you've got the advantage that you can say something like that!' says Jürgen, referring to Ali's 'foreigner' status. 'Yeah,' says Wolfgang, 'just what I was going to say. We're not allowed to say such a thing.' Elsewhere in the discussion, Jürgen talks of how 'many people' (it seems he knows a few) are dissatisfied with being associated with the acts of previous generations of Germans: 'Anyway, a lot of them aren't even alive any more, the ones who were involved in it back then. Hardly a person left. Subsequent generations should remember what a calamity it was, but that they're always labelled as scapegoats and that accusations are made again and again and so on, that's going too far for a lot of people. Because they say: "I had nothing to do with that. My great-grandfather, he lived it, but me ...".' Ali makes a comment similar to his other one: 'even today the Germans have to live under that. Every year this whole stuff is wheeled out, again and again. Weeks are spent on it, and think of how much money flows from the whole thing. Every year ...'. After a pause, Jürgen replies with: 'Ali's opinion as a foreigner is sometimes noteworthy. A German's opinion on that couldn't be any better could it, or couldn't be any different.' (Niklas, it should be added, explicitly dissociates himself in both these episodes, saying that whether or not he is 'entitled' to say such things, he has no wish to.)

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<sup>37</sup> At Erfurt, Uwe notes that 'whenever German politicians go abroad, everyone holds their hands out, and if they don't give them anything then quickly they get called a [very quietly] Nazi, you see?' Andreas argues that 'this responsibility, it was shed fifty years ago. At some point it needs to be recognised by other countries that the Germans of today are no longer those of fifty years ago. And I mean, one mustn't forget what took place, that's logical, it mustn't happen again. But nor can it be the case that everyone must carry on paying for it. In fifty generations, they're not going to know anything about ...'. Hans-Jürgen and Mike add their agreement, likewise positioning the 'people like us' between two extremes and resisting the idea of transgenerational unity.

In the Czech discussions, the delineation of the subjects is fairly weak, mainly because there is less discussion of such problems. At times one almost gets the impression that the Czech participants are rejecting any sense of subjectivity in this domain. Míra in Plzeň, for example, says ‘I think the Czech Republic is pretty uninteresting for terrorists,’ and when responding to the ‘Peace and War’ card says ‘that’s something which doesn’t affect the Czech Republic much, because no-one here really engages in that, we don’t shoot each other across the table.’ Notable in a passage from the Liberec group, aside from a repetition of this theme, is the way the presence of Czech soldiers in Iraq is treated as a rather ridiculous notion:

JW: On this area here, security, what kind of problems are we talking about? I think you said something about terrorism, or the war in Iraq ...

O: All of that’s a problem, but our society doesn’t engage itself much with those things.

Z: Our society is struggling to accustom itself to having professional soldiers.<sup>38</sup> We’re not used to it. How many times do young boys get into the car and it turns out they’re professional soldiers ... When I look at them I think ‘Fuck, I can’t believe my eyes!’

O: It’s something which is beyond our borders. Our nation doesn’t think of going and protesting in front of parliament about whether we do or don’t need to send soldiers somewhere. We leave it up to the state how it’s going to present itself.

Despite this weaker sense of subjecthood, many of the same discursive patterns are found in the Czech discussions as in the British and German ones. The subjects are positioned as essentially peaceful: when the Plzeň group talk about the presence of Czechs in Iraq, Míra emphasises that these soldiers are ‘not fighting, they’re just securing the region’, and the whole group agrees on the point that they are ‘not aggressors’. Muslims, despite their relatively minor presence in the Czech Republic, are treated as a particular source of difficulties. Zdeněk in Ostrava emphasises: ‘We’re not racists, but it’s a major problem that there’s a lot of foreigners around, and a lot of them are Muslim foreigners, and Muslim is a different nature from Christian ... Shiites, Christians, they’re all different. So therefore problems arise. There’ll be problems here in a while like the problems around the world generally. Already they want to build a mosque, because a lot of them go to the spas. That’s what they want. And they don’t know how to compromise, Muslims ... that’s the Muslim for you. It’s a problem, it’s always a problem, and even if it looks like it’s OK they’re still thinking something different behind your back. It’s a different mentality, different upbringing, different everything. They treat their wives and children differently. Here a

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<sup>38</sup> The Czech army was fully professionalised in 2004 with the ending of compulsory military service.

woman is equal, an equal partner, but not with them. And it'll never work well together, there'll always be problems.'

While discussion of the Roma tends to connect them more to economic or law-and-order problems, and to find them evaluated according to criteria of economic (un)productivity or criminal habits, a passage from the Ostrava group shows how on occasion they are also enveloped with the repertoires characteristic of *Relations between Peoples*, in the suggestion namely that gypsies are essentially of foreign extraction and should perhaps be sent back to from where they came:

M: Sládek and his party,<sup>39</sup> they had really extreme opinions on everything ...

J: ... On expelling the gypsies and sending them to Romania and to India ...

M: Extreme, extreme, very extreme, badly presented. He said what the majority of people think here ... [Z: But vulgarly and arrogantly ...] But yeah, you can't just say it like that, that's not on.

J: Hang on. They say that we're racists. We're not racists. This guy got into my car, British guy from a humanitarian organisation, they look after gypsies, and this guy's a gypsy from India.<sup>40</sup> I drove him to the district where the gypsies live, I took him there. And then these people swore at him and abused him. They broke glass, they made all sorts of problems. Of course they say those are normal general problems, but they say that we're racists. We're not racists. There was a competition here, a really popular nationwide competition on TV called Eurostar ... or whatever it's called, Superstar ... it's a music thing, it's also in Britain and Germany, and here a gypsy won it. So are we racists, are we? If we were racists then this gypsy, even if he knew how to sing, we wouldn't have given it to him. We're like this: the one with the best voice wins.

The idea that 'gypsies' should be expelled to India or Romania is presented as a 'very extreme' expression of what most people think (but which they cannot say quite so openly).<sup>41</sup> This does not prevent Josef positioning the subjects ('we Czechs') as sensible and open-minded: if a gypsy has a nice voice, let him win the singing competition.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Miroslav Sládek, leader of the far-right Republican Party and known for his strongly provocative statements concerning the Roma and the Sudeten Germans. The party was dissolved in 2001.

<sup>40</sup> This may be a reference to Kumar Vishwanathan, an Indian human-rights campaigner based in Ostrava who is known for his work with the Roma community. He is neither Romany nor British, but may have been taken for this on the basis of his darker skin and use of English.

<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, in the middle of a discussion about the misbehaviour of 'gypsies', Petr in Plzeň asks 'is there racism in England?' The word racism had not appeared at all before this mention.

<sup>42</sup> This reference is to the second *Pop Idol* competition held in the Czech Republic (in 2005). It was won by a Roma singer, Vlasta Horvath, though not without controversy: another Roma singer, Martina Balogová, said to be of good voice, was voted out of the competition in an earlier round, provoking criticism in the British press for anti-Roma bias. Some concluded that the victory for Horvath owed something to a desire amongst the voting public to put this record straight.

## ***B) Comparables and Counterparts***

The motifs used to denote opponents in this *Relations between Peoples* domain are not applied to *all* peoples mentioned, in particular not to those who seem to form part of ‘the West’ – for example, when participants talk about ‘the French’, ‘the Italians’, ‘the Americans’ etc. While these are sometimes described as having ‘national characters’, it tends not to be assumed so readily that these are fundamentally irreconcilable. Onřej in Liberec gets the backing of the group when he says that the English, as a ‘nation’, are ‘excessive’ and ‘silly’ when they come to Liberec, wanting only to get heavily drunk, but they are described as a nuisance rather than a menace. Nationalities associated with Europe and the West are not assumed to threaten each other in any existential way: as Uwe from the Würzburg group says above, with the agreement of Rainer and Oliver: ‘If I meet an Italian or a British person or a French person, that’s my mentality, I’ve got no reservations with them, or an American, it’s all basically the same for me.’ Likewise, the possibility that disagreements amongst such peoples might lead to war is generally ruled out. As Rainer puts it, ‘conditions like those that led to the First World War, to the Second World War, or also even in the century before, where there were hostilities within Middle Europe, Central Europe, that led to the world wars: they’ve been completely eliminated, gone forever, or at least for a long time. Such a peaceful, harmonious existence together, no more threat towards the outside ... The only conflicts which are left are far away from us, and here in Central Europe, in Europe, in the EU area we have a very peaceful shared existence. I think that’s very important, that’s a historical step forward. Germany-Britain, the bombardment in the Second World War, this hard enmity is gone, gone once and for all.’ War, says Petr in Plzeň, ‘is today a problem of the Third World. Africa, there are always wars of some kind there. In South America there’s nothing. In North America of course not at all, nor in Europe.’ Míra supports him: ‘yeah, in the south they have wars with each other, they have civil wars.’ When opponents are constructed within the West for problems in this domain – which is not often – they tend to be positioned at most as adversaries. Also, a distinction is more readily made in these cases between peoples and governments, with aggression sometimes ascribed only to the latter.

Instead, when other European countries are referred to, it tends to be as places of comparison rather than as actors. Unlike the *Society and the Law* domain, a broad range of comparables is evoked with regard to problems in this domain: transnational comparisons are common, at least amongst the British and German groups. A white national majority is at

least one of the features shared by the countries which the Swansea group describes as facing the same problem to do with 'invasion':

L: I mean, the status of a refugee ... a refugee flees his country and goes to the nearest safe place. I presume that's what refugee means. And I mean, why are they coming over to Britain? Obviously we take our fair share and help them out, but I mean places like Australia and all that have got strict rules ...

D: Germany, France ... these countries have said no to them all, haven't they.

L: Well France, there's was a programme on telly, the police in France ... it was all about haulage, and the police in France are chucking the asylum-seekers on the back of the lorries to get them out of the country. To get 'em over here.

[And a few minutes later:]

M: What about these asylum-seekers, are they going to America then? [L: Yeah, they're ...] Are they being caught? I mean, it's open for them to go to America, is it? Asylum-seekers? [L: They're going all around the world ...] Australia doesn't take 'em, does it.

L: That's what I was going to say, the only one who really seems to be putting a stop to it and saying 'no, we're not letting you in' is Australia.

M: Sent them back on a boat, didn't he.

A: And it's Finland or somewhere where they put them in like an exclusion area, and if they step outside that ... [D: Switzerland.] No, Sweden or Finland.

D: Yeah, I'm sure it's Switzerland, that. There's a mile away from everything ... [A: And if they step outside that ...] There was a programme on the telly about a week or fortnight ago. There's a mile away from everything, and they can only go within that mile.

The otherness of refugees and asylum-seekers is emphasised here to the extent that they are almost dehumanised, whereas a range of countries are mentioned as comparable – Australia, France, Germany, America, Finland and Switzerland. What is it that links these latter? There is of course a difficulty here in what (if any) collective term to give them: whether one infers that they are all representatives of 'white majority' countries, or 'the West', or 'liberal democracies', or 'historically Christian' countries. A passage from the Würzburg discussion exhibits several of these as markers for the places of comparison:

U: I recently read again how the British are supposed to have trashed the Germans [in newspapers like *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror*]. I said to myself, well, you know, I'm not going to get caught up in this hysteria. I've met enough British people and I've always got on really well with British people and I think it's all rubbish. Racism or whatever, it's basically stupidity I think ... [R: yeah]. Because ... think about it, what is the difference between a British person and me? Basically there's none at all. He was born over there and I was born here.

O: They're partly blood-related, through the Angles and Saxons ... they also had German origins. [...] As far as what he's saying, with the Germans and British, I don't see that as a problem at all. The only thing which I see as a problem in Germany is the religion issue, Muslims and Christians

... [U: yeah]. That's the only, fundamental problem, that Muslims are anchored here in the society, and on the one hand the women behave and dress like German women and on the other hand there's the danger of attacks. Muslim fundamentalism ... [R: yeah, yeah]. And anyone, if he wants to, can commit a suicide attack here. You can't even expel them any more because a lot of them are already German citizens.

U: You have that problem as well, especially in London. The same problem.

O: ... In the whole of Europe ... the Netherlands ...

R: Yeah, exactly ... they're getting the same in Britain too, that's right ... [U: ... The same problem ...]

O: ... Britain ... London ... Very difficult. A lot of Muslims there too ...

U: ... And they're also perverse. And the problem is, OK I'm generalising a bit, if you have a hundred Muslims, one makes an attack, but the other 99, who know about it, they don't speak up. They're harmless, sure, but they wouldn't say anything even if they knew, I think. That is the danger [R: Yeah, I agree ...] For everyone, for the whole western world, whether it's Germany or Britain or the US. I really see that as a problem.

R: It must be very pronounced in France too, I think the problem there is even greater. In France, because of the close connection with Arab countries ... Algeria ... Morocco etc.

U: They've also got themselves to blame there, the French. They ragged around down there like maniacs back then. That's a dark chapter in French history, the Algerian war ... [R: yeah, yeah] They slaughtered, they exploited to the extreme.

O: That goes back to colonialism – the Dutch, the British, the French, they were colonial powers. They whipped these countries back then and now the boomerang is coming back at them. The Muslims are incorporated now and they're trying to force through their interests.

Comparable environments where people face the same problems of exposure to those collectively dangerous or intransigent are clearly mentioned in this passage: London, England or Britain, the Netherlands, France, the US, and 'the whole of Europe'. The differences between the subjects within these environments are explicitly minimised: the distinction is merely that one was born here and the other was born there, there is even a blood relationship between them, and to be prejudiced towards them would be an act of 'stupidity'. They are abbreviated to 'the western world', 'Christians' and former 'colonial powers'. The concept of 'the west' or 'the western world' is widely deployed (cf. a passage from Uwe above), but the religious element should not be eliminated, given how commonly it is deployed to heighten the sense of difference.<sup>43</sup> Rather than seeking a meta-concept for the environments and comparables, it is perhaps best once again to think in terms of a series of concepts sharing a family resemblance. The white-majority countries, the west, the

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<sup>43</sup> Peter in Kassel uses it to emphasise the peacefulness of the environment and comparables: 'you won't see here a Protestant saying to a Catholic "we must have a duel" or "I'll kill you because you've got different beliefs."' When Hans mentions the counter-example of Northern Ireland, this is treated as a rather odd exception.

Christian world and the peaceful world would be core concepts in this; the ‘colonial powers’ (mentioned only here) and ‘liberal democracies’ (mentioned nowhere) would be very much subsidiary ones.

One might think that the experience of the Third Reich, whose *sui generis* nature is keenly appreciated in the German discussions, would render transnational comparisons difficult. A passage from the Lübeck discussion suggests rather that it merely problematises them:

W: Whoever disputes the Holocaust and claims that ... that there was no annihilation of the Jews and the rest, then they’re completely far-right, they’re beyond credibility. Because we can’t deny that, the Holocaust took place. But I think, in the meantime sixty years have passed in this country and there’s far too much banging on about it today. In other countries where there’ve been similar problems (not to the same extent) it’s handled quite differently. If I look at France for example, Le Pen, who’s emerged as a right-wing, more or less right-wing radical figure ... In France it’s never been the same problem as it’s been here with the NPD or the Republicans ...

J: Even to mention the past ... because of the past we have, it’s particularly difficult for us to be far-right, or to develop in that direction. It’s particularly difficult for us, that’s certainly clear. [W: yeah]

N: And it’s important that one deals with that. And that one draws the lessons of it, and ... avoids that radicalism, that one should always keep what happened back then at the back of one’s mind, and meditate on it ... how one discriminates ...

J: Because there’s never been anything comparable to the Holocaust in history, you really can’t compare it with France or Le Pen, it’s a completely different level ...

W: I didn’t want to compare them in that respect, I just wanted to point out that Le Pen, for example, he was against foreigners, against Moroccans and Algerians who’ve come to France, and ... that ... in France he was able to say it, but if we here in Germany say ‘OK, we want to have fewer Turks here ...’ or ‘We want to have fewer Iranians,’ or whatever, then immediately we’re neo-Nazis. No politician would say that here.

Here one sees Niklas, not for the first time, intervening to disrupt a portrayal of the Germans as victims. Germany is held to be distinctive in the extent to which open criticism is tolerated, and Jürgen and Wolfgang subsequently affirm that the Holocaust cannot be compared; but Wolfgang still maintains that France is comparable to the extent the French share the same problems associated with immigration as the Germans.

Amongst the Czech groups comparisons with experiences in other countries are much rarer. The home environment is seen as a peaceful place where open conflict does not take place – as doubtless the British and Germans would agree, were it not for the arrival of immigrants from outside. Whilst the Czech groups certainly do not imply a strong boundary between eastern and western Europe in this domain (unlike in *Economics*), they do distinguish between big states and small states, and doubt is expressed as to whether certain

problems experienced in the former can be expected in the latter. ‘Why would there be terrorism in the Czech Republic?’ asks Míra in Plzeň. Pressed as to why Britain had recently been targeted, he makes the link with the invasion of Iraq:

M: Because Britain was the main ally of America in the war against ...

P: Yeah, but it’s possible another conflict will come up and certainly countries will put themselves either on one side or the other. We’ll put ourselves again on the side of the West and then just as in Britain, France and the rest ... today you’ve got attacks in Germany ... [M: I think Poland is ...] Poland is now the main boss in Iraq ...

M: Poland’s in a worse position than we are as far as the threat of terrorism goes.

With a fair measure of interpretation, one might conclude that for the Czechs the comparable environments are other *small* (perhaps white-majority) countries which are assumed to play little active role in international relations. The relative thinness of the material here makes a nuanced conclusion hard to ground though.

As we survey these passages to do with *Relations between Peoples*, some of them undoubtedly quite disturbing, it is worth recalling the purpose of the study. What the goal is *not* is to suggest that taxi-drivers are incorrigibly prejudiced, or to point the finger at individuals and establish that ‘David in Swansea is a racist’, or merely to provoke the reader with colourfully outrageous bits of transcript. The aim is rather to identify common types of discursive practice and their implications for political association, including the ways in which they run counter to a democratic political community. To summarise what has been seen, the subjects in this domain are generally formulated as the white national majority, with connotations of good sense, peacefulness and the avoidance of extremes. Their opponents inevitably take on the inverse of these qualities: they tend to be described as being of fundamentally different appearance (elements of which include colour and / or religious-cultural expressions), as being uncompromising and perhaps aggressive, and as doing things to the extremes. These motifs are widespread in the British and German discussions in particular, even though individual speakers occasionally choose to repudiate them. Unlike in the *Society and the Law* domain, here the main opponents of the moment are easily cast as a transborder unity, as a single ‘Muslim people’, and unlike in the *Economics* domain they are repeatedly positioned as enemies, threatening the collective security and the ‘way of life’ of the political subjects. Whereas the key idea to describe eastern Europeans, which we saw when looking at the *Economics* domain, is ‘they don’t know how to work and contribute’,

and one of the key criticisms made of certain other groups, as we saw when looking at *Society and the Law*, is that ‘they don’t know how to behave properly’, here one of the key criticisms of Muslims – the main opponents in *Relations between Peoples* – is ‘they don’t know how to compromise.’

With emphasis on the irrationality, aggression and intransigence of the other, there is a strong tendency to construct essential attributes which are unsusceptible to change and which do not permit the possibility of compromise. These patterns of demarcation represent a strong divergence from the type of collective positioning associated with a political bond. Transnational comparisons are made with some frequency, and counterparts are explicitly evoked in these comparable environments, but the effect is to harden the categories of ‘we’ and ‘them’. Furthermore, it is not specifically a European context which is being described, but a broader one based on the notion of ‘the West’ and the supposed predicament of ‘western peoples’. Whereas the range of comparisons drawn for problems to do with *Economics* is rather narrower than the contours of a European polity, and for problems to do with *Society and the Law* transnational comparisons are mainly absent, for problems to do with *Relations between Peoples* they extend considerably beyond the boundaries of any putative European polity.

## Overview

This chapter has introduced the concepts of ‘political subjects’ ‘opponents’ (adversaries and enemies), ‘counterparts’ and ‘comparable environments’, and has used them as the basis for a reading of the source material designed to elaborate on the second element of a political bond. It has outlined the main acts of positioning found with regard to the three key problem domains of *Economics*, *Society and the Law* and *Relations between Peoples*. A recapitulation is provided in the table below.

In line with our conceptualisation of the political common, we have arrived at a discursive repertoire which is rich and complex, but not unpatterned. To render it in the stark, uncompromising square boxes of a matrix inevitably risks conveying an exaggerated sense of uniformity and overtones of determinism. Once more one encounters an important theoretical tension: discursive practices are patterned (that is, they are partially rule-bound), yet any attempt to express that pattern will inevitably be incomplete and procrustean, since speakers may sometimes diverge from that pattern, and since new patterns are always being

generated.<sup>44</sup> Any basic notion of free will must allow that individuals may want to reject the ‘we’ that other participants construct (as we have seen some do, especially as regards *Relations between Peoples*), and that speakers may venture into discursive territory which is not rule-bound, where patterned ways of speaking are less apparent (as is the case with problems to do with *Quality of Life*, to which Chapter 6 returns). Nevertheless, as an indication of prominent discursive features rather than as a rendition of tightly-bound structure, an overview carries heuristic value:

	<b>Economics</b>	<b>Society and the Law</b>	<b>Relations between Peoples</b>
<i>Political Subjects</i>	Active formulation: the contributors, the working people. (More) passive formulation: normal / simple / real / little people, without special advantages; the people in the middle (esp. for British).	Those who play by the rules, or who break only minor rules. Those who stand up for the rules.	The peaceful and sensible majority, often with (white) racial connotations.
<i>Opponents</i>	The oppressive – the rich, private companies, shareholders.  The non-contributors: scroungers (for British), the corrupt (esp. for Czechs – see next section); ‘cheaper’ workers, esp. from eastern Europe.  Status: adversaries rather than enemies, to be encouraged to contribute their share.	Criminals, anti-social egotists, incompetent / soft judges and police; certain minority groups (esp. of Turkish or Balkan origin in Germany; esp. Roma in Czech Rep.).  Status: mixed. Adversaries if they can be educated, enemies to be imprisoned if not.	As enemies: uncompromising fanatics, often with religious difference emphasised. Esp. Muslims.  As adversaries: the overly tolerant (inc. soft politicians); powerful peoples and governments within the West, esp. the US.
<i>Comparables and Counterparts</i>	Nearby European countries of a similar level of economic development. For British / Germans: countries in western Europe. For Czechs: central-/eastern-European countries.	Virtually no transnational comparisons, except amongst Czechs on corruption. Occasional comparisons and contrasts with the past.	Other western countries - states of Europe, US, Australia and others. Amongst these, for the Czech groups mainly other small states.

*Summary of Collective Positioning*

Perhaps one of the key points which emerges from this study of collective positioning is the importance of taking seriously the conflictual dimension when conceptualising the kind of

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Tully, 'The Agonic Freedom of Citizens', in particular p.164.

collective bond that could underpin a polity. The problems of these three core domains, the discussion of which formed the bulk of the interviews as a whole, are articulated not in detached or consensual terms but with a strong sense of ‘we’ and ‘them’. In articulating a political common, participants construct and orient themselves towards certain social groupings while positioning others as hostile to these. There is no reason to suppose that this is purely an artefact of the interview format – after all, it was *problems*, not people, that participants were encouraged to talk about, and it was generally to abstract issues rather than social groups that the topic cards made reference. And yet, as they discussed these matters of common concern, quite clear boundaries came to be marked out between those who shared in these problems as ‘people like us’ and those whose position on them was quite different, either generative of the problems or contributory in some way. For our wider purposes, the importance of conceptualising the collective bond such that one can accommodate this political adversarialism seems clear.

Conversely, the difficulties attendant in conceptualising the collective bond either in terms of shared values (a *values* bond, as described in Chapter 1) or in terms of diffuse feelings of trust and solidarity across the citizen body (a *social* bond) also seem to emerge in this study. Note for example the absence, almost total, of the invocation of ‘Europeans’ as a subject position. There is virtually no problem-area – with the possible exception of the marginalised problems of *Quality of Life*, to which we shall return – where it is assumed that ‘we Europeans’ hold a common perspective and are affected by problems alike. Unemployment, for example, is not treated as a problem for ‘Europeans’ in general, as an affliction which all share a common purpose in seeking to overcome, but as a problem for ‘the little people’ or ‘the ordinary people’, where these exist both in ‘our country’ and in other European countries, and where in both they are at the mercy of a range of economically more powerful actors. Problems of social atomisation and increasing egoism likewise are treated not as abstract and indiscriminating developments before which all are equal, but as hitting in particular the minority of people who both ‘play by the (important) rules’ and ‘stick up for the rules’. Of course, the prevalence of this kind of positioning does not imply that a broader sense of the common good is altogether missing: the calls are generally for ‘fairness’ and for a restoration of ‘the middle’, not for the absolute ascendancy of ‘people like us’. But it is generally assumed that this pursuit of a better state of affairs would have to unfold in circumstances where a set of opponents are blocking the way, and with whom some form of conflict would be necessary. In the face of this tendency to adversarialism, those arguing for a *values* or a *social* bond would perhaps have to argue that it is the discussion of political

problems itself which opens up these divisions, and that they may be closed and consensus restored by shifting the focus elsewhere, to the values that bind or to practices of cooperation. Such a move is difficult though, since it would imply a diversion from one of the essential concerns of a political community, perhaps even the paramount one, which is the contemplation and amelioration of problems which have been articulated as public rather than private in nature. To overlook them would be to remove the ‘political’ from political community.

However, what also emerges from the empirical material is that certain acts of collective positioning incompatible with a political community characterised by liberal tolerance are made with some degree of regularity, and with regard to one domain of public life in particular. When problems of *Relations between Peoples* are raised, there is frequent evocation of *enemies* – those whose very presence is treated as illegitimate. ‘Muslims’ represent the category most frequently thus invoked in these interviews, though one can imagine that in other periods other terms would perform the same role – the specific referent of the positioning act can be thought of as contingent.<sup>45</sup> At first glance this pattern seems to open up a significant line of critique against a political bond as a promising conceptual response to the question of the common. In proposing it as a normative ideal, we contrasted it not just with values-based and trust-based approaches to the collective bond but also to culturalist approaches, which it was suggested were always liable to be exclusionary and/or repressive. Having concluded from empirical research that a significant body of the problems which make up the political common invite acts of positioning which are likewise exclusionary and uncompromising, have not the same dangers which we wanted to avoid returned ‘through the back door’, severely weakening the appeal of this ideal? The objection is not compelling. The crucial point is that, by speaking analytically in terms of *problems* one holds out the possibility of change, since it is clear that different kinds of problematisation and ways of understanding these problems are possible, and indeed that – as will be seen in the next chapter – a plurality of discursive motifs concerning their origins and nature are already in circulation. A problem-oriented perspective, speaking for instance of problems such as group conflict or the unwanted exposure to alien cultural symbols, holds out the possibility that opposition is based on substantive disagreement, and that compromises are possible if those problems are addressed or redescribed. Thus the

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<sup>45</sup> Lamont brings this point out clearly in her study of American and French working men: the racial and class boundaries drawn are quite different for the two groups, with the implication that ‘nothing is inevitable’ about how such boundaries are drawn. Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men*, p.6.

possibility of some form of political action, based on fostering an alternative and more appropriate set of discursive practices, is fully recognised and a critical stance can be maintained. If, by contrast, one takes a *cultural* bond as one's ideal, one is liable to accord too strong a degree of permanence and acceptability to the acts of positioning one finds, acquiescing in the assumption that they are constitutive of the we-people and that 'others' (opponents, in our terminology) are constitutively different. Normatively unattractive formulations for the 'people like us' become, from this perspective, much more difficult to shake off. The question of discursive change will be dealt with in more depth in Chapter 6, but it is as well to highlight the advantage of treating problems, not cultural markers or beliefs about such markers, as the reference-point for collective positioning.

Furthermore, problems to do with *Relations between Peoples* constitute only one aspect of the political common, and the acts of positioning they give rise to are but a subset of a wider set of discursive practices. These discussions indicate the importance of taking seriously the issue-context in which positioning occurs, for it varies from one domain to the next. That there is plurality of this kind has a normative appeal since, as has been suggested, it implies multiple possibilities for *inclusion* as well as for exclusion. It prevents the emergence of one over-arching axis of conflict, based on a single category of 'we' and a single category of 'them', of the kind that might lead to the fragmentation of the political community. Instead, the construction of opponents is always specific to a particular set of problems, and there is always the possibility (the realisation of which is a practical matter) that those 'really-existing people' who come to be positioned as opponents by association with one set of criteria can be repositioned as 'people like us' through association with another. Those positioned as economic adversaries may be 'redeemed' as rule-abiding folk, and those positioned as opponents as regards the deployment of religious symbols may be repositioned as sharing the same predicaments in the domain of *Economics*. A plurality of concerns and ways of speaking has the potential to bind together, in a web of overlapping conflicts, those who take up these discursive practices.

If this plurality itself is attractive, it may be that here one has grounds to abandon the model which is idealised in the traditional language of the nation-state, where the emphasis is on a single national 'identity' or a coherent hierarchy of identities.<sup>46</sup> The variety of acts of collective positioning one can observe in discussions such as these, some of them quite localised while others evoking counterparts in a range of different countries, seems to open

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<sup>46</sup> Wagner, 'Crises of Modernity'.

out the possibility of something more complex, of a poly-dimensional political project in which different struggles and contests are played out with regard to different problem domains, potentially with appeal to multiple sets of political institution. If a European polity were to fit comfortably into this vision, it would require that a European context be invoked more frequently, and on more problems, than has generally been found the case in this chapter, where it has been noted instead that the context is more often a local one, a semi-European one, or a broader-than-European one. It would also require a conducive set of assumptions regarding the worth and plausibility of a political project. Organised collective address of the problems of the political common needs to 'make sense' if a European polity is to be validated in these terms. It is to these issues that the following chapter turns.

# Chapter 5

## The Political Project

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In a community one could properly call *political*, rather than a cultural community with political features, or a thinly tied assembly of individuals, the noteworthy allegiances would be those of a problem-oriented kind. We have explored this claim in terms of the allegiances of citizens to other citizens. The same proposal can now be made on the related question of allegiances towards the institutions of the polity. The appearance of a political bond would depend on these institutions and their demands making sense to people in problem-related terms. There would need to be an awareness that these institutions provide significant opportunities for the pursuit of common purposes. There is no need to imagine citizens as spending their daily lives locked in public debate and seeking fulfilment of all their goals by political means: nothing so grand is intended. But there would need to be some sense that political institutions can answer to at least some of the concerns of ‘people like us’. This is what one wants to express by referring, as the third element of a political bond, to the plausibility of a *political project*. Seeking to address the problems of the political common in an organised, collective fashion would need to be treated as a sensible and feasible proposition. If the sense of shared predicament in the face of common problems is what could bind citizens to their ‘counterparts’ further afield, it is a sense of the worth of a political project which could both augment this and couple it with a certain allegiance to the institutions of the polity.

In this chapter these ideas are developed further by exploring two kinds of assumption in the empirical material: assumptions to do with what is relevant for the explanation of problems, and assumptions concerning the extent to which they are amenable to organised address. Both allow one to think more clearly about what it is for a political project to ‘make sense’ to people. Certain kinds of discursive practice, it is suggested, serve to ‘prepare the ground’ for a European polity, while others may diminish its credibility. The kinds of explanation commonly given for problems are important because they express expectations concerning the parameters within which political agency can be effective. How

a set of problems is explained opens up certain possibilities for their remedy while at the same time closing down others. Furthermore, where there is a lack of explanatory resources altogether, this may have the consequence – even if the problems are taken seriously and the desire for change is stated – that they are treated with a sense of fatalism that puts in doubt the worth of organised action.<sup>1</sup> By looking at the repertoire of explanations for problems to do with *Economics, Society and the Law* and *Relations between Peoples*, we can therefore establish some general guiding principles regarding what kinds of political project will be received as appropriate. Then, by looking directly at the patterns of assumption concerning the possibilities for action, we will be able to identify more specifically what tends to be expected in terms of organised address for each of the problem domains. At stake here is what can be achieved and the means which are most applicable. Having explored the empirical material in this way, we hope by the end of this chapter to have indicated at a theoretical level what may be meant by referring to the plausibility of a political project, and more empirically what kinds of commonly-made assumptions one finds concerning politics as a problem-solving process. This will enable us then in Chapter 6 to trace out the implications for a European polity, and to consider the extent to which the accommodation of such a polity may require changes in discursive practice.

### *Explanatory Motifs and the Possibilities for Action*

‘Explanation’ as a feature of everyday talk can be conceptualised in a number of ways.<sup>2</sup> Instinctively, there might seem good grounds to treat it strictly as a matter of reported causality: explanations involve the giving of a reason or multiple reasons for the emergence of a problematic situation. By way of example, one can take the instance of a ‘particularly hot summer’. Someone treating this as a problematic situation and wanting to account for it might supply a reason as follows: ‘This has been a particularly hot summer because of the build-up of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.’ It is a straightforward example, and the element of reported causality is quite clear: it is the fact of a build-up of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions which is being treated as

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<sup>1</sup> This point is well made in Gamson, *Talking Politics*, p.6.

<sup>2</sup> The discussion here naturally excludes explanation as a puzzle in the philosophy of science. Further, within the field of lay explanation, it excludes ‘mentalist’ or psychological approaches such as *attribution theory* for the reasons outlined in Chapter 2, and draws instead mainly on approaches emerging from ethnomethodology. A useful overview of some of the ways in which lay explanation has been explored is Charles Antaki, ‘Explanations, Communication and Social Cognition’, in Charles Antaki (ed.), *Analysing Everyday Explanation: A Casebook of Methods* (London: Sage, 1988).

the reason for this summer being hot. The statement acts neatly as a reply to a ‘why’ (or a ‘how come’) question. One could, if one wanted to, extend the analysis further by considering the underlying idea or *warrant* (in Stephen Toulmin’s terminology<sup>3</sup>) that build-ups of CO<sub>2</sub> do generally cause hot summers, and indeed the possible reasons for maintaining that this is so (the *backing* for the warrant), for instance a newspaper article which describes consensus opinion amongst scientists as holding that build-ups of CO<sub>2</sub> have this effect. This kind of logical analysis of isolated statements has an attractive air of the methodical, and with carefully designed utterances it works well to highlight the reason-giving aspect of explanation.

There is more to explanation, however, than the mere presence of reasons and reasons for accepting reasons. Issues of language usage and of context are crucial. In the example above, the explanation is constituted at least in part by the assumption that this was indeed a particularly hot summer in need of explanation, with the consequence that it becomes important to explore what is commonly understood by the notion of a ‘particularly hot summer’, and likewise what one understands by ‘build-up’. Definitions (conventions of usage, that is) are as much a part of explanations as reasons. Furthermore, there is the assumption not just that build-ups of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions cause hot summers, but that this is the most *relevant* fact in play in this particular instance: as opposed e.g. to changes in wind patterns or solar activity, or as opposed – more disruptively – to the possibility that the problematic situation was in fact indoors, that it was a particularly hot summer due to a failure of the air-conditioning. Assumptions about relevance are critical. Thus a good portion of the explanation lies not so much at the surface level of the utterance in the explicit expression of reasons, but in the assumptions of appropriateness which are embedded in the utterance and in the way one reads it, where these are matters of social convention and discursive context. Indeed, one may plausibly come to the conclusion that almost *any* utterance can count as an explanation, and not just that which exhibits explicit reason-giving, depending upon the context in which one finds it and the questions which one asks of it.<sup>4</sup> What is more, when one is looking not at contrived and idealised utterances such as the above, or those generated in a tightly constrained experimental environment, but at spontaneous group discussion such as that which forms our research material, one may have particular grounds for adopting a conception of explanation which is looser than that simply

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Stephen W. Draper, ‘What’s Going On in Everyday Explanation?’ in Charles Antaki (ed.), *Analysing Everyday Explanation*, p.16.

of reported causality. As we have seen, in the group environment points are often made jointly by more than one participant, based on multiple interventions, and ostensible contradictions even within the single intervention may appear as a consequence of the deployment of different types of discursive resource. To restrict oneself only to the identification of consistent reports of causality may be to exclude a large body of illuminating material.

Charles Antaki suggests that ‘perhaps the safest thing is to take no strict line on what will count as an explanation beyond the very general principle that it be *some stretch of talk hearable as being a resolution of some problematic state of affairs.*’<sup>5</sup> While ‘resolution’ is a rather strong word, and one might prefer to speak perhaps of the *response* to a *problematization*, the spirit of the suggestion is sound. The guiding notion of explanation in this chapter will be likewise a quite general one, oriented broadly to what one can call patterns of assumption concerning what it is that is relevant to understanding problems. This is by no means to overlook the reason-giving aspect of explanation – reasons and their absence are an important part of what we shall examine – but one should avoid a strict emphasis on these alone. Faced with the contrapuntal rhythms of everyday conversation, the term ‘explanatory motif’ is probably more suitable than ‘explanation’. Unlike the study of reason-giving in its ideal form, the examination of patterns of assumption is not a simple question of analysing what follows a ‘because’. Assumptions are not flagged up by a clear set of syntactical markers, and it does not pay to focus too rigidly on the grammatical structure of utterances. As an interpreting actor, the analyst naturally does not put an equal emphasis on *all* assumptions identifiable in the text, but highlights some in particular as these correspond to the theoretical concerns of his/her work.

While in principle one can select *any* passage of text and usefully analyse it for explanatory motifs, those that are explored in this chapter have been chosen for their richness – that is, for the presence in concentrated form of motifs which are dispersed more widely throughout the material. Many such passages appeared quite naturally in conversation, as participants articulated and talked through the problems under discussion. Free-flowing conversation provided many opportunities to study reported causality, the ascription of characteristic traits to people and situations, the invocation of reference-points, and the usage of important concepts. In addition, during the interviews themselves, certain interventions from the researcher were designed so as to elicit assumptions concerning the facts relevant to

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<sup>5</sup> Antaki, *Explaining and Arguing*, p.4.

the problems at hand. Some were quite direct, including questions such as ‘how do you explain that problem?’ or ‘why does that problem arise?’; some were more indirect, exploring related issues such as the attribution of responsibility with questions such as ‘who is to blame for this problem?’ These questions are ambiguous on the criteria of what is relevant, and so – given that no response can include *all* the possibly relevant factors – participants would have to discriminate between the relevant and the less so. This produced material fertile for analysis: one then studies whether, for instance, connections are drawn primarily to local factors centred on actors and mechanisms within the home environment, or whether they are made to broader processes assumed to play out at a transnational or global level. By examining the reference-points invoked, one is able to explore the spatial context in which the problems of each domain are assumed to unfold. Alternatively, one might find that such questions drew puzzlement or uncertainty in response, implying the unavailability to participants of explanatory resources with which to handle the problems in question. On occasions one finds interesting instances of the *non*-attribution of responsibility, when it was conceded that an actor’s conduct had led to a problematic state of affairs, but they were not blamed on the grounds that they had no choice.

Consideration of the repertoire of *explanatory motifs* acts as a prelude to looking at what *possibilities for action* are assumed to exist. That something *should* be done about the problems of the political common is generally implied in the urgency and often the indignation with which they are articulated. That something *can* be done about them is a separate issue. Problems affecting ‘people like us’ could be cited with a strong degree of involvement without this necessarily being matched by a sense that they might feasibly be addressed.<sup>6</sup> As with explanatory motifs, one looks at the assumptions which are embedded in the flow of discussion, as well as at responses to direct interventions from the researcher designed to elicit the taken-for-granted. Probing questions included ‘can that problem be avoided?’, ‘can anything be done about it?’, and ‘what kinds of action can be taken?’ Where the possibility of action was affirmed, of interest then would be the agent deemed appropriate to leading it.

Chapter 6 will look specifically at how the EU is invoked in these discussions. Here we shall be making a preliminary set of distinctions concerning a) whether possibilities for

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<sup>6</sup> One can of course imagine that, were such scepticism to be practised over a substantial period of time, it could lead to the normalisation of the problems involved to the point where they are treated as ‘facts of life’ and thereby deproblematised.

action of any kind are recognised, and b) if so, which of three different approaches tends to be emphasised. Andrew Perrin has usefully proposed that citizen expectations concerning the remedy of political problems be clustered into three broad methods, ‘governmental’, ‘public’ and ‘private’.<sup>7</sup> Where the *governmental* method is called for, this involves the expectation that government officials can adopt policies that tackle the problems in question, that political parties can be judged according to their willingness to pursue such policies, and that those that fail to do so can be rejected at the polling booth. The *public* method, by contrast, seeks to involve other *people* rather than government itself in the remedy of the problems in question. Society-led collective action such as the formation of social movements, the organising of boycotts, or the use of the media to communicate with a wider public, would be the kinds of move advocated in this approach. Unlike the other two, the *private* method is not based on organised collective action: rather like Albert Hirschman’s concept of ‘exit’,<sup>8</sup> it involves moves to avoid the problems in question rather than to make a concerted effort to resolve them. The private method of action, one may therefore note, contributes nothing to a political bond: being unorganised and individualist, it plays no role in making sense of a political project intended to address the problems of the political common. The governmental method has a clear role to play, in that the expectation of purposeful governmental policies immediately suggests a longer-term project that enacts these. The public/societal method is of some relevance too, in that societal action suggests communication with those assumed to share in the problems in question, and thus may contribute further to the integrative acts of collective positioning that were looked at in the previous chapter. Thus when possibilities for action *are* emphasised in these texts we shall be alert to which of these three categories of action seems to best capture the kinds of proposal being made.

## Economics

### **A) Explanatory Motifs**

One of the first things to note about problems to do with *Economics* is that many of them tend to elude explanation. They form a large proportion of the discussions and are discussed

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<sup>7</sup> Perrin, *Citizen Speak*, pp.63-4; pp.116ff.

<sup>8</sup> Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

with considerable urgency, as by now should be clear, but there is often a sense of mystery concerning their origins. Particularly for problems with a numerical dimension, such as rising prices, a widespread lack of explanatory resources seems to be evident. The participants from the Swansea group are not untypical as they struggle to explain a rise in fuel prices, house prices and mortgages: ‘Now how can they justify this in Britain,’ asks David, ‘not just in Swansea, in London or in other cities, the purchase of a house can go from, for example, from £50,000 to £200,000 in two years. It’s ludicrous ... more debt, more stress, more everything ...’. The researcher took the opportunity to intervene with a question: ‘Why are the prices going up so much do you think?’ David again: ‘Why has it gone up? ... I don’t know, I can’t answer that. Maybe cos five or ten years ago the cost of shares went up and everyone thought “oh this is a good bet, let’s jump on it”, and it all went back then and they all lost thousands of pounds. It’s the same what happened with the properties. Whether it’ll start coming down I don’t know. [...] But you know, everything’s got to come to a head, hasn’t it ...’. David’s reference to shareholders adds a further element to the mystery, an extension of the pattern, but does little to make sense of it. All he has to guide him, it seems, is the very general notion that things ‘come to a head’, and perhaps that what goes up must come down.

With similar uncertainty, when the Norwich group reports improvements in the local economy, these are accounted for not so much on the grounds of a successful organised revival as on the idea that luck inevitably changes. Leyton refers to economic recovery in Wales and the north-east of England:

L: ... But them particular areas at the time went through bad times on that change. As you say, they’ve changed now, they’ve gone through other avenues. They’ve built the city up now, they’re doing other things.

JW: How did that happen, how did they recover, do you think?

M: Well we had no other choice. We had absolutely no other choice. She took literally ... she took everything, she took everything.

L: She took the rug completely from under their feet.

M: We used to have to go to the football matches ... it’s funny when you look back ... I left school in 1981 and I was called one of ‘Thatcher’s children’, and that was the saying in them days, ‘Thatcher’s children’. Over three million people unemployed. We’d never had that before. Never. [L: Yeah, that was a bad ... very bad time ...] [...] And what that bitch did, she broke families up, people were literally committing suicide because of her. Because they were getting big insurances out, getting in their cars and driving at walls, basically, because they’d lost all their dignity. And the funny thing about it, yeah, is that going down a mine is one of the most disgusting things you can do. She even took that off them. You know, hanging from a bit of rope, welding a ship, isn’t the most glamorous thing in the world, is it. But she took that, she took the fucking lot.

JW: What do they do now, what are the industries that they've recovered with ...?

L: With life ... I mean, you know as well as I do, with life itself, where one door shuts ... [B: Another one will open.] Another one will open. And these are typical changes. Because their door shut, others opened, otherwise that would never have happened. And all these bad times will always be in their minds until they end up wherever they end up at the end of the day ... whatever they decide to do.

B: I don't know if you know Norwich, but we had a big shoe industry here, massive shoe industry, I mean there was fifteen, sixteen factories, wasn't there. And as soon as we had the Common Market, cheap imports, we've just got the one factory now ...

G: Valleys has shut down ...

L: It's happening everywhere now. Industry now in Britain is virtually zero.

B: False economy ... A big leisure centre, and insurance and office-work, that's all Britain is these days.

L: But where does everybody work? ... Apparently the working ... what's it, quota, has never been so high. It's higher now than it's ever been ... [B: What are they doing?] You know, it's a mystery. There'll always be sad thoughts in his mind and millions like him, you know. But as I say, at the end of the day, you've got doors shut, others open.

Even taking a loose understanding of what constitutes an explanation, there is rather little of it in this passage. The regions recovered because they 'had no choice'. Things got better for the reason that they could not get worse. A sense of obscurity surrounds the improved employment figures – '*apparently ...*', 'where does everybody work?' 'what are they doing?' 'you know, it's a mystery'. The economy is 'false'. Barry's reference to 'cheap imports' is potentially more fruitful (this motif will be returned to below), but it is undeveloped, and Leyton's motto about opening and closing doors – which Barry completes – seems to be primarily an acknowledgement of contingency, and also a consolation for contingency, in that good things can come out of bad (at the end of the day). Why the doors might open and close is undiscussed: the doors seem to swing on their hinges, like doors in a draughty corridor.

While explanatory motifs are often thin on the ground for *Economics*, they are by no means absent. Importantly – and this is the second point to emphasise – where they are present they tend to be broad and transnational, indeed global, in scope. They invoke a whole range of factors extending far beyond the 'home environment' in which the problems are encountered. Of course, local factors are not disregarded – there are certain themes which one sees with some frequency. We have already seen that a link may be made between a country's economic wellbeing and the willingness of people to contribute to the system, and that the problem of unemployment is explained at least partially in terms of the

(un)willingness of individuals to devote themselves to finding a job. As Murda and David in Reading put it, ‘there are those who won’t work, and that don’t work’ – ‘and who won’t never work!’<sup>9</sup> Excessive and wasteful bureaucracy, ill-judged regulations, and corruption (both in the private and public sectors) are further motifs which refer principally to factors centred in the home environment. What is interesting, however, is how often these local aspects are explicitly connected to factors much further afield. In the following extract, the Reading group explores why it is that some people choose not to look for work. They start by looking at local explanations (distorted incentives for the unemployed) but progressively widen the scope of their explanations:

M: Fifteen, twenty years ago, a West Indian friend of mine, and we were just discussing things, and he said one of the worst things, living on the dole money, one of the worst things for the West Indian guys he said at the time was this dole money, because it didn’t give them any incentive to go out. They had their house paid, they had a little bit of dole on top, and at that time, for that little era, they was quite happy and content. So they didn’t have any incentive to do anything. And that’s what’s happened with a lot of people now as well again, you know. I mean, as long as your rent’s paid and a few things are paid, people have got no incentive to get off their arses and do anything. [...] The other thing, I think they’ve changed now, haven’t they: when somebody leaves school they can’t go on the dole straight away or something, I think it’s a couple of years or something? Which is good. Because before, as soon as people are leaving school at sixteen – Bam!, next thing they’re going down to the Social [Security] and signing on. And I’m glad that they ... you know, if it’s true that they have done away with that ... I think it’s a couple of years before you can sign on, it’s good. You know, in that time ...

S: Yeah, but couple of years ago, plenty of work, all the factories, everything, yeah? The people, as soon as they come out of college, they’re not going on the dole money because there are many factories and they find a job working. But now there’s no work left ...

M: No [surprised], there’s still work left! It’s how much you want it.

D: Students go to work part-time ... If you want work you find it. If you are really destitute ...

S: You’re a qualified man, you charge £10 an hour. They come from India and Pakistan, they charge £4 an hour. They’re not going to give you a job. That goes to them. Where do you get the money for eat for yourself, your children and missus? You go dole money sign. That’s the problem in this country. [...] Afghanistan ... and Bosnia ... They come for cheap! They come for cheap! Cheap workers. That’s the problem. [...]

M: But then it goes down to – where’s it gone [looks for card Education & Training] – Retraining. Because say like everybody, ten years ago, thought ‘oh, computers, I’m going to make loads of money.’ And everybody went into computers. And then the whole thing became a little bit saturated, like with the IT and everything ... Now, there’s people out there crying for plumbers, crying for bricklayers, crying for something else, and they can’t get ‘em. So: retraining. You

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<sup>9</sup> Or as Lee in Swansea has it, ‘there’s plenty of employment out there, people just don’t want to get off their arse.’ Amongst the Czech groups, such comments often feed into a discussion of the Roma. When asked who is responsible for unemployment, Míra and Petr in Plzeň put the blame ‘90% on those people themselves’. ‘It’s also the reluctance of people to move elsewhere,’ says Petr. ‘If now ... if you take the car factory in Kolín, they really lack people there but those ones in the north simply won’t go there. And I think a lot of those people from the north, they’re simply never going to do anything.’ Petr fades out with a reference to towns with a large gypsy community: ‘From Most and Chomutov ...’. ‘Ah, like that you mean,’ responds Román, evidently catching where the discussion is drifting.

can't just go ... It's like the taxis now, just because everybody knows that 'ok you can make a little bit of money on the black cabs', everybody jumps in the black cabs ... Find something else! There's loads of things out there. [...] England for example is not a manufacturing country any more. Hi-tech, yes, but like the old [unclear], it's moved away from that into these lovely nice business parks and things and everybody's in a nice suit and everything ... Everything's changing, and you have to like sort-of ... If you say 'I'm a rag-n-bone man, I want to stay a rag-n-bone man', you can't be because rag-n-bone man's out the window. Same like with the guy that used to have the horse and cart and drives the coal ... You know, it's all changing, so you have to change with the time.

H: There used to be a Huntley-Palmer factory [in Reading], I've seen ... They make biscuits ... [M: Huntley-Palmers, yeah.] But the biscuit is still in demand, yeah. So why does ...?

M: But not particularly those biscuits ...

D: They've still got an operation in Huyton up in Liverpool, there's still a place there, Huntley-Palmers've got. It may have changed its name ...

M: Also for example now, right, like with the new one, Prudential, right, they've taken their call centres over to India. Why? Because it's cheaper. Same with manufacturing. I mean, if I had a factory and I was paying ...

S: So, like, hang on, they pay the work to the Indians. So it's less work in England then, isn't it?

D: 'Course, yeah ... but the economy for that company Prudential ... they're having a laugh ...

S: ... Because Thatcher's put up too much tax ... the problem ... they run away some other country. They have so many facilities over there ... Pakistan, India, they have so many facilities and they're not pushing for tax or anything ... They know if they ply the people for work that's alright, they're happy. Over here, Thatcher get the knife in hand and she want to cut the throat ...

D: Well not now ... can't really bring her up for everything ... she's been out of it for a while now ...

M: It's management skills ... If I had a factory, right, here, and my outgoings was worth say a million pounds, right, and then I could have the same factory in Pakistan, India or wherever, right, and my outgoings were going to be a thousand pounds, yeah, it's management sense for me to pick up my stuff and move over there and still be able to bring my stuff over here ... It's management sense, it's nothing to do with Thatcher, it's supply and demand and, you know, it's where you can get your goods cheaper ... Like you - if you could get something cheap from Pakistan and come over and sell it for twice as much over here, you would do it. Why? Because it just makes sense for you to be able to make that profit margin. [...] OK, India's very big and everything, it's opened its doors and everything, but if you ever go shopping around you'll find that everything - clothes, toys, tools - is made in China. Now when China actually does get friendly with the west and opens the doors you're not going to get nothing over here. Every single factory is going to close down ... But that's just the way it is, though. They pay pittance over there and we want minimum £10 an hour. So of course it's going to go over there and things, you know, manufactured stuff, is going to come from over there ... [D: Yeah, yeah ...] Only hi-tech stuff ... I mean, there was a time when anything made in England, people thought 'Made in England', wow. Isn't that any more. Just hi-tech stuff now.

An explanatory chain is being constructed here between the local and the global: there is unemployment in the city because, even if the jobs are out there, they are not easy to walk into and require specialised skills; there is a lack of straightforward manual labour due to the decline of industry in the area (such as the closure of the biscuit factory), which is the result of companies moving their production processes elsewhere. This, in turn, is to do with

‘management sense’ based on supply and demand: wages in places such as Pakistan, India and China are cheaper to finance than in Britain (‘they pay pittance over there and we want minimum £10 an hour’). The problem is compounded by immigrants coming to Britain who are also willing to work for lower wages. Global price and wage inequalities are directly linked to the problems experienced at home. Even when Shafeek makes a rather idiosyncratic comment blaming Margaret Thatcher for *raising* taxes in Britain, and thus encouraging industry to move to Pakistan and India, he makes an argument which is premised on an inequality or imbalance between the home environment and the world outside. India, Pakistan and China come through in this extract as what one might call *relevant contrasts* – places whose fundamental otherness is of significance for explaining the problems faced at home by the subjects. As Murda in Reading declares, Britain ‘is no longer a manufacturing nation’ because Asian countries have taken over that role thanks to their lower costs. This corresponds with what was noted in the Norwich extract, where Asian countries and eastern Europe were mentioned in the same role.

A passage from the Würzburg group displays this broader spatial dimension clearly, with all participants emphasising the transnational when exploring the reasons for unemployment and the decline of industry, and citing a similar set of contrasting countries:

R: I wanted to say something more on the subject of work, something which seems important and one hears a lot in this context: globalisation. Very much linked to unemployment because it’s possible for companies to go abroad relatively easily and simply to say – which wasn’t quite so easy before – ‘we’re going to the Czech Republic, we’re going to Poland, the jobs are cheaper there, the labour in Romania etc. and ... we’ll do our manufacturing in China, Taiwan, it’s cheaper everywhere.’ Globalisation’s the keyword, I’d say, another of the causes of high unemployment ...

U: Yeah, and it’ll get worse too. After a while, even among these cheap countries, the Czech Republic becomes too expensive again ... There are countries which do it even cheaper ... [R: ... Yeah ... India, or Russia ...] ... So one of these days a worker is going to be working all day long for a handful of peanuts ... The gap between rich and poor is getting bigger and bigger ... [R: mmm, mmm]. I often think that some day – unless new factors come into play, you never know what may happen – that some day you’ll have the massively wealthy and the utterly destitute ... on one side of the city you’ll have the rich all living together, and on the other side you’ll have all the poor, passively going about their lives ... [O: Like back in the Middle Ages ... ] Yeah ... [O: Up in the castle ...] Up in the castle all the rich will be living ... [O: And down below ...] the plebs ...

R: Yeah, just like in the Middle Ages. Really sharply polarised, so that there’s no middle layer any more. It’s already going in that direction, it’s already looming here now. Rich and poor are drifting further and further apart ...

O: And it’s going to intensify too, because for example in China another 200 million people are waiting for jobs. The costs and the wages aren’t going up yet because they still have 200 million people who want work. The wages aren’t going up. In ten years ... who’ll still be producing here then?

U: Right now in Germany we have this problem of wage dumping. With the lowest wage ...

R: These are splendid times for employers, it's clear, because they can really extort the employees. I mean, what's going on here in Würzburg with Siemens-VDO, you know ... [U: yeah], 'either you work longer hours and take home lower wages – wage dumping – or we go abroad', they want to go to the Czech Republic I think ... [U: yeah]. And that's the pattern with a lot of companies, isn't it. That they can say 'we're going abroad,' or to individuals: 'if you don't want it there are five others behind you, another ten at the job centre, they're all waiting to take over your job.' That's simply how it works today ... for the companies these are splendid times. The employers, the companies, they're rubbing their hands ... employees have never been so properly extorted here before.

The motif of the 'cheaper East' pervades the discussions in all countries. Uwe in Erfurt singles out the company Trigema (a sports-clothes manufacturer) because 'they produce only in Germany. Not like others, like Nike or whatever who produce in China and places, places where the pay is 1 euro or 50 cents per hour ...'. Peter in Kassel suggests that 'All people want to buy things more cheaply ... [D: yeah, that's clear ... "greed is great" ["*Geiz ist geil*"].] Look, go back ten years, how few Aldi shops<sup>10</sup> there were then and how many there are today. [D: We're cutting off our own ...] Everyone wants to buy things more cheaply so a huge amount of mass production moves abroad.' Elsewhere he notes: 'VW, Mercedes ... every car company has gone abroad somewhere. And it carries on – now they've gone to Poland, then the wages in Poland become too expensive so they go to Lithuania. And further and further if there are people working for two euros ...'. The further east one goes, the cheaper the conditions become.

Sometimes one feels that these comments have an orientalising flavour and that the logic of the *Economics* domain is being mingled with that of *Relations between Peoples*.<sup>11</sup> An association is sometimes made between the cheapness of price found in these relevant contrasts ('the cheap countries') and a cheapness of value: Wolfgang in Lübeck remarks that 'it's often a problem that when we develop something and bring it onto the market then far too quickly it's copied in south-east Asia and put onto the market by someone as a cheap product. And ... quality is all very well, but in today's economic situation less attention is paid to quality than before, today it's mainly a question of price.' But while there is arguably an intersection of domains here, with multiple evaluatory logics being applied, it is worth highlighting how a more purely economic language can reassert itself. The Lübeck group, for instance, in a discussion of employment and working conditions, begin by talking of how immigrants from the east are willing to do:

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<sup>10</sup> Aldi – a discount supermarket chain.

<sup>11</sup> At Würzburg, for example, in a discussion about Germany's falling exports, Uwe reports: 'I was recently talking with some top brass from Ulm University and he said, "the Chinese students, what they study and learn, as opposed to the Germans, there's absolutely no comparison."'

N: ... The jobs that the Germans don't want to do. [W & J: yeah, yeah ...]

A: It's still the case – Germans don't want to do every kind of job. That's still the case ...

J: The Poles, for example, they work in the fields a lot, for farmers on the land. You hardly see a single German there, because they don't want to do it.

N: The work is too difficult ...

Just, however, as one thinks that the point is about to be made on the basis of intrinsic cultural differences, reasons of an economic kind come to the fore:

W: The work is too difficult and also, for the going rate here it's very badly paid. Compared to the Polish rate it's very good. There was a report on TV recently, about how job agencies – mainly over in the East, in Mecklenburg etc. – how they hire workers through a subcontractor in Poland because they'll work for 5 euros an hour, whereas here they'd have to pay a German worker 8 euros. So ... and 5 euros per hour is very, very little.

The Czech groups, though they are geographically to the east and are sometimes mentioned as such in the British and German discussions, are no different in the frequency with which they deploy spatially wide explanations based on the motif of the 'cheaper East'. Onřej in Liberec links unemployment to the movement of industry away from the area: 'all the jobs that there were under communism with the textile industry, the seamstresses, we had so many of them here and all kinds of businesses, they're no longer around, that's why there's unemployment. If someone trained as a seamstress and all that came to an end in the Czech Republic, clothing's imported from China and the seamstresses don't have any work here, then it's logical that she's going to be on benefits.' The Plzeň group, in a discussion about foreign investment, present a similar account (though in this case Míra suggests an interpretation not as bleak as the usual):

P: I'd probably be in favour if you had mainly firms originating from here, with Czechs being employed on some kind of research let's say, and performing more complex operations than today, where like at Panasonic for example they're just tuning the monitor screens and pulling wires through one after the other – something which absolutely anyone can do. [R: Mercedes have got a research centre ...] Right, exactly, Mercedes is one. But all the mass firms, 90% of what's over at Borska Field industrial park, they're just looking for people who bend a bit of wire and push it through like this [hand gesture].

M: Yeah, those firms went there because there's a cheap labour force, that's why ...

P: And now they're threatening to say cheerio in five years and all move off to China.

M: Yeah, and already they've moving away to Belarus and those places ... because they're calculating that there's another chunk over there for them, that the labour force there's so cheap that it's better for them ...

P: And they say that when the tax holidays end ... [M: Or to Latvia ...] that they'll all stop and the question then is how things by that stage will look here. [R: Of course.] [M: Well, I don't think they'll stop ...] But there are firms in Moravia, it was somewhere ... there was a factory there like there is here and they shifted it somewhere else. They abandoned ...

M: Ok, but that area's going to be attractive to someone else, isn't it ... [P: Of course ...] One plant closing or one branch closing doesn't mean anything, because someone else'll come along and do something else there.

Developments taking place within the home environment (the Czech Republic, and the region therein) are presented as dependent upon events outside in places of relevant contrast such as eastern Europe – which for the Czechs begins east of the Czech Republic and includes Belarus, Latvia and ‘those places’ – and China. The explanatory motif of ‘cheapness’ is the usual one, even though Míra is disputing here the common assumption that the quantity of ‘east’ exceeds the quantity of industry and investment.

What *is* rather different in the Czech discussions is that western Europe represents another of the relevant contrasts as regards economic problems. In the Liberec discussion, the health of the Czech economy overall is seen to be strongly bound up with that of its west-European neighbours. ‘We’re starting at last to export more than we import from abroad,’ says Onřej, ‘which is something positive, but if Germany ever goes into recession, that means the economy stagnates, then the problem is they won’t want to buy our products so we’ll sell less. And Germany is next-door and it’s our principal neighbour ... [Z: And they’re proud and they like to buy their own stuff ...] That’s the problem. We’re very dependent on the states around us, especially Germany ...’. There are no references to the impact on the economy of factors in North America, either here or in the British and German discussions. The perspective is a strongly transnational one, but generally an eastward-looking one.

### ***B) Possibilities for Action***

This repertoire of explanations and explanatory motifs has important implications for the credibility of a political project. With economic affairs within the home environment treated either as a matter of puzzlement, or deemed to be heavily dependent on the outside world, the possibilities for action are assumed to be tightly constrained. Although, as has been seen, several participants suggest that the government can encourage individuals to adapt to the situation by giving them the appropriate incentives to ‘get off their arse’ and to follow the job

vacancies – a mixture of *governmental* and *private* means by which to react to problems – very few positive proposals for organised action emerge in the course of the discussions (in contrast to at least one of the other domains). The fact that many of the explanatory factors extend beyond the home environment is something that most likely accentuates this. Generally speaking, only where explanations contain at least some more local elements are they accompanied by proposals for action.

All groups express a very weak sense of governmental agency on the question of industrial decline, a problem treated in a broad spatial context. Several of the British groups point out that, while the country still has coal mines with coal in them and while in theory these could be reactivated, in practice this is unworkable because imported coal will always be cheaper. The kind of measures that can be adopted within the environments are dependent on what goes on outside, and the notion that the East is always cheaper is repeated with vehemence. As David in Reading says, ‘Wales and Yorkshire, still full of coal-mines, I mean, the coal’s still down there ... [M: But I think it’s cheaper ...] ... cheaper ... [M: ... to come from Poland ... ] It’s cheaper, yeah ... [M: It’s what you just said, it’s cheaper to bring the coal, import it from Poland, than to have guys digging it in this country ...] That’s right.’ ‘That’s how it is with manufacturing as well,’ says Murda. ‘Unless you start paying everybody 10p an hour for their jobs, right, you can’t compete with other countries now. [...] All the little kids wanted to be coal miners. But coal mining died. They can’t say “I still want to be a coal ...” No, you got to go and find something else.’ The ease with which David and Murda see ‘cheapness’ as trumping politics will be recalled from above: Shafeek’s attempt to blame Thatcher for destroying British industry is met with the reply, ‘it’s management sense, it’s nothing to do with Thatcher, it’s supply and demand and, you know, it’s where you can get your goods cheaper ...’. As a justification for decline one hears not only the irresistibility of cheapness but also the naturalness of change and evolution; Murda again: ‘You can’t just blame Thatcher, you know, times change. Like in the old days you had the smoke coming out of the chimneys and stuff, you don’t have that anymore. Times change ... You had a horse and cart years ago, [today] you don’t have a horse and cart.’

A similar scepticism about what politicians are able to achieve generally in response to economic problems comes through strongly in an extract from the Lübeck group, which begins by the researcher asking who is responsible for the provision of jobs:

W: Who has the responsibility for creating jobs? The ... the ... industry ... and ... politicians. Politics has to create a sensible framework ... a sensible framework, the basis, that makes it

possible ... that makes it possible to create jobs, and industry has to create jobs at home rather than abroad.

J: That's the problem of course. Industry goes abroad because jobs are cheaper there. And industry, or the economy, has to be in agreement with politics, they need to pull in the same direction. I sometimes have the feeling that the current government – Red-Green – doesn't conform properly to the economy, that on the contrary they even work against it and that private enterprise would rather have a different government, that they'd rather work with the CDU. And if private enterprise doesn't go along with the politicians then it's hopeless, then the government can make as many pretty speeches as it wants but nothing's going to happen. If industry – the really large companies ... if they don't cooperate then it all comes to nothing. The big lobbies are too powerful.

N: Many of the large, very profitable industries, they ... you can't really blame the government there. These companies run up huge profits and even so they relocate abroad ...

J: The profits ... they've gone up ever more in the last few years. But the number of jobs has been reduced. You see it with Deutsche Bank, they've made a 30% bigger profit compared to the year before and at the same time they want to make 6000 people redundant. [W: Yeah, 5000, 6000 people ...]

JW: So the solution would lie in changing industry or changing the government? You said the relationship between the SPD and industry isn't right ... [J: ... That's what I believe, yeah ...]

N: Well actually I think the CDU would play even further into the hands of the economy and make it even easier for them to increase their profits.

W: Yeah, and for that reason it'd probably be best if we had a grand coalition at the federal level ...

N: Then nothing would work at all!

W: Well ... have to see.

Here the limits to organised collective action are expressed in two ways: in Jürgen's argument that if business or industry is sceptical or hostile towards a government, if the government does not 'conform' to the economy, 'then it all comes to nothing. The big lobbies are too powerful,' and in Niklas' willingness both to absolve the current government of blame and to suggest that any change of government is likely to make things worse because the CDU will 'play into the hands' of the economy even more. There is no contradiction between the two; Jürgen, it seems, is simply more comfortable with the idea that a CDU government will not try to dictate its wishes to the business world. Clearly it is the capacity of the government which is at stake – there is no reference to *public/societal* or *private* approaches – and Wolfgang's call for a coalition government, plus his initial attribution of responsibility to politicians for creating a 'sensible framework', are two notes of positive agency, but both are reactive in character.

In Würzburg, Rainer refers to the 'job summit' between Chancellor Schröder and CDU leader Angela Merkel, which had taken place a few weeks before the interview, in

which the heads of the two major political parties met in an attempt to find solutions to the unemployment crisis:

- R: There was this attempt recently with the summit a few weeks ago, where the government met with the opposition to try and regulate ... to intervene, so that corporate taxes – which are already low – are lowered even further to encourage companies to invest more and so create more jobs.
- O: Yeah, well the pressure comes from outside, because neighbouring countries like Austria, they've already got a tax-rate of 19% ... the Netherlands is lower too ... In Bavaria the problem at the moment is that companies are moving abroad because corporate tax in Austria is lower than in Germany. 19% compared to 25%. So we have to trail behind and ultimately at some point it'll probably all level out across Europe ... the prices, the taxes ... [R: Mmmm, mmmm] and so on. There's this slow process whereby it all levels out ...
- R: Yes ... but ... to come back for a minute, the taxes are lowered – the corporate taxes – and what happens then? The companies accept it all gratefully and skim off the tax benefits, but they don't create any new jobs. [U: yeah] That's how it's probably going to go ...
- U: It's about nothing but profits. And if they can make more profit then they will. So I just think, in these big companies, with all the shareholders and bosses, it's just about creaming off more and more, as always. [...]
- O: It all hinges on the global market and shareholder value ... [U: yeah]. Whether it's Deutsche Bank or Daimler Chrysler. They have to measure themselves against Toyota or Citibank. It's global competition, and if they become too weak or if their investment returns are too low then they get a slap on the head from their shareholders who say 'Toyota's got 100 billion, Daimler Chrysler's only got 20 billion,' or whatever, 'you need to put the pedal down, because otherwise ...'

Oliver's interventions explicitly emphasise the influence of outside factors on decision-making – 'the pressure comes from outside', and the competition is 'global'. Governmental decisions (e.g. the lowering of corporate taxes) do have consequences, but the emphasis is on their negative consequences (the loss of revenue without the creation of jobs), and those with the real decision-making power are assumed to be the companies. Subsequently, the group reaches a clear consensus on an assessment made by Oliver that politicians are just 'puppets' when it comes to the economy.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, they also invoke the freedoms of democracy to argue that firms must be allowed to leave the country if they want to: 'Because, what exactly is the government going to do?' asks Uwe. 'It's a democracy, you'd have to introduce some kind of dictatorship ... "You stay here, full stop. Otherwise you go to prison." You'd have to introduce some kind of a dictatorship like in the past. One Germany, nothing comes in and nothing goes out, as bluntly as in China ... You can't do it any other way, but what do

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<sup>12</sup> Mike in Erfurt also mentions the 'job summit': 'does anyone still speak today about the job summit between Schröder and Merkel? Of course not, that was a one-day thing, nice big slot in the newspapers and that's the end of it.' Hans-Jürgen in Erfurt criticises the way companies take tax-payers' money to train workers, 'just so that the statistics are good', without subsequently employing them, but Mike and Andreas counter by suggesting that the government has little say in the matter. 'What could be done differently though?' asks Mike, 'you can't fight against the state or against the economy. You can't sue someone for not taking you on.' Andreas adds: 'There can't be an obligation handed down from the state that says "you have to take on a hundred trainees."'

you want to do in a democracy?’ Rainer agrees – governmental interference would constitute ‘authoritarian measures.’

A common motif is that while yesterday’s politicians might have had the opportunity to prevent these problems, for example by choosing not to privatise industries, today’s politicians are powerless and it is *too late* to alter the situation. The Kassel group emphasises that the government is unable to control the movement of companies: ‘That doesn’t work any more,’ says Peter, ‘it’s simply too late ...’, says Hans, ‘in the past ... in the past ...’, chips in Dieter, ‘we’ve got no chance now. The train has left the station.’ ‘It was always going to be this way,’ argues Hans, ‘with all the multinational corporations we have. That means firms have no limits any more, there are no boundaries ...’. ‘And why? Capital,’ responds Peter. In the wake of technological change, unemployment is here to stay. ‘The car companies began it,’ says Peter. ‘Along came a new machine and it replaced 10 workers, then along came the next one and it replaced 100 workers. [...] So, now we have a minimum of 6 million people, probably 7 million ... we’ll never get unemployment back down again. [...] Our economic development no longer allows us to employ so many people.’<sup>13</sup> In this passage the Swansea group, starting out from the question of coal mines, likewise arrive at the conclusion that it is ‘too late’ to take measures:

L: There’s enough coal in South Wales.

M: Yeah but thing is, overseas, it’s far more cheaper isn’t it.

A: Yeah, it’s too expensive to get it out of the ground here. But that’s all because everything else is too expensive over here. You can’t get a man going down a mine for £100 a week when that £100 a week is going nowhere. You know.

D: If you take now for example industry in Britain, it’s finished. If it’s not finished, in ten years it will be finished. [A: ... No steelworks, no coal ...] If you go back when I was at school, fifteen years ago, industry was strong. Engineering was good then ... industry, manufacturing ... but it’s now all too expensive to produce the stuff. They’re all going to third-world countries. Like the Czech Republic and all these countries like ...

A: But then a lot of it is out of this government’s control. Like HSBC, the bank, they took all their call-centres to India.

D: There’s only one person to blame, for the lack of industry in this country now, and that’s Margaret Thatcher. Because she privatised everything, she sold everything off, didn’t she. [L: Arthur

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<sup>13</sup> Social security is, in Dieter’s view, just another mistaken attempt to put up barriers against the tide: ‘It was all crap,’ he says of the post-War system of support, ‘how can I work off the assumption that the amount of people always remains the same and the amount of work always remains the same? It’s a completely absurd idea, since these three factors – the number of old people who receive a pension, the number of people who are productive, and the amount of work available ... all of these have to stay the same if this loop is to work properly. And the moment the loop breaks down ... as the old people become older and older ... It’s complete shit, this way of thinking, really.’

Scargill was right, wasn't he. Everything he said.] She privatised everything. Why didn't Britain keep doing what they were doing?

JW: And what, now it's too late to change the situation?

D: Yeah, it's gone too far, hasn't it.

A: ... gone too far ... Unless the government open up the coal mines and subsidise it themselves!

Here, unlike in the Reading group, Thatcher *is* blamed for the decline of British industry, but this extension of agency to a politician of the past is not matched by a sense of agency for the politicians of today. Andy's notion at the end that the government could subsidise the mining industry seems to be a consciously ridiculous proposition. When asked his view of HSBC's decision to move their call-centres to India, he says: 'Oh you can't blame them for that. They've been able to make money. It's a bank at the end of the day, it's a private concern, it's a bank. They closed the call-centres over here – they got two hundred people over in Llansamlet – and opened the call-centre over in India. Because it's cheaper to employ them over there and set up a new call-centre than keep them over here.'<sup>14</sup>

Inevitability is one of the dominant motifs of the *Economics* domain, unsurprisingly given the thinness of explanatory resources one sees. Price rises are treated as an inevitability. As David in Reading says, 'It's a never-ending thing, innit ... the petrol goes up, everything goes up ... no matter whether you think you're bread and butter don't, it do ...' 'Everything goes up,' confirms Shafeek. Murda adds: 'Well, someone said the water's going to be bloody expensive pretty soon. I'm going to have to dig a well at this rate, I think.' State debt, spoken of as another major constraint on a government's ability to pursue policies favourable to social security, is talked about in similar terms of inevitability. Notice how spatially wide explanations for problems can feed into scepticism about the possibilities for action: in this passage from the Kassel discussion, it is explicitly pointed out that while state debt is a surmountable problem when national economies are fairly isolated from one another, in today's world these environments are economically interdependent and so the traditional options for managing the problem are unavailable:

H: It's traditionally been the case here in Germany that the state intervenes a great deal. And now what's happening is that this state involvement is being reversed quite sharply ... [D: yeah]. That means that the social safety-net gets bigger and bigger holes in it. In other words, more and more

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<sup>14</sup> Leyton in Norwich conveys a similar sense of the determining impact of prices: 'If they [large producers] can find it cheaper, wherever it comes from, they will get it. And they make sure it's for them only. That's what Heinz does. Do you know Heinz, baked beans, they produce their own beans but they also produce beans for these, like, Morrisons. All they do is change the bloody tin. And the same contents goes into the same bloody tin. And that happens all the time, all these companies do it.'

people are now falling through the net and getting into circumstances which are very painful for most of them.

P: Fine, but then you get back to the point that the State is taking in less and less and so it's able to give out less and less. [...] I mean, ultimately what this comes down to – and we haven't said a word about this yet – ultimately it's about our debts, our state debts. [H: That's a very interesting dimension, definitely, because ...] Our state debts increase every day, we need to pay more and more interest on them, the State has less and less of what it takes in at its disposal, and at some point ... I mean, the balance ... We've been building up debts since Adenauer was Chancellor, since back then, despite the fact that our pension funds are being emptied by them ... [D: Kohl ... by Mr. Kohl ...] And basically, no matter what we're talking about here, it boils down to these State debts. And as long as they're still there, until we've got rid of them, we can't really make demands of the State. Whatever amount goes into these debts, that's how much less we get back.

H: So the question then is, why are the debts so ...

P: Because the State ... because the State supported everything ...

H: Not just that but because it also didn't pay enough attention to making sure that money comes up from below again. Because ...

P: A normal company would have gone bankrupt decades ago, but not the State. I really don't see ... I can't see where they get the money from. Where does the money come from? Even the rich oil countries are supposed to be in debt. Where does the money come from? [H: Imaginary, as they say ...] I mean, every day we have less and less ... the State has less and less at its disposal ... [...] And everyone who gets voted into government says 'yes, we want to remove the debts.' That goes on for a year and then next year they're twice as high ... [D: Exactly] That's ... at some point there's going to be a collapse.

H: It's going to happen sometime. It can't carry on.

P: Yeah, and then what happens? Currency reform. Very simple: currency reform. [...]

H: And that's exactly the point, today it's no longer so easy to bring about currency reform. That doesn't work any more, because this interlocking, this international interdependence is far too extensive to allow such a thing.

The sense of powerlessness here, born of the presumption of the State's financial constraints, is linked to the feeling of mysteriousness – what is it that keeps the State afloat, where does the money come from? The idea that most things cost too much for the public purse, and the absence of positive proposals for changing this (e.g. raising the top rate of taxation), is characteristic of discussions across the country groups. Amongst the Czechs in particular, it is regularly emphasised that the State has little money at its disposal and so its ability to act strongly is limited. As Zdeněk in Ostrava says: 'The public purse doesn't have enough in it to give money out. Infrastructure is inadequate for a good transport system. We've got so few motorways, really slow railways, and air transport is inappropriate for a small country. There's never enough money there, it'd gobble up everything.'

There are added reasons on top of these for pessimism about the possibilities for governmental action voiced amongst the Czech groups and the Erfurt group. One of these is the sense of dependency on the economies of western Europe, as highlighted in the Liberec

passage above. Uwe from the Erfurt group expresses this perspective: instead of casting the home environment as Germany as a whole, he casts it as the former East, and highlights its dependence on the West: ‘in the East we’re practically dependent on the development aid of the state. We’re not lifting out of it though by way of capitalism, because that’s messed up our whole economy. So we’ll forever be dependent on the development aid of the State until the economy at some point recovers – but that’ll last forever.’ A second basis for these groups for a low sense of agency in the *Economics* domain, different to the other German and British groups, is their inclination to see the State as blighted by corruption and incompetence. Public officials are accorded little trust when handling large amounts of money, and so their interventions in the economy are generally regarded with suspicion. Note that, whilst this is a common assumption about politicians in general, it tends to be expressed in a way which is domain-specific; corruption is not foregrounded, as will be seen later, when the discussion is about foreign affairs. Marek in Ostrava tells a story, familiar to all in the group, of how an Israeli firm charged with constructing a stretch of motorway was given a contract so generous that the State lost huge sums of money. The error is presented as typical of the financial incompetence of ministers and their advisors, and is seen as compounding the fact that government policies are already highly constrained by limited finances.

Positive proposals are not entirely absent in these discussions. Participants in the Kassel and Erfurt groups are both very much in favour of the idea that any firm that leaves Germany has to repay whatever subsidies it has received. Hans-Jürgen in Erfurt suggests how one should treat such firms: ‘if someone has a need to enlarge his company and thinks he has a better chance abroad then he should go – but without a cent from here. That’s how it should work, and not how it works now, with threats like “if you don’t want us then we’re off.” If I was Chancellor I’d say, fine, let’s have a tête-à-tête then, bring me your passport, we’ll put a stamp in it here: “Not wanted in Germany – go!”’ Similarly, Barry in Norwich argues that ‘if you move your business lock, stock and barrel then as far as I’m concerned you’re gone. You shouldn’t import them things back over here, you should ban it. Don’t let them sell it on our market.’ Some speakers, pointing more to a *public-cum-private* approach, recommend that consumers exercise discrimination in their purchasing – Mickey finds general agreement on this point: ‘You go to Comet, right. Now, what happens is, when a new product comes out, like a DVD player, I paid £185 for my DVD player three years ago: now you can get them for thirty quid. But you could always get them for thirty quid! They

make the money ... they overprice them because everybody wants something that's brand-new. If people would stop being so bloody stupid – me included – would stop being so stupid and turn around and say “hang on a second, we're not going to be fooled into any of your marketing crap any more,” we'd have them for thirty quid. [L: But people won't do it, will they.] [B: They've got to have one first, haven't they.]

To the extent that this is a problem of consumer ignorance, the possibility is maintained that something can be done about it. Dieter from the Kassel group laments, to Peter's agreement, that ‘everyone wants to buy things more cheaply’ and ‘if people just had a bit of brains they'd say “we'll go without these firms' products”,’ but carries on to argue that this is potentially something that can be addressed through education. Advertisers are blamed for encouraging people to take on debts they cannot manage, with Peter characterising the madness like this: ‘Everywhere it's being suggested to us: “You need this, you need that, you need the newest computer, you need the newest bedroom, you need the newest kitchen, this oven's got air circulation, it's not just a grill, you can stick your head inside and use it as a sunbed.”’<sup>15</sup> Compulsory schooling in basic day-to-day economics is therefore put forward as a worthwhile policy, to prepare people to ‘think twice’ before they buy. However, to the extent that the problem is not just to do with the mentality of actors within the home environment (consumers) but is to do with economic processes extending further afield, the possibilities for action are constrained again. ‘The economy demands sheep,’ says Dieter, ‘that simply want to [P: yeah ...] stuff themselves all the time. [P: Exactly!]' Peter suggests there is a limit to what consumers can do, however enlightened they are: ‘if I had an account with Deutsche Bank, I'd cancel it. I'd boycott such firms. The thing is, everything's so interwoven these days, you don't really know ... [Dieter: yeah] ... where they all work, where they produce ... Whatever you do, the glasses will come from somewhere, you can't say “I'm not drinking that any more because the glass doesn't come from Germany.” That's the problem, because ultimately you simply can't separate it out ...’.

Not only this but organised action of a social kind such as a collective boycott is sometimes cast further in doubt with an expression of scepticism regarding the willingness of others to show firmness. For example, Leyton in Norwich predicts that one day ‘you'll have one company who own all the food chains. One big massive block will own the lot.’ Barry agrees, and Mickey says it is happening already in the form of price-fixing. ‘We should go in there,’ says Mickey, ‘we should go into Asda or Morrisons or whatever and we should turn

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<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, Hans-Jürgen talks of the ‘law of capitalism’: ‘give people credit, give them credit, so that I can bind them to me. In GDR-times you had to pay for something if you wanted it. [U: yeah]’

round and say “Get that foreign crap out of our house.” ‘But until everybody decides to do it,’ responds Leyton, ‘it’ll never happen. They’ve got the upper hand all the time and they’ll do what they want to do.’ Even if ‘people like us’ were to take the lead, the rest would probably not follow us.

Having expressed considerable doubts about what can be achieved collectively, either through governmental action or society-led approaches, it is perhaps no surprise that Leyton and Barry arrive at arguably the least agential of possible remedies to their economic problems: the luck of the lottery. The following passage is remarkable for its combination of a strong sense of injustice and urgency (rooting the speakers’ financial problems, and economic inequality more generally, firmly in the *political common*), and some clear acts of collective positioning (summoning up well-defined *political subjects* and *opponents*), and yet a notion of the possibilities for action which is limited to making alterations to the probability that one pulls out a winning ticket:

L: Now, if they made them prizes [the top prizes] smaller, and just kept the money for prizes, for people ... cos it was actually designed for the working class anyway ... and if they’d done that, people would win more, the money would be ploughed back in, and everybody would be living a far, far ... If I had a £5000 cheque fall on my back every so often, I’d be bloody over the moon. I don’t need millions of pounds. [B: If the top whack was a million ...] I’d have a couple of days off work, and get rid of a few bloody bills lying around ...

B: Top prize a million, three numbers a thousand pounds. Give more to the lower numbers. [...]

L: I know, that’s what I’m saying. This is what annoys me with the lottery, because the lottery could make everybody – not just ... it was made for the working class, why do we have to keep bunging money for all these bloody ‘good causes’? The good cause is the people who are bloody playing the game.

The central point of this section, to recapitulate, is that all groups see very few possibilities for action in the *Economics* domain. When discussing what can be done about the economic problems facing ‘people like us’, speakers generally invoke ‘the government’ and ‘politicians’ as the most relevant points of reference, but usually then only to write off their capacities. The reasons for this are largely the same across the groups, though the Czechs and the Erfurt group have the added reasons that they see their state as especially financially weak and economically dependent on west-European countries, and they see the state’s involvement in the economy as being marked by corruption and incompetence. The second key point is that while some possibilities for action *are* recognised when problems are attributed to factors within the environments (e.g. the mentalities of unemployed people and

the incentives they face; the educational background and the skills of those who are struggling to adapt to economic change), a particularly weak sense of agency is apparent whenever the causal links are traced to the world beyond – which is often.

## Society and the Law

### **A) *Explanatory Motifs***

For problems to do with the *Society and the Law* domain, explanations are found quite reliably – there is less of the sense of mystery that so often encircles problems to do with *Economics*. Just as we saw in Chapter 4 that transnational comparisons are very rarely made in this domain, so one finds that most explanatory motifs focus on actors within the home environment, which means mainly within the city itself. None of the groups mentions organised cross-border crime for instance. To the extent that wider factors are invoked, these may be connected to the country as a whole, but tend not to be connected to the world outside, and explanations hardly ever include places of relevant contrast abroad. The sense of political space is, in this sense, much narrower. Problems such as crime and society's response to it are generally not considered in a transnational context.

One might instinctively respond: how could this be otherwise? Are not the problématiques in question – crime, anti-social behaviour, the decline of the family – *essentially local* in nature? But one should be sceptical of the notion that there are problématiques which are *essentially* local, and one can quite plausibly think of broader explanatory ideas which are not used. The decline of religion would be one (a natural one given the countries studied), and it would be entirely feasible in principle for a discussion to frame law-breaking, antisocial behaviour and the lack of community feeling as being due to the fact that 'no-one fears God any more'. Such a perspective would then enable the problems articulated to be treated as consequences of transnational processes of modernisation experienced in many human societies – a perspective implying a much wider sense of space. But this is not found. Nor does one find discussion of technological change and its implications for the atomisation of society or the decline of the family, another potentially wide-ranging, transnational perspective. Instead one finds a much narrower focus. The exceptions are the link made by groups from each country between immigration and an increase in criminal behaviour, and the borrowing of explanatory motifs from the

*Economics* domain, especially amongst the Czech and Erfurt groups. Both of these open out a wider sense of space, albeit largely by associating with the logic of other domains.

Considered crucial across the groups for people's willingness to play by the legal and social rules is the way in which they were brought up as children. A bad upbringing, both in the family and in school, is the main explanation given for irresponsible behaviour. Onřej from the Liberec group complains of the inadequacy of the school curriculum in preparing children to live harmoniously in society: 'The curricula in schools are badly designed because education – moral education, how people should behave in society – is something they really don't teach at all in schools. That's a problem. They're always having to read articles or whatever, but how reality works, how the laws function, they just don't take that into consideration at all ... [R: How life works ...] They don't prepare children for that at all. They have to learn that for themselves later, and either they end up on the right side of the line, they achieve something and they're intelligent, or they end up on the wrong side and they're just rogues.' Likewise, those who *have* been taught well at school 'know the difference between right and wrong', argues Mickey at Norwich. 'It's the same with parenting. If you scream and shout at your child and whack 'em about, what are they going to do?' 'Grow up silly,' says Barry. 'At school,' Mickey continues, 'you can tell the parents who read to their children and talk to their children, and the parents who just ignore them. Because of their behaviour.' Problems set in when both the household and the school experience a decline in disciplinary standards.

The importance of upbringing is a theme across all of the groups. The comment made by Marek in Ostrava about the Mercedes parked across two parking-spaces drew an explicit link between antisocial behaviour and upbringing: the child was being set a bad example by his father and would learn to copy him when he grew up. Dieter in Kassel emphasises the importance of upbringing and role models when talking about the development of 'moral ideas': 'it's a matter of education, of the personal development of the child. There needs to be proper guidance there, from the school or the parents.' He goes on to link this back to the distortion in people's values: 'parents today, their view on life is that "I must work, work, work," our society is fundamentally sick in that sense, because we all simply think we need to obtain money and goods and we completely lose sight of life – real life, the point of life, we completely lose sight of everything. And someone who's developed this way of thinking, and who's old enough to bring children into the world, how's this person supposed to teach his children? It's fundamentally counterproductive – from his perspective – to educate his children. So that child's hardly got a chance.'

The importance of upbringing is affirmed by Hans-Jürgen in Erfurt in a similar fashion to what one finds amongst the western-German and British groups – ‘here’s where life begins, if you like: in the kindergarten’ – but with a twist corresponding to the changes experienced since the fall of communism: ‘You can still notice the difference today between people who grew up here in the East and people who grew up in the West. Let’s take the same age-group, that’s probably the best way to compare. Here you got an all-round education at school, and you took an interest in things yourself because various things were forbidden. Because whatever was forbidden, that was something you had to know about. “Why is it that here I’m not allowed ...? What’s different over there ...? How’s it going to hurt me if I go over there?” OK, and in the other education system, in the western one, it was more “This is what you need to know for your life and that’s it, no more.” Because whatever goes beyond your knowledge, well there’s some other person who knows it. You don’t need to look beyond the edge of your plate.’ Uwe agrees: ‘They bred nerds, one-track specialists.’ Education is seen as defining people’s horizons and is therefore central to the health (Dieter’s metaphor) of society. It builds morality as well. For Hans-Jürgen, what is important for the enforcement of rules is not so much institutions and structures themselves as the morality of the people within them. One might regard this as an assertion of the moral/social over the legal: ‘I always say, with all the things that are on the cards here, at the end of the day it’s always a person who does it or causes it, it’s a person, not some law. If that person says “I don’t want to,” then he’s decided it. He’s given the option to do it or not to do it, he always has that. ... And so it all goes back to education, to the kind of morality which is given to individual people. That’s where it all really begins.’

We have seen already that one of the key problems raised in the German discussions is a perceived lack of community spirit and a reluctance on the part of individuals to help one another, and we have seen that one explanation offered is that this could simply be the result of a ‘German mentality’ of rudeness and indifference. In the following passage from the Kassel group, the participants discuss the same problem with reference to another possible explanation to do with luxury and indulgence:

P: [...] You only need to look at the taxi trade: twenty years ago – I’ve been driving 28 years now – twenty years ago if you made an emergency call, ‘I need help’, within a minute there’d be at least three taxi-drivers there and within ten minutes there’d be fifty. Do that today and not even one will come! [D: It’s true, it’s true ...]

JW: Why’s there been this change?

P: There's no standard any more. Somehow everything's splitting apart. Everyone speaks just for themselves now. You see it here too ...

D: ... Yeah, but there's many reasons for that ... [P: Yes but in Germany ...]

H: But that's exactly the point you made earlier, this each-for-himself ... that everyone's his own master and wants to keep it that way, that that's where the tendency is. That's how I understood you anyway. ... I mean, that's the point, why this ... this togetherness is getting weaker and weaker. I think it's also got something to do with the fact that society here in Germany is glutted, that desires or, or ... that some notion of where I'd like to end up is no longer as strong as it was forty years ago.

D: And so what you need exactly then is that people step back and say 'wait a moment ... [H: ... Exactly ...] I don't have need of this any more ...'. The problem I think is rather that they're forced to have them ...

P: Yeah, desires always correspond to the economic level. Fifty years ago if you had the chance to afford a go-go or whatever it meant something. Today the economic level is much higher, today everyone wants ... 'I need a CD-player, ooh I think I need one for the other room too. Doesn't hurt. Ah wait, I'm lacking a television. And a television belongs in the bedroom too ...'. One simply wants everything. One gets ...

S: And just listen to your words, it's always 'I'. Forty, fifty years ago, after the war, you always said 'we' and you helped each other. Now it's 'I'.

The question of consumer behaviour is one which we encountered in the *Economics* domain. In the logic of that domain, the problem was that people were spending too much money and thereby getting themselves into debt, ultimately making them reliant on the financial support of the state. In the logic of this domain, the problem is of a moral and social kind: frantic buying is an expression of greed and egoism, the selfish fulfilment of one's personal desires. Individuals have been spoilt by the luxury which is on offer in modern society and therefore no longer recognise the need for a sense of 'togetherness'. The past acts as the point of comparison: 'I' was once 'we'. Other groups talk in similar terms.<sup>16</sup> At Erfurt, where very much the same point is made, the explanation is unambiguous – it is to do with the entrenchment of capitalism. 'In GDR-times people were more sophisticated in the head than they are today,' says Andreas, 'because today it's only consumption which counts – everyone with his chair, his table, his bed, his TV, which has always got to be better and better. Whereas before, this community ... the public-spirited way of thinking, it was all a little bit different.' Uwe picks this up: 'The people from the old West Germany, they have a horizon

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<sup>16</sup> At Würzburg for instance: for Uwe, whereas 'the wealth of a person lies in their heart and in their head,' in practice 'it's money that's become our beloved god. That's all it's about now. And even so they [rich people] are unhappy because naturally there's always something missing.' Oliver immediately makes explicit the connection between this and the condition of society: 'society's no longer so integrated, it's getting more and more anonymous – the more successful it becomes, the more anonymous it becomes.' Rainer suggests that morality has declined to the extent that the old biblical motto has been inverted: 'To take is more blessed than to give.' Today's society has become 'the elbow society'.

that extends up to the garden fence. “My little world, nice high fence and whatever’s outside I don’t care about.”

Besides these influences on the willingness to follow the rules, the conduct of those charged with *enforcing* the rules is another key explanation given for problems in this domain. Problems arise insofar as they fail to fulfil their duties. While it was the magistrates who took the blame in a Norwich extract explored in the previous chapter, the police – particularly amongst the British groups – also tend to face criticism. They are regularly described as being fussy, immature and having the wrong priorities. Mickey in Norwich speaks fondly of the days when a policeman would just have said “oi, cut that out”, slap across the head, end of story.’ The same motif arises in the following extract from the Swansea group. As is evident, the problems are explained partly in terms of the individuals involved and partly in terms of the institutional constraints within which they work:

A: The coppers now are all youngsters, and as soon as you put a uniform on them they think they are God. And they come at you with attitude. If someone comes at you with attitude, you’re going to give it straight back, aren’t you. What gives them the right, know what I mean? Just cos they got a uniform on.

L: They train ... they train them to have an attitude. They train to be the boss. They train to speak to people to let them know they’re in charge, they’re trained to do that. The police ten, fifteen, twenty years ago, was in a better way than what it is now. [...] If they caught a little thief they’d give him a little clip around the ear, and they’d take him home to his father and his father would give him a little clip as well. [A: Exactly.] Now, they take him into a cell, they do their little bit of paperwork, they go to court ... what does that achieve? That little kid wouldn’t do it again. If he goes to court he’ll do it again.

JW: You mention paperwork, do you blame the police as individuals ...?

L: No, it’s the government. It all boils down to the government ...

D: They set all the regulations, don’t they. For the country.

A: They set the rules, they set the rules, they want the police to enforce them. They’re getting too much paperwork to do, you can’t blame the police entirely, but at the same time there’s a way of doing the job ...

L: They’re too scared to do it now, aren’t they ... Even though they do it, but they do it for the wrong reasons ... [A: Yeah, that’s right, yeah ...] They’re too scared to do it because their job’s on the line or whatever ... If I’d have done something wrong I’d prefer to have a clip, it’d be quite ... you’d have a clip on your ear and you wouldn’t do it again ... [M: For the minor things ...] That’s what I’m talking about. If you’ve done something major well obviously you’ve got to face the consequences then.

A: If you read the *Evening Post* all you hear about is people getting done for speeding and minor offences ...

L: The courts are full, the courts are full. My missus used to work at the magistrates’ court. They’re full.

Part of the explanatory motif centres on the individuals and their mentalities: the police are seen as having the wrong attitude, overusing their authority, and pursuing minor offences such as speeding which clog up the machinery of justice.<sup>17</sup> Rather than representatives of an institution that carries authority they are ‘youngsters’ in ‘uniforms’. The explanation is broadened a little with the reference to paperwork and bureaucratic procedures; the invocation of the government means there is a national dimension. The Norwich and Reading groups give similar accounts. David at Reading, that night he found a burglar in his house (Chapter 3), found the police too casual. ‘And all these pieces of paper ... The girl that came, she kept giggling ... She wrote [the statement] down, she said “how’s that?”, I said “well, quite honestly, you’ve spelt that wrong ...”. She said “what have I spelt wrong ...?” She got a little thing out that rectifies the spelling mistakes, little electronic thing ... I’m not lying, I bet there was four sheets of A4 paper, she’s made all this stuff out, she says “would you like to read it before you sign it?” And I’ve started again and I say “To be quite honest it’s all mistakes.” She said “could you signature above the mistakes?”’ They were ‘over-powered with paperwork’, he adds, and concludes ‘the trouble is, the police forces are being run like a business, aren’t they. They’re being run like a pub, and they all got to show a profit at the end. “Reading’s doing really good – oh the crime rate’s down, we’ll take a note of that.” [...] The police are made to make the figures look good ... It’s a business, it’s a business.’ Murda, from the same group, supports David’s narrative, and later augments it with a different perspective based on a television programme he has been watching called *The Secret Policeman*. Here again one sees an understanding of the relationship between local conduct and national target-setting. Asked to describe it, he explains ‘it’s just about the treatment of ... like for example, like the police, right, one of the things – just showing their racist side, basically, you know ... They would, say, stop 50 Asian guys and black guys, and then, right, they’d have to stop a couple of white guys and say “alright, I’ll let you off John, let you off Paul”, just for the stats, you know. So “no, no, it’s not all Mohammed, Mohammed, Mohammed and Winston, we’ve got John here, and we’ve got Peter and Paul here ...”.’

The conduct of those who enforce the rules is highlighted amongst the Czech groups with added dimensions – notably the significance of mentalities which have been inherited

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<sup>17</sup> This parallels a point made by Mickey at Norwich: ‘if someone effs and blinds, “I’m not paying your effing fare” ... the copper might turn a blind eye to that, but somebody has a little minor dispute with his best mate over something pathetic and tiny, he’s cuffed, thrown on the ground and shoved in the back of the van.’

specifically from the communist period, and the financial weakness of the state. These factors emerge in the discussion in Liberec on the question of criminal behaviour:

Z: Before it used to be individuals, today you're starting to get gangs, mafia groups and whatever.

O: Yeah, but you had them before. It's a question of money again, because for your average policemen on the beat, preventing crime isn't easy. Police can't be everywhere, and as soon as their standard of living goes low ...

R: Criminals nobble them to keep them quiet ... [O: Corruption ...] They corrupt them, they give them money to silence them.

Z: And if they're really young policemen they do it themselves, they run it themselves ...

O: Preventing that requires a completely different approach. I think it needs a completely different approach from flinging money and hiring policemen until you've gone from 20,000 of them to 50,000. I think far better than flinging more money at it is prevention and education and waiting until that generation dies out ... [Z: Until that generation dies out ...] and is brought up differently. But unfortunately that's not happening. [...] The judiciary doesn't work properly either. You've got cases which take years to get to court ... [Z: So much trivial stuff and so much money ...] And criminals know if they steal something they can do what they like for three years without any problems, that's just the average, they can move about in freedom without harm. And if finally it gets to court then there's procrastination again ... everything, everything takes ages. The prisons are full, they don't have anywhere to put them, now they're going to build some and that construction will cost billions, that's not small money at all, and we're throwing billions at it so that we can lock someone up again.

Z: And if the prisoners don't have work then for every criminal you'll get another criminal.

The motif of the corruptness of the older generation, morally tarnished by its association with communism, is a recurrent one (and one that can exist in parallel with ideas about the greater public-spiritedness of people under communism). Note Zdeněk's repetition of 'until that generation dies out', an indication of the ease with which he recognises Onřej's theme: one of the reasons why the police are considered heavily susceptible to corruption is that they were brought up to have a 'completely different attitude', in conditions where different behaviour was normalised. The assumption of corrupt values is made of officials in all forms of public office, including the judiciary, the police and the law-makers. 'There's absolutely no moral responsibility there', says Zdeněk at Ostrava, 'we can't govern it, we can't control it, it's a proper madhouse, to put it in Czech.' Like the Liberec group, the Ostrava group ties this in with the generation problem and a weak legal system.<sup>18</sup>

The explanatory motifs which have been traced so far assert the relevance of factors which are domestic or local. Very occasionally, a transnational dimension is also raised.

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<sup>18</sup> When the Plzeň group confronts the problem of the judicial system, their first point is that it is biased. Asked to explain this, Míra says that 80-90% of the people working in the system are survivors from before the revolution, 'people brought up in a completely different way,' he says (with almost identical language to Onřej's comment above).

The notion of a declining ‘threshold’ as regards willingness to engage in criminal activity is associated by both the Lübeck and the Würzburg group with the arrival of immigrants from outside the home environment. The principal places of relevant contrast here seem to be eastern Europe and the Balkans, whilst Turkey has an ambiguous status – both groups mention it in this regard, but Würzburg mention it more as a device to put the behaviour of eastern Europeans into relief. Here one is moving towards the *Relations between Peoples* domain which will be considered further below, but there is a distinction: the threat being described here is to the security of the individual rather than to the collective. In the first extract, Wolfgang and Jürgen in Lübeck frame the problem in terms of ‘the readiness to use force’:

W: ... I think – the statistics show it too – that among a lot of foreign nationalities [speaking slowly], whether it’s eastern Europe or let’s say the Turkish area, that the readiness to use force is considerably higher there than is normal in Central Europe. I mean, punch-ups you’ve always had, that’s nothing new, but that one goes straight at someone with a knife or that one reaches immediately for a pistol and shoots someone down, let’s just say that’s not normally the order of the day in Central Europe.

J: You could be right. When someone comes from Kosovo or somewhere, and he’s experienced the chaos of the civil war there ... [W: Exactly, yeah] and he’s seen deaths and he’s seen how one person murders another, that surely brutalises these people a bit, and perhaps for him the value of life is not put quite so high any more. Who knows. I’m not in a position to say, but ...

W: The threshold of inhibition is lower ... [J: Yeah, the inhibition threshold is lower.]

Niklas subsequently contests this point by reframing the problem according to the *Economics* domain, arguing that violence is always most common amongst the poor, whether they are outsiders or Germans. But the fluidity and responsiveness with which Wolfgang and Jürgen develop their point suggests that the discursive resource on which they are drawing is one which is easily available to them. The Würzburg group begins its discussion of crime by debating whether crime is really rising or not, and the extent to which this corresponds to the economic situation, before connecting to the immigration question as well:

O: And crime is going up too.

R: Apparently not. [O: What?] Apparently not. If one reads through the police statistics ... Certain types of crime have gone up. That’s the interesting thing. It also connects back to the topics ‘Work’ and ‘Economy’ again, in that theft and violent offences have gone up a bit. The others haven’t though, according to the statistics that are published in the papers from time to time – now of course, statistics here, statistics there, fine, but one needs some kind of orientation – and these ... that’s the interesting thing, those offences which have to do with the social situation, with this tense situation, they’ve gone up, that’s evident in the statistics. Like I said, violent crime, property crime, burglary, robbery etc., they’ve gone up. And they’ll probably carry on going up. You know, that the people in society who are coming off badly, to put it simply, that they go and fetch themselves what they’ve been deprived of [U: yeah]. That the inhibition threshold for breaking

laws drops lower and lower. The worse, the more extreme the social situation becomes, the lower the inhibition threshold goes, to go into a department store and walk out with something in your pocket, or to bounce a check, or to mug a pensioner in the park to get hold of some money ... these are pretty primitive things of course ... but they're going up.

O: The inhibition threshold sinks ... [R: yeah]. The mentality that says 'it's all the same to me'. [...]

U: Fine, I mean, it links in also with 'Treatment of Outsiders' [points to card], these crimes, theft and so on ... that naturally a lot of ... from the East especially – I wouldn't say for Turks perhaps – that they come over, they see this rich country ...

JW: From the East – you mean from East Germany or ...?

U: From eastern Europe ... [R: ... Russia ...] ... eastern Europe ... [R: Key word!] ... and they think this is the land of cockaigne, where the roasted goose flies into your mouth, that everything lands automatically on your palette for free, and then – isn't it so? – and then these conflicts come up, I think these robberies and attacks will continue going up ...

R: Here in Würzburg there's a district, slightly outside and up on the hill, lots of high-rise buildings there and ... [U: ... Really horrible ...] Really horrible, yeah, and there's a lot of Russian emigrants living there – there's quite a few in Germany – and they're living all in a great mass. Whenever there's a crime in Würzburg, whenever someone gets beaten up or gets robbed, whenever a shop is broken into, than everyone listens up – oh-oh, it was the Russians, that's what people say. So ... and often it turns out to be true, unfortunately one has to say ...

By linking crime with economic and social desperation (generally, 'the social situation'), a potentially much wider sense of space is made possible through association with the discursive patterns of the *Economics* domain. The eastern Europeans make their appearance, together with the poverty which is expected of them. These are not so much the eastern Europeans who would compete for jobs but the ones who do not know how to work, in particular the *Russlanddeutschen* who have difficulties with alcohol.<sup>19</sup> With their expectations of wealth disappointed, they turn to crime.

Explanations based on economic factors are particularly in evidence amongst the Czech and Erfurt groups. As suggested in Chapter 4, in the discussions of these groups in particular, elements to do with *Economics* and *Society and the Law* are entwined. Josef in Ostrava exhibits a widespread assumption when he links a person's liability to legal punishment with their economic status: those who have friends, a lawyer and some money will be ok. The Erfurt group presents policemen as governed by economic motivations: 'I the little policeman, I want to earn my money.' Explanations of declining social order based on economic factors are evident in Liberec:

O: Those are huge gaps, and the second thing is then university: I think we've got a good level, but the problem is the places. Few places, little money for people, a poor student either has some kind of stipend ...

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<sup>19</sup> Later in the discussion, Oliver repeatedly emphasises the problem of alcohol for the *Russlanddeutschen* and argues that 'the combination of alcoholism and unemployment is fatal'.

Z: He needs a stipend. If he's good then the school recommends him and he gets it off the state. [O: How many of those people are there?] There's not many. A normal mortal, even if he's average rather than first-rate, might enjoy it and get more out of it if he went, but he doesn't have the parents for it.

R: Yeah, and maybe because his parents can't afford it that kid is going to end up in a gang ... [O: That's it! ...] [Z: That's exactly it ...] and they'll think up some shit, five young lads'll get together and maybe one'll say 'let's steal a car' or 'let's attack someone' ...

Z: They don't go and steal a car immediately, first they go and nick an antenna ...

The economic dimension of these explanations (the inability of the poor to get access to good-quality education in schools; the decline of standards in the household due to the precarious economic circumstances of parents, and – elsewhere – the decline of standards in schools due to the emigration of teachers) opens out a wider sense of space through association with the *Economics* domain. Otherwise, however, the explanations remain rather local. Insofar as the Czechs habitually associate criminal behaviour with minorities, it is with the 'gypsies' (not, for example, with the Vietnamese, one of the largest minority populations in the country), and the gypsies are treated generally as a domestic problem – they are not recent arrivals from the outside world, and cannot be connected with a particular sponsoring state. To point to them is again to rely on a 'domestic' explanation for crime.

### ***B) Possibilities for Action***

As noted in Chapter 3, all of the groups interviewed express a clear sense that something *should* be done about the problems associated with this domain. A sense of injustice is strongly evident when the British groups talk about vulnerability to crime and the lack of adequate protection, when the German groups discuss various forms of antisocial behaviour and the weakness of the public's response, and when the Czech groups talk about institutional corruption. The sense that something *could* be done varies somewhat, but is generally stronger than in the *Economics* domain. One sees calls both for government-led approaches and for initiatives originating from 'society' as a whole. All of these possibilities for action are connected to national or subnational actors, which is consistent with the fact that the problem explanations tend to be limited to factors within the home environment. Indeed, and significantly, it may be that there is a stronger sense of agency here than in the *Economics* domain precisely because the sense of space is rather narrower.

One of the specific reasons it is stronger relates to the emphasis placed on upbringing. To the extent that misbehaviour is associated with the distorted values and attitudes of individual actors, better education – whether at school or in the home – presents itself as a convincing remedy. Andreas in Erfurt argues that ‘certainly more money and time need to be devoted to the future of children’, and children should be encouraged ‘to develop their own opinions and to know roughly what’s right and what’s wrong.’ Mike makes an allusion to an event three years earlier when a pupil from the local Gutenberg Gymnasium went on the rampage, killing seventeen people: ‘the connection (*Zusammenhalt*) between the parental home and school teachers, it’s no longer there like it used to be. I can still remember when I was at school, my schoolmistress and my father used to meet at least once a week [laughs from the others] ... No but really, if it was still like that today then what happened at the Gutenberg Gymnasium would definitely never have happened.’ Hans-Jürgen adds his agreement. Mickey in Norwich argues that ‘at the end of the day, most of the taxation comes down to one thing, or should: a lot of it should go on education. Cos if people have been educated they’re less likely to be ming-mongs.’<sup>20</sup> The British groups talk a great deal about ‘nipping bad behaviour in the bud’, and in this Norwich extract one sees the national government referred to as a convincing agent for doing this:

L: ... I mean, youngsters today, walking around here, sometimes, it’s a nightmare. I saw two lads the other day, they had their eyes on a young lady there and if I hadn’t said something to one of the lads I don’t know where she would have been. I actually backed into a bus because they all zoomed in on me. I backed into a bus cos of it, and they all ran off laughing and going on, but she had a chance to get away. And they were all a bunch of young lads up for no good, you know.

M: As I say, I think if you could nip the small things in the bud – and I think the government are beginning to do this now, aren’t they – if you can nip the anti-social behaviour in the bud ... Now, it’s like, I’m a one-man wall around where I live, and I finally got my own way, it’s taken me nigh three years, but I go out after people and say ‘get off my garden, stopping kicking my fence, get away from this, get away from that,’ because you phone the police up and they’re not interested. You get these wardens coming round, and half these wardens are getting paid to do nothing because they never come round.

B: All comes down to education doesn’t it ... [M: Yeah, educate people ...] ... Children, parents, teachers from the word ‘go’, you know, right and wrong.

M: You stand outside the first school and you have some kids coming out effing and blinding, screaming and shouting, then you look at the parents and you see the reason why. You have other children come out and all they want to talk about is what they want to do and how many books they want to read, ‘I’ve had a really good day at school, Mummy and Daddy.’

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<sup>20</sup> Andreas in Erfurt argues that children should attend school for as long as possible – twelve years, as in the Gymnasium system, rather than ten, as for the *Realschule* – because ‘this feeling of belonging together is built up from the first class onwards.’

If people can be caught ‘from the word go’, then it seems there is a real chance of bringing them up as honest citizens. It is, one may say, an assertion of the importance of civic education, and it persists despite the scepticism of certain State institutions such as the police. At the same time, education can only achieve so much: Mickey’s last intervention implies the importance of the family as well as the school, since different children will be more teachable than others.

Education, while emphasised across the groups, is treated as a long-term approach, and changing the behaviour of adults is viewed as more difficult. Especially for those groups which consider crime to be a major problem, education needs to be supplemented in the short-term with better enforcement of the rules. The potential of punitive action to tackle crime is a second government-led way in which a sense of agency is affirmed. It is true that there is much ambivalence expressed regarding the organs of the law such as the police and magistrates.<sup>21</sup> The participants in Swansea are keen to describe themselves as ‘always the target’ for the police, and we have seen Murda in Reading reading a television programme as informing him about ‘the police’s racist side’. But this reflex cynicism coexists with plenty of calls for action. Stronger sentencing is an obvious one, as seen in Chapter 4 with the calls for a policy of ‘three strikes and you’re out’. ‘I watched a programme,’ says Mickey at Norwich. ‘The average drug-dealer affects and destroys forty lives. Destroys forty lives. Simple way to stop that, isn’t there.’ Barry responds: ‘yeah, take him out.’ ‘Lock him up,’ continues Mickey. ‘Nip the supply in the bud.’ A principle of enforcing the rules harshly on ‘true criminals’ and gently on those who have been caught out for a minor thing also seems to have an instinctive and widespread appeal. ‘I think basically you need to separate out the criminals who are unreformable and really tighten up the punishments for them,’ says Onřej in Liberec. ‘There has to be that law here, three times and that’s enough. I approve of that. If someone murders three times, Jesus, it’s impossible to rehabilitate him, there needs to be an end to it. He needs to be locked up for life. But if someone steals something, for example, if someone steals a car and gets five years, for that person, if you send him to

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<sup>21</sup> Cynicism towards the agents of law enforcement is much less evident though amongst the western German discussions in Lübeck, Kassel and Würzburg. The Lübeck group’s own satisfaction with police conduct was noted earlier, while Rainer and Uwe at Würzburg see widespread trust in the police as the natural state of affairs in Germany: Rainer mentions having recently read ‘that the police as an institution still enjoy a very high degree of trust here. That made an impression on me. It was a public opinion poll, it said that the police ... how shall I put it, that they’re not seen as particularly corrupt, that they’re very well trusted.’ ‘I can believe that too,’ continues Uwe. ‘I mean, I can imagine that a small official – policemen are also officials – isn’t corrupt, because it doesn’t pay to be. If someone tried to grease a policeman’s palm with 2000 euros, I’m sure hardly any of them would take it up.’ The consensus on this is total. Such confidence in the conduct of the institutions of enforcement, coupled with a generally relaxed attitude towards the problem of criminal behaviour, suggests the Germans do not see a problem of agency here.

prison, you're going to train him into the criminal profession. After five years he's not going to come out reformed. He's going to go out and put into practice everything he learnt in there ...'. Zdeněk agrees: prison sentences for minor crimes are what turns car-thieves into bank-robbers. Consistent with this, the participants of this group strongly oppose proposals for the age of criminal responsibility to be lowered. A fifteen-year-old child will do what he wants, it is argued, and locking him up will not improve him.

Worth highlighting is that these calls for stronger law enforcement are sometimes set in the context of the national political system. A political party is needed which is willing to 'enforce all the rules the same'. Note Mickey's use of the word 'promise' here, and his reference to his own political involvement:

M: We were promised three strikes and you're out, weren't we. And that was one of the reasons that I've voted for this government, yeah, we were promised three strikes and you're out, and I think the reason why we've all picked on this subject is because at the end of the day it is the most important subject. We would pay more of that [Taxation] to get better that [Legal System]. [B: Definitely.]

L: We would yeah, that's right. I mean, who's worrying about paying more of this [Taxation] when everything else comes into play? D'ya know what I mean? And this is where the Liberals score, don't they. Because their policies, what they're coming out with now, is what people are going to be thinking about. The Conservatives, I mean, they're not that bad but at the end of the day who's going to produce the most for everybody's safety?

The expectation that something *should* and *can* be done is evident in the tone of disappointment and the willingness to see higher taxation, as all three participants affirm. Leyton's reference to British political parties is hard to read – the Liberal Democrats do not traditionally score well on law-and-order issues as he suggests, but the reference could be to their position on taxation. Either way, his last sentence conveys a sense of expectation: the ability to guarantee safety on the streets is one of the key criteria for assessing the worth of politicians. The possibility of transnational forms of action is undiscussed; the problems are national or local and need to be dealt with as such.

The possibility of society-led approaches is raised in several of the groups. If people will stand up for the rules – rather like Leyton was doing above when he backed into the bus, or as Hans-Jürgen did when demanding that the person opposite take his feet off the seat – then there is the possibility that society can be made a better place. There are two difficulties cited with this however. First, it is quite likely that one will be ignored. Dieter in Kassel says: 'Think of our stupid colleagues, they chuck their cigarettes out of the car here, onto the rank where they're standing, in other words their immediate environment. And if you approach them and ask them, if you say "Listen, you've just thrown your cigarette butt out,

that's littering" ... "Yeah well the street-cleaner needs work, doesn't he." That's ... when you think how stupid that is ... Are you really going to expect that these people can develop, that they can change ...?' The second fundamental challenge is that social etiquette stands in the way. 'If you say something,' says Andreas at Erfurt, 'then you're cursed as a trouble-maker.' This compounds people's apathy and fear, says Uwe, so they say to themselves 'oh, there's no point, let's leave it,' and the deviant behaviour continues. The motif of people's timidity before the transgressor is evident in the following, and the final comment seems to imply a limit to how much one can expect to control these social trends:

H-J: ... Let's take the mobile phone, for example, a really simple normal thing: would you go to the opera or to the theatre with your mobile and let it ring and then start a conversation?

A: And why don't eight hundred people speak out against the person who's on the phone? Because he's speaking so loudly that no-one dares to speak to him. That's how it is. [...]

H-J: We experience it every day. If someone comes into my car and takes my phone then I get really fed up. He should ask me, he should ask me. I don't go to the hairdresser's and settle down with my phone and carry on a conversation and then say 'goodbye and see you'. It's just not what you do. These are basic rules of decency. But they don't exist any more ... [U: ... It's a madhouse ...]

A: This kind of decency needs to come from the parental home though ...

H-J: But there are people who get into our cabs, 40 or 50 years old, lawyers, doctors ... What are you going to do, call their parents? ... No, it's their lifestyle – 'I'm not interested in other people.'

A: No, it's not their lifestyle, it's the times ...

Confidence in either a political or a society-led approach only goes so far, and ultimately the only solution may be immediate, private action to extinguish the problem. Just after the passage above in which the merits of different political parties are considered, Mickey's next comment twists things in a rather different direction: 'And I tell you, I've already had this conversation with you Barry, it's only a matter of time before there's vigilantes.' If education fails, if individuals continue to break the rules and politicians are unable to get a grip on the problem, then 'people like us' will need to resolve things on the spot. 'Whoever's in power,' says Barry, 'we all look to the government and the council for what we want ... [M: Yeah ...] but they seem to have abandoned us.' The only alternative is to take a stand:

B: What you want is a political party which speaks like us. Someone who was actually committed to what they say. I mean, they give you all this 'I'll do this' but when they get there they become one of the brothers in Parliament ... [M: [of B] I'd follow him.] Cos we all want the same things, don't we. We want fairness across the board, but you don't see it, you don't see it.

M: He's like me, he wants ... [B: Fairness, don't we.] We had a really good discussion one day, didn't we. We were actually talking about vigilantes. He had problems with scumbag neighbours, I had problems with scumbag neighbours ... [B: We all have ...] ... You sort mine, I'll sort yours.

Nor should such talk necessarily be dismissed as posturing. A later passage of conversation finds Mickey recounting an incident to do with noisy neighbours where the police refused to act and where a solution was achieved – ‘and I don't mind telling you this on tape’ – only with the intervention of ‘two mad, big, muscley, bouncer Geordies,’<sup>22</sup> old acquaintances of his from Newcastle, who explained to the miscreants ‘if you ever fuck with him again we're going to kill you.’ This is clearly at the radical end of expressions of agency; agency which avoids formal channels of authority and which can hardly be described as organised. However, it is consistent with the general sense that problems to do with criminal or antisocial behaviour are soluble. There is none of the sense of inevitability which one finds in the *Economics* domain, and no attempt to normalise the problems. They can be tackled, one way or another.

The assumption of agency is in some ways weaker amongst the Czech groups. That it might be a Czech national tradition to avoid submitting to the law is one sceptical position which has already been noted. More detailed arguments are to be found also, mainly focused on two major problems: petty crime and high-level corruption. Greater spending on the police is described as legitimate in principle, although there is doubt about its affordability, plus a sense that – as state employees – the police already get better protected salaries than most. A call for more psychiatric help for criminals when they come out of prison runs up against the major barrier to action which is distinctive of the Czech discussions, the lack of state finances. This is the counter-argument raised whenever the usual points are made about improving the education system or the quality of law enforcement. ‘The biggest problem is the lack of finances,’ says Onřej from the Liberec group. ‘Whether it's how much goes on healthcare, on the police, on transport, on the legal system ... the money problem is the biggest one.’ Without better wages, the quality of the police force will remain low and the likelihood of corruption will be strong, but no change can be expected ‘if the state doesn't take in enough money to be able to give out.’

There is another restraining factor, and this links to the second major problem, that of corruption. Whereas the British and the western-German groups treat the legal system as a means of rooting out corruption (insofar as they are concerned about corruption at all), for

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<sup>22</sup> Geordies – people from Newcastle.

the Czech groups the legal system – stretching all the way back to the law-making process – is instead seen as one of the primary *expressions* of corruption, the locus rather than the solution. Corruption is considered a barrier to all kinds of institutional response to the problems of law and order. As Marek in Ostrava puts it, ‘corruption, I don’t think there’s any way to get rid of it as long as the people making the laws here are the ones who live off corruption. You see, I can’t make a law which is against myself. That’s what I mean when I say that if we copied a law from another state ... Here they always make a law which is favourable to one side and there’s no recourse, or it’s done very badly so that a clever lawyer can unlock it and get around it. Laws in Germany for example, they make it so that there is recourse of some kind, so that no-one can escape. Whereas here it’s only half-complete.’ Rather than being seen as a defender of the public interest, the legal system is often considered one more means of advancement.<sup>23</sup> In the face of loopholes and the ability of those at the top of the hierarchy to circumvent the law with the help of a sharp lawyer, what matters then is not the legal constraints but the personal morality of the individuals who hold office. And their morality, of course, is the morality of society more broadly. Onřej and Zdeněk in Liberec both say that it is impossible to point the finger of blame at individuals, that the problem is with the society from which these individuals are drawn: ‘it’s the upbringing, it’s the morality of those people, but that’s how the whole of society functions,’ says Onřej. This brings us back to the notion of a whole generation which has been tarnished by its association with the old regime. Is it considered possible to change their mentalities and behaviour? The assumption seems to be that it is not. ‘People brought up completely differently,’ is what Míra in Plzeň calls them, and all one can do is ‘wait until they go off into retirement and a new lot comes along.’ The problem will endure until these people retire and are replaced by a younger generation – ‘and you have to hope,’ adds Petr, ‘that the new ones don’t learn off the old ones.’ Zdeněk and Onřej likewise assert the need to wait patiently ‘until that generation dies out; the main thing is to educate the new generation differently’. This is clearly a statement of the absence of possibilities for action in the short term, but it should not be equated with pessimism: there is an evident sense that, given enough time, things are likely to change. Indeed, the Plzeň group sees progress already: ‘corruption was huge after the revolution,’ says Míra, with the vocal agreement of Petr and Román, ‘the five

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<sup>23</sup> The Erfurt group treat the legal system as another expression of social hierarchy. ‘It’s like a staircase,’ says Hans-Jürgen. ‘When you’re at the top, just picture it: you’re standing over the others, if you don’t take your foot away then they can’t come up. I can do what I like with those under me. That’s how it is with everything, whether it’s in the economy, in politics, whether it’s in the army or in prison, if you’re the arse at the bottom who can’t move upwards then that’s your bad luck. There’s someone up above, you have to trample him down or else you won’t get up there.’ ‘It’s a hierarchy everywhere,’ confirms Mike.

or six years after the revolution were by far the worst. Now it's been intercepted; compared to what it was it's minimal now.'

The sense of agency in this domain, while still qualified, is noticeably stronger than in the *Economics* domain. Especially amongst the British and German groups, education and law enforcement are widely assumed to be convincing *governmental* approaches – though the government involved is the national one, and there is no sense of a transnational context here. Society-led approaches are mentioned too, though with rather more cautious optimism.

## Relations between Peoples

### ***A) Explanatory Motifs***

Problems in the domain of *Relations between Peoples*, such as conflict, threat and intimidation, provoke two main kinds of explanation. Neither of these implicates the political subjects themselves, of course, since they are generally assumed to be peaceful people. The focus is on other peoples: one set of explanations is based on other peoples seeking to compensate for what they lack – in particular, power and resources; another set is based on these peoples expressing what are perceived to be their essential characteristics, for example an unwillingness to compromise. Conflicts arising from the first, for example over the control of resources, are presented as rational and may sometimes involve western governments. Those understood to be of the second kind, whether involving terrorists or intransigent minority groups within the environment (and this link is often made), involve at least one party which is considered in some way irrational.

The military intervention in Iraq (2003-) is often discussed at least in part in power-political terms. The West is seen as contesting power with the 'Arab-Muslim' people, as symbolised by individuals such as Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden. The latter, as they challenge for power, present a threat which the West then has to act against. Martin in Swansea on Saddam: 'Well I think it was right to be done. Right to be done. Cos he's a threat and always will be a threat, and I think the longer he'd been left in power ... You know, obviously they didn't find nothing then, but in time he could have quite possibly made a nuclear bomb or whatever. He is a threat. [...] If he'd had a chance of making a bomb he'd do it. I think the Iraq war was right, myself.' 'It's all to do with power, isn't it,' he says

a little later, which suggests a conclusion to David: ‘You know, at the end of the day, the most powerful country in the world is America. So at the end of the day, cowardly as it may be to say, I’d rather be with America than against America. [murmurs of agreement] Given now in the next six months to a year ... George Bush has just been re-elected, within six months to a year they’ll be going in on Iran next. Don’t worry about that. And Iran have got nukes. He [Bush] is a Texican, isn’t he ...’ Lee responds: ‘He is a man who’ll start a world war. No question.’ Bush is portrayed as a potentially aggressive actor, perhaps even foolhardy; the subjects may not like him, but prefer to align with him for power reasons. When Petr in Plzeň presents the Iraq war as being ‘theoretically’ about bringing freedom to people, Míra succeeds in convincing him ‘yeah, but ideals ... it’s money and oil in everything.’ Particularly for wars where the US is involved, ‘all about money’ and ‘all about oil’ are common refrains. An indication of a power-based perspective is found when the same group discusses the strength of the Czech army: Míra suggests it is ‘paltry compared to other states’, and ‘compared to the rest of the world it was much stronger before the Second World War, and we still couldn’t beat off the Germans.’ Román points out ‘to say to the Americans “don’t do that!”, if the Czech Republic says that then of course it won’t have any effect.’ At Erfurt, Hans-Jürgen uses the power motif to interpret Germany’s past: ‘You don’t get any other country – take Britain for example – being reproached for colonialism. Same with France, Portugal and Spain. Think about what they did in South America. These things have happened in history. That one must never forget it is logical. But one can’t keep pointing the finger all the time. [...] No-one reproaches the Americans when they do something. ... What’s the difference? The difference is designated by the more powerful one. And once again that’s not the Germans.’

Who has the power is deemed one of the keys to understanding relations between peoples. A global contest for power and resources is posited, with complete consensus, by the Kassel group when accounting for international conflicts:

H: I think the crunch with this whole thing is that the distribution of resources here on Earth is very varied, that most wars take place due to this distribution. Whether it’s basic economic goods like oil or other raw materials, or as is going to happen also with water, which some day is certainly going to have to be divided. Doesn’t affect us so much yet, but it may certainly hit us later. Perhaps very soon.

D: That’ll come too. ... With oil we’re probably already there ... With water it’s coming. [...]

P: It’s always a matter of distribution ... [H: yeah]. Wars happen because things are wrongly [*falsch*] distributed. But that’s completely normal. If I have something, why should I give it up to you? Tell me. That’s just how it is, isn’t it. And you say ‘why don’t you give me some, you have a lot, you don’t need it all.’ Yes, but I say, ‘sure, but why? Bad times might come, then I’d need it.’

- S: I think with war and peace it's more that certain countries want to keep their position of power ...
- D: Yeah, that's exactly what he's saying. Simply to hang onto their personal or country-specific advantage and secure their position ...
- P: Or, then there's these wars which in Africa ... a lot ... that some general launches a putsch and is brought to power ... [D: ... Power, power! ...] And then we're back at the same stage like when we had Hitler who killed the Jews and ... in the one case the Tutsus [sic] get killed, in the other case the others get killed ...
- S: Sure, but these African wars, for example, the Americans aren't very interested in those. [P: Right, because there they can't ...] Yeah, because they can't extract anything there.
- P: And probably soon the cost of the raw materials, even if they could get something out there, it'd be too expensive to ship it over to America ... [S: ... No raw materials in Africa ...] Yeah, exactly. [S: ... That's how it is ...]

One seems to see two kinds of explanation of conflict here, one explicit and one implicit, and relevant to different kinds of war. The first is the more structural one to do with relations of power: if resources are distributed unequally, there will be conflicts as those who have them try to fend off the challenges of those who do not. These wars are rational, and they may involve western actors such as the US. The second is a more essentialising explanation: wars in Africa are not about resources because there are none there, rather they are more to do with meaningless violence (like that of Hitler against the Jews – though the point is not developed). Note the phrase ‘some general’, as though the occurrence were so common that the details were unimportant.

Unless the West is specifically targeted, or unless the US chooses to involve itself, these conflicts over power are played out in the places of relevant contrast. Aside from the odd exception like Northern Ireland, Europe is considered a place of peace, as we heard Rainer in Würzburg affirm in the previous chapter. It is in places like Africa or the Middle East that wars take place.<sup>24</sup> A description of the Israel-Palestine conflict by the Lübeck group displays both the power explanation and something close to an essentialising of conflict amongst the peoples of that region: Jürgen (with Wolfgang and Ali emphatically agreeing) says: ‘The Israelis are armed to their teeth. The Palestinians have a lighter set of weapons – they throw stones for example, or maybe they’ve got a gun in their hand, but the imbalance is simply too great. [...] You certainly can’t condone everything the Palestinians do, setting off these attacks and blowing innocent people into the air ...’ Wolfgang: ‘the

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<sup>24</sup> Or in the past. At Würzburg there is talk about Spain and Portugal as having been ‘imperialists’ – ‘they divided up the world’ and Oliver makes here a rare explicit mention of race, perhaps made easier by the fact that the events in question are far back in history: ‘to put it simply, the white race wanted to dominate other races. To make gains for itself and to exploit places like Africa.’

problem is exactly like you say: both sides are ... [A: stubborn ...] stubborn, they're not willing to sit down with each other and work out a compromise. And without a compromise you can't solve anything.' Jürgen (with Wolfgang repeating 'exactly' in the background): 'it's basically always a reaction and a counter-reaction, and they get each other more and more worked up until it becomes really extreme.' Niklas: 'Yeah, almost all wars are religiously motivated in some way, aren't they. There's fanatics on both sides.' Again, religious fanaticism – barring the exception of Northern Ireland – is held to be what originates in the contrasts rather than in modern-day Europe. It is another way of emphasising irrationality and difference.<sup>25</sup>

Some conflicts then are driven by (rational) considerations to do with the distribution of power, some by (irrational) proclivities to engage in war, and presumably some by both. Insofar as the West is generally assumed to be peaceful (with the possible exception of the US), these conflicts would take place just in far-away places of contrast; what makes certain places *relevant* contrasts is that what happens there can intrude on life in the home environment and comparables, integrating the sense of space. Andreas in Erfurt gives one indication of how, raising the example of Rwanda, which he and Hans-Jürgen agree is an archetype: 'it's the best example, it's *the* example ... [H-J: Definitely, the very worst ...] Rwanda, where these Tutsis and Hutus ... [H-J: Hutus and Tutsis] ... Hutus and Tutsis, where they got in each other's hair and basically slaughtered each other ... where this Canadian General said – said to the UN – that we need to act immediately ... Politicians were told that we need to act, we need to keep them apart. Otherwise we get a huge refugee problem, that's the consequence of murder and slaughter and whatever else.' Peter in Kassel indicates a different way in which developments may impinge upon the home environment, based on aggressive intentions:

For me ... Not in the near future but sometime in the future the great bogeyman [*Feindbild*] is going to be the Chinese and the Muslim. [H: yeah] ... In any event it's going to happen that the Chinese bursts out and attacks. I think there's no way around that. And the Muslims all over the world, they're all peaceful like we said but you see what happens everywhere with their attacks and all. The Muslims, they're in every country, and some day they're going to take over – this is my opinion – they're going to take over world supremacy. Because the potential is there. This belief is there – this fanatical belief is there ... So there's enough potential for war, there's enough for the next hundred years. Question is, how long will it all survive? Until someone, some kind of madman presses the button and everything goes up. Pakistan – all you need is for someone who's a bit hysterical to come to power

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<sup>25</sup> As Peter in Kassel says, 'look at how the Koran is interpreted ... You can interpret it in a peaceful way and you can interpret it in a violent way, and generally it's the violent way. There's nothing in it, for example, that says a woman should be put to death [ed.: probably a reference to various high-profile cases of honour killings in Germany around the time of the interviews], but they do it anyway because they interpret it differently. And I think that's a huge danger, really.'

and some day he presses the button. China overwhelms Taiwan – the Americans have said they'll defend Taiwan, what would they do then? [D: yeah].

Aside from contingency (represented by the notion that a madman, or someone in Pakistan, could come to power and press the nuclear button), there are the two main explanatory motifs evident here. There is the motif of power relations (the struggle for world supremacy); and, entwined with it, the essential character of the contrasting people (the 'fanaticism' of Muslims who are trying to take over countries). The passage is reminiscent of the comments made by Uwe in Würzburg noted earlier, where he suggests 'they want to destroy the whole western world.' When these people come to live with 'us', they bring their irrationality with them, and their behaviour is simply the expression of their natures. The same sense of irrationality was evident in earlier passages from the Swansea group, where Arabs were referred to as 'fanatics from a very, very young age' who have 'had it drilled into them.'

With (slightly) less alarmism, the Lübeck group expresses clear consensus when discussing the problem of 'Germanness' being undermined: it is to be explained in terms of the unwillingness of other peoples to make the effort to integrate:

J: When for example you stand here at the station taxi-rank on Sundays and as a German you're in the minority, and there are nine foreigners there and one German, then you also start to feel a little bit like an outsider, somehow it's ... it's somehow not normal. [...] I don't think that's going to develop in a positive way, in fact I'm concerned about my grandchildren ... [W: yeah], that they're actually going to be living as a minority here in Germany, or at least that there'll be areas where they're in the minority. That worries me. If Turkey comes into the EU then there'll be further colleagues coming over. You can understand them, if they live in poverty and they want to have a better life here, the east Europeans too ... But at some point German children also have a right to a national ...

N: The problem is also that there's little interaction, the groups stay amongst themselves, which one can understand too, that they keep to themselves, form parallel communities, that there's little ...

J: It's very visible in the US, where there's actually whole town districts where only Russians live, only Chinese live, where only ... whatever, Turks or something, and they've really sealed themselves off. And in their areas, the areas where they live, they speak their national languages, don't they. That can't work either, I don't think, you get friction-points then ...

N: The Turkish women have been here thirty years and they don't speak any German ...

J: Yeah, and they go around veiled up so that no communication's possible ...

A: The new generation too, they're not allowed to attend school. I didn't want to mention it but why are there a lot of taxi-drivers, you know them too, who've married again, the wife is eighteen or nineteen ... I've campaigned so hard but the woman doesn't go to school. I've campaigned so hard ... I've been able to get her to go to school for three days, so that he collects her and takes her and after three days he forbids it. She's the wife of one of our colleagues, I won't name names ... These women have been here a year, a year and a half, and there's already a second child on the way and they don't have any German. Not a single word. Later the children speak German so they'll translate for the mothers when the mothers go to the doctor or ...

J: ... They generally translate for their parents at the doctor or with the authorities, they take the children along ...

A: ...Even now. Even the new generation of Turks, they still don't speak any German ...

While eastern Europeans are mentioned once, it is clear that the focus here, in a discussion about group difference and ways of life, is on Turkey and the Turks. The problem is the lack of communication, of peoples who stay amongst themselves in parallel communities, who refuse to make the effort to integrate – the emphasis on language heightens the sense of otherness. Even Ali, who has tried so hard to convey the importance of schooling, has been unable to break down this resistance. Niklas, ever sceptical of the willingness of his fellow participants to talk in the logic of this domain, elsewhere in the discussion explains the same problem of uneasy relations between peoples with reference to an economic argument: ‘the worse the economy goes, naturally the worse the rivalries between Germans and immigrants [*Ausländer*<sup>26</sup>] become. Because a lot is pushed onto the immigrants, they're blamed for the fact that there's so few jobs. It's a problem.’ Niklas, however, is rather on his own with this argument.

The problematic point tends to be presented not as that other peoples have different traditions and ways of living (to object to that would be ‘unreasonable’), but rather that those peoples are unwilling or unable to compromise on their differences. They seek to impose their customs and way of life on the inhabitants of the city. It is part of the motif ‘they're more racist than we are,’ which is a favourite of the participants in the Swansea group, as if to say ‘*they* are the ones with irrational prejudices’. Even in the Reading group, considerably less hostile in its general tone, we see this suggestion of stubbornness, although this time not with regard to Arab-Muslims:

D: Cos a lot of people who come to the country, always ... ‘oh we've been treated’ ... I just heard a programme on the local radio – and it was Radio Berkshire – talking about black people from Ba- ... from the West Indies, came to Reading. And when they got here in late 1950s, 1960s, they worked in Reading, and one lady has said on there that when she worked for Huntley Palmers, that make the biscuits here in Reading, they had a separate entrance for the black people. They never did. I worked for Huntley Palmers at the garage there, one entrance, you went in the main entrance ... She wanted to be an outsider, she was talking on the radio, she was making herself ...

M: I'm surprised about that ...

D: Yeah that's right, now I thought that sounded ...

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<sup>26</sup> *Ausländer* is a complex term to translate: ‘foreigners’ would be more appropriate in some contexts, and ‘immigrants’, while it seems suitable here, is imperfect to the extent that speakers may also be referring to the descendants of immigrants.

M: That'd be going back maybe a hundred years or something maybe ... But not here, no, I wouldn't have thought so.

D: No, no, and it was only one person, the others were all saying 'oh we worked there and we all went in the same gate' ... [M: ... South Africa in the 50s ...] ... special doorway because they were black ... funny that [...] Funny isn't it, how's it portrayed or whatever, or how people ... You know, I was about there then and I never heard of any secret doors.

David presents the woman in question as *wanting* to be different, as presenting a kind of conspiracy theory based on 'secret doors' and 'special doorways' to make herself seem a victim. Whatever the truth in the particular case, what is significant is the willingness of Murda (incidentally, himself non-white) to accept the account as being plausible and to be able to develop it consistently with David's perspective. The explanation for uneasy relations is fixed on the minority.

We have also seen amongst the Czechs an explanation of conflict based on fundamental difference. Zdeněk in Ostrava spoke above of Muslims not knowing how to compromise, of it being their 'mentality' and of their having a 'different nature to Christians'. Gypsies also, when not being accused of choosing not to work or choosing not to play by the rules, are sometimes accused of having 'a different mentality'. That there were not more examples amongst the Czechs of threat and conflict being explained in these terms could be down to several things. It could be that the number of interviews was simply too small; it could be that, having heard of western media criticism – particularly around the time of EU accession – of Czech attitudes towards minorities, the participants interviewed were wary of presenting themselves in these terms to a British researcher. Certainly Román of the Plzeň group several times during discussion of these problems tried to reverse the interview by asking the author about race relations in Britain and London. Perhaps just as likely, however, is that the lack of exposure (at the time of the interview – the situation may change) to unfamiliar groups who might conceivably be thought of as constituting a collective threat provides little opportunity for a discursive repertoire of this kind to be deployed.

In studying explanatory motifs, special attention has been paid to the sense of space which tends to be evoked, to the territorial spread of factors deemed relevant to understanding the origins of problems. Both of the principal explanations traced for *Relations between Peoples* – the one based on power and differences of power, the other based on the characters of contrast peoples – imply a sense of space which is wide. In the first case this is quite evident: one sees evoked a world of peoples with more or less power

who try to improve their positions. The second, one might think, is a perspective which is *non-spatial* or *detrterritorialised*, since it is based on characteristics rather than structural features. Yet on the contrary, one feels it is highly spatial because these peoples, and the conflicts which they give rise to, are associated with particular parts of the world. Relevant contrasts in this sense are Africa, the Middle East and (though mentioned only a few times) China, and the peoples who are encountered within the home environment and comparables are explicitly associated with such regions in the sense of them being ‘from there’ or ‘belonging there’. The sense of space is, again, very wide therefore.

### ***B) Possibilities for Action***

Rarely in these interviews does one find the idea that relations between peoples can be improved through dialogue or through better mutual understanding. We heard Hans in Kassel make this suggestion in Chapter 3, but it is certainly not common. A few individuals amongst the German groups (Niklas in Lübeck, Rainer and Oliver in Würzburg) call for German language lessons to be made compulsory for immigrants: ‘with integration,’ says Oliver, ‘it’s up to politicians to take them by the hand and say “here’s a language course for you to take.”’ The sense that these should be obligatory – not just offered – may be read as implying however that the emphasis is more on enforcing conformity to ‘our’ practices than on establishing the means for dialogue. The absence more widely of progressive ideas is most likely because conflict between peoples is seen to be out of the hands of the political subjects: as generally peaceful people, it is not they who are responsible, their behaviour is merely reactive. Those whose aggression is understood as a challenge for power and resources are subverting the status quo and the problem is of their own making; if a western country like the US is the active party, this tends to be treated as a greedy government looking for money and oil, little to do with the subjects themselves.<sup>27</sup> When antagonism is attributed to the *character* or *nature* of other peoples, their intransigence or irrationality, again the subjects are positioned as those responding to rather than initiating the problem.

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<sup>27</sup> Note however that if a government *withholds* itself from an aggressive conflict then its association with the political subjects can be affirmed. When Oliver at Würzburg talks about Germany’s abstinence from the Iraq war, the pronoun is ‘we’ all the way: ‘Germany is slowly coming out of the post-War situation, bit by bit starting to develop some autonomy. Before we were the little brother of the USA, and whatever the USA said we agreed with. Now since Iraq that’s changed. We have our own opinion on that now, we’ve said we don’t want war. It’s the first time in German history that we’ve taken an independent line. Before that we really were just the USA’s little brother.’

In neither case does the notion of ‘dialogue’ get very far. Admittedly, the research was conducted at a time of much talk in the media about a ‘clash of civilisations’, a term which could easily act as an organising concept for those inclined to see conflict as inevitable. The term was not used in these discussions, though a comment by Dieter in Kassel encountered earlier has a similar ring: ‘this whole thing with the takeover by Muslims – or them achieving parity I should say, there won’t be a takeover – they’re everywhere and they install themselves everywhere and ... I’m not against *Ausländer*, but this way and means by which it’s all happening, I find it really unhealthy. And there’s not going to be war between countries any more, instead war takes place between people(s), who live side by side but who have completely different cultures from each other ...’. Whatever the impact of one particular discourse of the moment, the fact remains that conflict tends to be normalised, across all the groups. Of course, this should not be read as evidence in support of a ‘clash of civilisations’ or ‘clash of peoples’ thesis: our focus is on common-sense assumptions, and it is a quite separate question whether one would want to buy into the common-sense position that conflict between peoples is unavoidable.<sup>28</sup>

A recap of the material confirms this assumption of the inevitability of conflict. ‘Unless you can zap people for thinking,’ says Mickey, ‘you will never ever have peace.’ ‘You’re never gonna stop war,’ says David in Reading, and ‘I can’t do nothing about it.’ Radical contingency is one aspect: we have heard Peter in Kassel suggest that ‘all you need is for someone who’s a bit hysterical to come to power and someday he presses the button.’ Or as Petr in Plzeň puts it, ‘just like 11<sup>th</sup> September, two planes struck a sky-scraper and the next morning there was suddenly a war going on, in Afghanistan.’ The scarcity and unequal distribution of resources is another determining aspect we have seen. Then there is the problem that the attitudes of certain peoples are not conducive to harmony. When the Würzburg group is asked whether there are ways of encouraging the integration of minorities, the immediate response is:

O: The integration process ... it’s difficult. With Russian-Germans alcohol’s involved. And with Muslims it’s that their religion’s a problem. They want their own thing, their own soup-bowl. What was it that Beckstein<sup>29</sup> said? – some kind of state within a state, their own caliphate. And that makes them hard to integrate.

U: Yeah, and as far as their beliefs go, one needs to be quite honest and say that their goal is world domination. So I mean ... sometimes I think that they really want to infiltrate the country ... [R:

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<sup>28</sup> Also, at the micro-level, these repertoires are deployed unevenly: only when a situation is problematised and conflict is foregrounded are they likely to be invoked, a fact that allows plenty of exceptions to be made.

<sup>29</sup> Günther Beckstein, the CSU Interior Minister of Bavaria.

Yeah, I think that's it ... the ideology ...] They want to destroy the whole western world. [R: yeah, yeah]

This set of assumptions clearly limits the perceived range of possibilities for action. There are some however, with slight variations between countries. For the British groups, dealing militarily with high-level threats when they arise is one necessary course of action. Tackling the threat means eradicating it rather than engaging with it, a job for the country's armed forces. Mickey at Norwich, with the backing of Gavin and Barry, says the Iraq war was 'a necessary evil, we had to go in there, we had to do something,' as a response to the attacks on the US of 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001. The logic of the 'war on terror' is accepted unproblematically. 'There's only one thing, there's only one thing I ever ever agree with in the whole of the Bible – I think it's the greatest book of fiction ever – what it is, is "an eye for an eye".' In this domain, action is not guided by rules but by what has to be done to show power and to remove the threat. 'Now at the minute, the biggest war we got in the world at the moment is terrorism. Now we got the greatest soldiers in the world, the SAS ... They could have murdered these terrorists in their sleep, they know where they are ... Do away with them! I don't want to hear about it, I don't want to know about it, just do it. [...] If I get on an aeroplane, yeah, say next week, and two years later it comes out, in Ally McNabb's book or whatever, that that same aeroplane didn't blow because the SAS went in, dragged these dirty, stinking, cowardly, murdering bastards out their beds and put a gun in their heads and blew their stinking rotting brains out, yeah, am I going to complain about that? Am I hell!' In this approach of cutting out the threats, there are no rules to follow. 'War is war, isn't it,' says Martin at Swansea, 'simple as that.'<sup>30</sup> In the Erfurt discussion, Hans-Jürgen refers to the case of the so-called Caliph of Cologne, an Islamic leader whose possible extradition to Turkey on criminal charges was a point of heated debate in Germany in 2004.<sup>31</sup> 'Just say what people really think. Put him in a plane and let him crash.' He then links this to the case of Ayatollah Khomeini, 'who lived in France for years and then they sent him back and what happened afterwards? You had a war there. That's why I said if he'd crashed then you'd probably never have had a war there. It's these individuals – we had one

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<sup>30</sup> The Swansea group express this thought when criticising the British government for prosecuting one of its own soldiers for a misdemeanour in Iraq. Andy: 'he's up on the charge for killing somebody ... Well, war is war, once you're out there you don't know what's coming towards you. You don't know whether it's a fanatic or just a tiny ... If they're coming at you in a speeding car, what do you do? Do you take a chance and let them blow you up or do you just pop 'em?' Lee feels the injustice: 'Now, the Metropolitan Police have brought charges against him and he has been taken to court now on a murder charge. For being over there, and there was a war going on. You know, what's all that about?'

<sup>31</sup> Cf. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1705886.stm>, accessed December 2006.

ourselves here in Germany and if he hadn't been an idiot then everything would have been different.'<sup>32</sup>

A second approach raised in several groups is to reduce the amount of mutual exposure between peoples. One way to do this is to take a tougher line on the number of outsiders let into the environment. As noted above, the Swansea group credits other countries in Europe, and Australia, with being firmer. Such a policy, as one can imagine, is favoured not just for the benefits it can bring for the problems of this domain (reducing the unwanted encounter with those held to be intimidating and uncompromising) but also, in the logic of the other domains, as a means of cutting crime and reducing the economic 'burden'. Murda in Reading suggests: 'say for example the war in Bosnia, and then the war in Afghanistan, yeah? Now, once everything's been sorted out and it's no longer a war zone, now these people that have come over here as political asylum, can't they be like sent back? You know, not in a horrible way, deported or anything, but another country that likes England, that aren't well off, do something over there, make it better for the people ...'. The proposal is presented as an act of charity. David 'know[s] what he's saying.' At Swansea, such a move would no doubt be welcomed, though there is some concern about feasibility. The chief obstacle is taken to be the softness and craftiness of the national government. According to David and Andy at Swansea, the government does not act against immigrants because 'everyone's afraid to step on them'. The authorities are secretive, doing things behind the backs of the subjects:

L: [...] There's so many [asylum-seekers] in here now, what do you do, you can't really ship them out.

M: They've put a stop to it now, haven't they.

A: They can put a stop to it now, can't they, so no others get in.

D: But have they put a stop to it, at the moment? Haven't they put a freeze on it? [A: I think so ...] There's a certain percentage, isn't it ...

L: It was in the paper, on the news and everything, that they stopped ninety asylum-seekers coming to Swansea, about three weeks, four weeks ago, because one asylum-seeker got killed in Swansea. On a night out. And they stopped it then for safety reasons. That was on the Friday. On the Tuesday ... Big headlines, you know, they tried ... the government obviously had to ... big flashpoint, ninety asylum-seekers won't be coming to Swansea ... Literally four or five days later

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<sup>32</sup> This emphasis on no-holds-barred military action against salient threats is generally found less amongst the Germans or Czechs. Both see the deployment of their troops overseas as a radical move and out of keeping with national tradition. The Czechs also emphasise the limits of their capabilities: 'we're so meaningless,' says Petr in Plzeň, 'from our position our country's unable to influence things,' says Míra. A role as part of NATO is mentioned (Román mentions Czech expertise in anti-chemical-weapons manoeuvres), but one within parameters set by the US.

there's a little bit in the *Evening Post*, where nobody's going to see really: they've now let the ninety asylum-seekers come into Swansea. You know, four or five days later. All of a sudden there's a big bit in the news ... [D: About the safety crisis and everything ...] And then five days later there's a little tiny piece in the *Evening Post* saying it's been over-ruled and the police think it's safe now for the ninety. So what difference has four days made?

The government, the police and the newspaper are presented as in collusion. The news of the arrival of the ninety is suppressed, almost in a guilty manner, and any opportunity to protest is circumvented. Amongst the German groups one also finds calls for the national government to be stricter on how many outsiders are let into the country, with the success of such calls likewise qualified. The motif of weak and sly national politicians is widely present, in the German case entwined with the discourse on the country's history. An interesting discussion of this appears in the interview in Lübeck, following on from a passage cited earlier dealing with the ability of (mainly Turkish) immigrants to speak German:

A: ... It's not just Turkey. Where I live is a foreign land – there's just Turks and Russians living there, and now the majority is white Russians. They don't speak a single word of German but their great-grandfather was German, so they've all been given entry permits to Germany and then they immediately get German passports. They've never been to school, so they don't speak a single word of German, and they live here like kings. They have ... Just go to the carpark to see what kind of luxury cars they have.

W: ... They could prove they had a German shepherd dog and then Fischer gave them a visa ...

J: Fischer gives everyone a passport. And that's the problem, because the politicians, in my opinion, they live somewhere in cloud-cuckoo land and they can't see reality any more. I mean ... now you're sitting down to talk with us, now you're finding out what the people think. But if you speak to a politician he'll talk quite differently.

JW: Why are they so blinkered? [J: The politicians? ...]

W: They want to be re-elected. It's ... it's the desire for power. Whoever's had some kind of office and a large chair to sit on, he clings to it and doesn't want to give it up. Also ... also to blame is this block arrangement we have with the political parties. On the one side there's the block with the Christian parties – the CDU / CSU, with the FPD as an appendage – and then over here there's the Social Democrats with the Greens, and ...

J: Yeah, and politicians here, they immediately get a lot of hostility if they talk about foreigners. It's such a hot subject, so dangerous for the politicians, that they really don't want to touch it, and if they do then they generally run into problems because ... because it's immediately assumed that they're xenophobic, radical-right, fascist etc. [W: yeah, exactly ...] and that's not always the case. If one speaks objectively about foreigners ... you're not immediately a Nazi just for raising the topic. But a lot of Germans – a lot of those I've spoken to – think that there is a problem with immigrants, and they'd quite like to have a party here in Germany that was a little bit more to the right, that draws up laws ... [W: yeah] ... that clamps down a little harder – but without going too far to the right ... [W: Into the brown corner ...] ... exactly, without going into the brown corner, not into the brown corner. Take that Schill Party for instance, they got 20% straight off in Hamburg, and they were to the right, located a bit more to the right, but from the very beginning they distanced themselves from the brown corner ... They said 'Security is important to us, we want people to still be safe on the streets at night.' And that's what people want ...

N: In reality they were brown though!

J: Yeah but like I said, people would like to have a party which was further to the right than the CDU. But they're afraid of becoming a slave to these pied pipers, the skinheads, the brown neo-Nazis ... [N: yeah] ... And that's always a thin line of course ...

In two connected moves, politicians are treated both as contributors to the problem articulated,<sup>33</sup> and as being insufficiently willing to address the problem, out of touch with what 'the people' think. The extremeness of their tolerance is matched by the extremeness of neo-Nazi hatred. A very similar point is made by Uwe in Würzburg, backed up by Oliver: 'I think we Germans should still allow ourselves to criticise foreigners. I mean, I'm not going to punch someone in the stomach about it – that's nonsense – but that doesn't mean one has to accept everything that comes along, it can't be like that. No, and we have these two extremes. On the one hand, we've become an effeminate touchy-feely society (*Bussi-Bussi-Gesellschaft*) which always loves the offender – really loves the offender, the weak one is always right whatever he does. [...] On the other hand, because that's then fertile ground for the extreme right, there's the nationalists who then go around saying "get them all out now", and they strike out wildly. The reasonable middle is lacking in this country at the moment.'<sup>34</sup> The sense of inadequate representation on these problems is very similar to that found amongst the British, though it is assumed to be a distinctively German phenomenon.<sup>35</sup>

Another approach to maintaining a 'healthy' separation of peoples, mentioned with some regularity in the British and German discussions, is to send aid to the countries from which peoples are moving. Africa and other places associated with war and disaster are highlighted. Murda in Reading argues: 'most of the countries [immigrants come from] have actually had like a war or something ... Some of the African countries where they've had war, even in Iraq where they've had a war ... You've got to get the aid out there.' 'At the end of the day,' he says later, 'everyone just wants a better standard of life, don't they ... [David: Everyone wants that, yeah.] So if you could get that in the places where they live in the first place, they probably wouldn't need to move,' and 'then you won't have a lot of the outsider problems.' Hans in Kassel, from a less subject-oriented perspective, makes the point about

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<sup>33</sup> Shortly before the interviews, then foreign minister Joschka Fischer had accepted responsibility for German embassies being over-enthusiastic in the issuing of tourist visas

<sup>34</sup> The day before this interview, Chancellor Schröder had called upon Germans to acknowledge the lessons of the twentieth century in a speech commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp Buchenwald. Cf. the Methodological Appendix.

<sup>35</sup> Amongst the Czechs, former president Václav Havel receives some criticism from the Ostrava group for not telling Cubans and Vietnamese residents to 'go home' at the end of the socialist period and for accepting immigrants from other eastern-European countries which did adopt this policy. But the bulk of complaints are framed economically and refer to eastern-European workers. When at one point Josef, having built up a head of steam talking about lazy Ukrainians, tries to extend the discussion to 'the Indians and Pakistanis', Marek is dubious: 'But how many of them are there really?'

the importance of sending aid: ‘perhaps not so much for now but for the future. Because the more you relieve economic dependency in the Third World, the less danger of war there is. The tension’s reduced.’

All such arguments face the objection (in Kassel supplied by Peter) that such aid is often so diluted by corruption that there is little point in sending it. Murda even makes the point against himself: ‘I was talking to somebody once, right, and they were talking about the Red Cross, right, and they said “If you started off with a million pounds here, right, just as an example, and by the time it gets to somebody like Mother Theresa in India there’s probably about fifty quid left!”’ Another counter-argument is to point out that sending money abroad means less money for people at home. ‘Charity begins at home,’ says Andy at Swansea. ‘I mean, there’s people starving and freezing in the winter over here, I think the money should go to them rather than to people coming in.’ Lee agrees: ‘I mean, we complain how our country is in the state that we’re in and then we’re letting more people in and giving them money all the time. When, as you said, charity starts at home. I mean, you should be looking to sort your own country out first.’ A consensus amongst the Czech groups is that the country’s government is already too generous in sending overseas aid. This ties in with the ‘small-state’ narrative: Josef at Ostrava, with Zdeněk’s agreement, suggests: ‘we’re a small state, but we’ve got a big heart, and we give more than we get. We had the floods here a few years ago, massive floods, the floods of the century, the square was covered and there was big damage, but we always receive less than we give.’

In sum, the problems of *Relations between Peoples* are generally assumed to be best avoided by minimising relations with the relevant contrasts rather than by working to improve these relations. Forcibly limiting immigration is considered one option, though dependent on politicians overcoming their reluctance to act; discouraging migration and war by means of overseas aid is another option considered, though always liable to be discredited as a waste of resources. Both of these are treated as policies for the national government – as will be seen further in the next chapter, the EU is rarely mentioned as a possible means of collective action. The possibility of resolving problems by means of a conciliatory approach towards opponents tends to be rejected, not least because these opponents are assumed to be essentially unconciliatory themselves.

## Overview

Having made a large number of observations over the course of this chapter, we can summarise them briefly in the following table:

<b>A Political Project</b>	<i>Economics</i>	<i>Society &amp; the Law</i>	<i>Relations between Peoples</i>
<i>Explanatory Motifs</i>	Sometimes quite lacking.  Alternatively very broad, stretching beyond the home environment – global price & wage inequality, the ‘cheaper East’, dependence on economic conditions elsewhere (esp. amongst Czechs).	Almost exclusively local – mentalities and conduct of local actors, institutional constraints, declining discipline.  Some links to other two domains – impact of economic changes, behavioural tendencies of immigrants.	Generally broad, stretching beyond the home environment – global inequality of power and resources; aggressive / irrational impulses of non-western peoples.
<i>Possibilities for Action</i>	Little. Inevitability, global price / wage inequalities conclusive, companies will go wherever costs are cheaper, ‘too late’ to undo critical decisions, hard to protest because everything entwined; debt; dependence on other economies, corruption (both esp. for Czechs). Individuals may be able to adapt.	Reasonable. Education at a young age, stronger enforcement of the rules, through the law or social ostracisation; wait for a new generation (Czechs).	Limited. Conflict by and large inevitable, and ‘our’ politicians unwilling to take a stand. Can reduce exposure, e.g. with immigration controls and overseas aid; can use force where necessary (esp. British).

### *Chapter Summary*

Juxtaposing our findings like this, the differences across domains become clear. One sees that one domain of problems – *Economics* – is characterised by a combination, on the one hand, of general uncertainty about how to account for the emergence of problems, and on the other hand, when explanations are supplied, by the construction of a wide spatial context in which the determining factors lie far away from the home environment in which the problems are experienced. To simplify just a little, it tends to be suggested either that problems arise for reasons that are mysterious, such as the strange tendency of prices to rise faster than earnings, or that they arise due to developments on the other side of the world, such as the cheap cost of labour in ‘the East’. Although the transnational dimension is of potential significance for a European polity, neither perspective in its current form lends much credibility to a political project designed to tackle such problems, since neither

perspective invites a clear sense of what could be done and by whom. It is little surprise then that one finds considerable scepticism about the possibilities for action in this domain. The pattern is rather the reverse, however, as regards *Society and the Law*. Here one does find a fairly clear set of explanatory motifs, and rather than invoking reference-points which are far removed these tend to be mainly local. Problems arise due to factors close to home. This more readily available set of explanatory resources, and the tendency to evoke a narrower spatial context, seems rather more conducive to the credibility of a political project, and indeed one does find a reasonably positive set of assumptions about what can be achieved to alleviate these problems. The most commonly heard proposals (education and stronger enforcement of the rules) do not point in any obvious way towards a European polity, though would be compatible with one were certain powers of decision-making suitably decentralised.

The third domain of problems – *Relations between Peoples* – is notable again for the wide spatial context in which the problems in question are seen to be unfolding, and for ambivalence about the extent to which they can be addressed. The tendency to assume that problems experienced at a local level also play out on a wide scale is likely to be a contributing element in the scepticism here regarding the possibilities for organised address, in that it implies that such problems are always likely to cut across polity boundaries. They are neither purely local and therefore susceptible to local address, nor are they purely distant and therefore susceptible to a policy of disengagement and withdrawal. However, here there is also a distinctive factor involved. As seen both in this chapter and the last, a strong link is made between the problems articulated and the nature of the opponents, with a marked tendency not only to assume that differences between peoples are real and essential, but that dialogue is unfeasible and that conflict most likely is unavoidable. This friend-enemy dynamic is not only an assertion of intolerance, as suggested earlier, but also of the impossibility of tackling problems of inter-group conflict. The opponents, it is assumed, cannot be engaged with so as to overcome such problems. They are not included in the solution to the problem; rather, they are pretty much equated with the problem itself, and the solution depends on their being absented from the home environment. This rather clearly undermines the prospects for a democratic political project in this domain, whether centred on the national or the European level.

Both when raising doubts about the possibility of organised action, and when affirming its feasibility, it is principally action by *governmental* means which participants invoke as the reference-point. As we have seen, interventions by the researcher to inquire

‘what can be done about such problems?’ tended to draw responses that foregrounded the role of ‘politicians’, of ‘the government’, or of ‘the State’, whether to demand further action be taken, to give credit (occasionally) for certain initiatives, to express concern at a failure to act or the breaking of ‘promises’, or even just to write off officials as ‘puppets’. It is the government, it tends to be assumed, which is the actor of greatest relevance to the remedy of common problems, even if much ambivalence about its prospects is conveyed. Where the authority of the government is judged weak, we have seen that *private* and *societal* means of action may be proposed, whether it be adaptation by individuals to the market economy, or an attempt to get others to boycott certain goods. But these are options of last resort, and there is no mention of action through civil-society bodies such as NGOs. If the message of much contemporary political science is that politics today no longer takes place through the traditional institutional channels, and that ‘civil society’ is the principal reference-point for taking action on matters of common concern, this is a message which seems not to have been absorbed by our speakers. Perhaps in contrast to the kind of assumptions to be found in lay discourse in North America,<sup>36</sup> amongst these European groups it is the government and the state which is to the fore.

While this suggests that the principle of popular sovereignty is still in some sense taken for granted – governments, as the things one votes for, are treated as the most relevant actors to the problems which should be addressed – the unevenness with which faith is expressed in their capacity to tackle these problems is undoubtedly a matter for concern. While the principle of popular sovereignty is always deeply complex to institutionalise, and perhaps especially in the pluralist context of contemporary Europe, its vitality depends in the last instance on a certain strength of expectation that common problems are susceptible to address. As we have seen, for political agency generally, such expectation persists but within a limited set of parameters. It is stronger for some policy-areas than others, and one cannot rule out that it may be stronger elsewhere on the European continent than in the places of interview,<sup>37</sup> but some need for its revival seems necessary. What has been excluded from the

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Perrin, *Citizen Speak*, in whose focus groups public/societal action assumes a more prominent position. In Gamson’s study, societal or ‘citizen’ action is also to the fore, though with some variation according to issue-area. See Gamson, *Talking Politics*, chapter 4.

<sup>37</sup> In the qualitative study by OPTEM, Britain, Germany and the Czech Republic are noted to be amongst those EU countries where at the time of interview there was a high ‘general level of pessimism’ concerning the years ahead. (OPTEM, ‘The European Citizens and the Future of Europe’, p.9.) One might infer that these are therefore also the ‘hard cases’ more specifically as regards faith in the possibilities for collective agency. While this is conceivable, one does need to be sceptical about arguments which put a strong emphasis on national boundaries as containers of discursive practice: our intuition is that the patterns we have noted in our interviews are likely to have wider extension.

analysis so far is how the EU as such fits into the picture described, how it relates to the array of discursive practices that have been traced. It is to this, and to the implications for a political bond in Europe, which we turn in the following chapter.



# Chapter 6

## A Political Bond in Europe

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Having proposed a political bond as an appropriate perspective from which to approach the question of the common in the context of contemporary Europe, the strategy has been to step back from the EU as such so as to explore the broader web of meanings into which it is set. This has meant avoiding an approach which treats acontextual ‘attitudes to Brussels’ or ‘feelings of European identity’ as the key ideational fact; the move has rather been to ‘decentre’ the EU by taking discussion of political problems as the starting point. Accordingly, we have explored in depth the kinds of problem which get talked about, the acts of positioning which they inspire, and the assumptions made about the worth of trying to tackle them. We have observed a large number of problems regularly articulated in discussion, amounting to a substantive core of concerns around which a political bond might develop. While inferring therefore that the notion of a ‘political common’ finds some immediate validation in existing patterns of discursive practice, we have also noted how certain patterns of talk diverge from our ideal conceptualisations of the ‘political subjects, their opponents and counterparts’ and a ‘political project’ of organised address. Hence our concepts, of necessity, have started to acquire a more diagnostic function.

This chapter connects these considerations back to the question of a European polity. The first section examines how and when ‘Europe’ and the EU are invoked in discussion. We shall observe that these tend to become entwined with the discursive patterns which are now familiar, as the motifs characteristic of political discussion more generally come to be applied to this specific phenomenon. Discussion of the EU, as the historical manifestation of a European polity, attracts ways of speaking which, while in some respects consistent with the ideal of a political bond, in others serve rather to undermine it. The second section, having noted the important divergences in this respect, looks more closely at what would need to be different in discursive terms if a political bond supportive of a European polity were to have better resonance. As a kind of routinised behaviour, discursive practices are likely to be enduring but by no means impervious to change, and it may be that there are

existing features which can facilitate such change – ‘platforms to build on’, as it were. In considering these questions, we shall adopt a more explicitly normative, critical mode of argumentation towards the empirical material. The third section turns to the question of how this change might be effected. It discusses the need for actors who can lead such a process – ‘discursive architects’ as they might be called, whether they be parties, social movements, media organisations, or others – whose role would be to make available new ways of talking politics which could act as resources for discursive practice. Also considered is the role of institutional structures, a question which invites discussion of the kind of institutional regime towards which our exploration of the political bond points.

### Europe and the EU in discussion

The appropriateness of the move to decentre the EU in the design of this research seems confirmed by the fact that explicit mentions of ‘Europe’ or the European Union are not especially common in the discussions. In each of them these did appear spontaneously at some point, and were prompted by interventions from the researcher towards the end, but in total such references could be associated with – as a very approximate estimate – no more than about 10-15% of the interview material. As noted in the preceding chapters, in two problem domains at least there was frequent evocation of a transnational context, but references to Europe as such represented only one of various ways in which this could be done.

For the purposes of analysis a distinction can be made between two kinds of reference to the European. The first involves the direct expression of opinions concerning the EU – its institutions, and the very idea of the Union – separate from the context of concrete political problems. These are questions of the institutional set-up and of the legitimacy of the polity. An emblematic example of one would be the complaint made by Andy in Swansea about the money which is wasted (‘£20 million or something’) every time the European Parliament moves between Brussels and Strasbourg. Such references will not be the focus here. One reason is that many such ‘out-of-context’ references relate to rather contingent, second-order phenomena – a particular institutional configuration which might easily be changed (e.g. by a decision to house the European Parliament solely in Brussels) – rather than to the political significance of the Union as an arena and means for the address of common problems. They are overly specific to the present arrangement of the EU. A second

reason, just as significant, is that it was rather rare for participants to express opinions of this decontextualised, non-policy-related kind. While for academic scholars questions of institutional structures, the mechanisms of integration and the ‘finality’ of the integration process will inevitably and properly be of considerable salience, it seems natural that those without a professional interest in the subject are more inclined to work outwards from problems which are of a more immediate concern to them, and to invoke ‘Europe’ or the EU only where they are assumed to have a direct bearing on these. The political scientist’s interest in the institutional regime, and the political philosopher’s interest in the legitimacy of the polity, should not be projected into the source material. Insofar as comments like Andy’s did appear, or insofar as there were comments like that of Zdeněk in Liberec who noted that after forty years of rule by ‘the Russians’ he did not want to be ‘dictated to by Brussels’ (a challenge to the very idea of the Union), these tended to be in response to the researcher’s direct questioning towards the end of the interview, when a concerted effort was being made to move Europe-related issues to the centre of the discussion. Responses to direct questioning are what survey data provide, and do not need to be documented in detail in a study such as this.<sup>1</sup> Of interest here is rather the most common ways in which ‘Europe’ and the EU were invoked spontaneously in the course of discussion.

We shall therefore focus instead on a second type of reference to the European, whereby ‘Europe’ and the EU are woven naturally into the discussion of specific problems facing ‘people like us’. This means, in addition to evaluating the implications of the assumptions and acts of positioning considered in the preceding chapters, looking at how ‘Europe’ and the EU are invoked directly as reference-points with which to understand the problems of the political common – both their origins and their possible resolution. In this approach, which follows from the problem-oriented focus of the political bond, it is the context of invocation which is crucial: not ‘attitudes’ to the EU in some general sense, but the political significance which is ascribed. Of course, the EU and its current policies constitute only one possible version of a European polity, and alterations to these policies would probably lead ultimately to it being treated differently in lay discussion. But studying how the ‘current version’ is talked about in substantive terms can tell us much about how the discursive patterns explored in the previous chapters come to be applied to a European polity, and the implications of this when it happens. It provides further indication of how far a

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. OPTEM, ‘The European Citizens and the Future of Europe’, which contains substantial sections on knowledge levels about the EU institutions and how they work, as well as attitudes towards them. Also, for an analysis of such material and his own highly focused group interviews, see Bruter, *Citizens of Europe?*.

political bond functions as a representational term and how far it is an ideal which would require changes in discursive practice to be realised. How the EU is introduced into discussion differs according to the three domains we have outlined, and so we consider these in turn, before returning to the fourth, less clearly delineated set of problems to do with *Quality of Life*.

It will have been anticipated from the analysis in the preceding chapters that in one domain of problems – *Society and the Law* – the significance ascribed to the EU is very minor. These are problems which are given considerable prominence across the groups, and they represent some of the most important problems that ‘people like us’ are liable to face. There is a clear set of opponents against which the subjects are demarcated – the persistent, serious rule-breakers – and a clear sense of injustice and of the need for action to be taken. But it is the domestic arena which is the focus of attention. Comparisons are almost never made with experiences in other countries, and the relevant comparisons are assumed to be cross-temporal (declining standards, declining discipline etc.) rather than cross-spatial. Problems tend to be explained in quite local terms, with little reference to outside factors, and although one sees relatively positive assumptions concerning the worth of organised, collective address, these tend to ascribe roles primarily to the national government and to fellow citizens. While it is sometimes suggested that a minority of offenders may be unresponsive either to further education or to discipline – that they are simply ‘like that’, an essentialising, enemy-type positioning – there is nonetheless a widespread sense that many can be purposefully engaged with, suggesting positioning which is more of the adversary-type. For the *Society and the Law* domain, the concept of the political bond seems to fit fairly well. Insofar as such a bond is constructed in the discussions it is not one that is conducive specifically to a European polity, since the transnational context is little mentioned, but nor would it be incompatible with such a polity, since the possibility that certain policy-areas be in the hands of local authority is recognised in most democratic polities, and is expressed by the EU’s principle of subsidiarity. The discursive practice associated with this domain of problems could be *accommodated* in a European polity, though with implications for the institutional regime as will be discussed later.

In discussion of *Economics* (especially) and *Relations between Peoples* (to some degree), ‘Europe’ and the EU are invoked rather more. That a connection is made on both is important: it reaffirms the danger of reducing the EU to a purely economic, cultural or geopolitical phenomenon, a tendency which one finds in some of the EU-related literature

(see Chapter 2). The significance of the EU in both domains is no doubt linked to the fact that both are described in transnational terms. Opponents of the political subjects are assumed to have a presence both inside and outside the country, comparisons are frequently made with experiences in other countries, and explanatory motifs include factors extending well beyond the local environment. In this sense there would seem to be some of the ideational ‘raw materials’ in place for a political bond consistent with a European polity. But for both domains one finds assumptions and acts of positioning which counter this.

For *Economics*, the patterns of collective positioning noted in Chapter 4, including the evocation of counterparts in certain other European countries but restricted along an east-west axis, and the construction of opponents as adversaries rather than enemies, are replicated in those passages where discussion is connected directly to the EU. True to the idea that, in this domain, opponents are not irrationalised and calls are not made for them to be prevented from living side by side with the ‘people like us’, calls for current eastern-European member-states to be expelled from the Union are not heard in these interviews. Rather one hears calls for ‘fairer treatment’ such that ‘people like us’ (the contributors, the taxpayers) are not called upon to subsidise ‘them’ to the degree currently expected, or such that when they come ‘over here’ to work they have to pay the same contributions as local workers would and work for similar wages. Where opposition to EU enlargement to the East is expressed, it often takes the form of a criticism of the timing rather than of the act itself. Peter in Kassel argues that ‘all these eastern-bloc countries haven’t developed far enough to fit in with us. I think it’s all too early. It should have been perhaps in ten years or so ... and above all not this whole mass at once.’ Dieter confirms: ‘That’s the problem, yeah. The way it’s being done, that’s the mistake. You’re not necessarily against having the borders removed, letting everyone move around more, that’s certainly a good thing. But I think there should have been more thought given to the mechanisms, and perhaps to the consequences too.’ Importantly, as should be clear, in this domain and in contrast to *Relations between Peoples*, the differences between the ‘people like us’ and the opponents are generally not essentialised. Those who ‘do not contribute’ could in principle be encouraged to contribute more – to ‘pay their bit’ – or, if they unable to do this, to take less; the positioning is agonistic rather than antagonistic.

This may be a rather precarious condition nonetheless, and the emergence of an antagonistic dynamic cannot be ruled out. While there is no essentialising of the irrationality of the opponents, occasionally one observes something close to the essentialising of their economic situation, for instance the poverty of eastern Europeans (though not to the ‘dollar-

a-day' extent of those in the 'Far East'), and an essentialising of their willingness or unwillingness to contribute. Were they thus positioned as being *irredeemably* poor or *irredeemably* unwilling to contribute, their legitimacy as opponents might well be questioned. This is by no means the only perspective – references are quite often made to countries which used to be poor but which have got richer, such as Ireland, Spain or Portugal – but it is one which does arise. Noticeably, one sees little enthusiasm expressed at the prospect of further enlargement of the Union eastwards, where economic conditions are held to be quite different. 'The problem that I see with Turkey joining the EU,' says Wolfgang in Lübeck, 'is that we, that Germany is already the biggest net contributor, and we'll have to pay even more in afterwards, and we'll get none of that back for ourselves. And again that's something which is going to hit us as tax-payers. It means we'll have even less money in our pockets.' Ali comments that 'one Turkish person brings five Turkish people with him,' and that 'if more countries come into the EU then we can call it a day here.' As we saw in Chapter 4, a zero-sum relationship seems to be posited between the 'industrialised countries' of western Europe and the poorer countries of eastern Europe, and the idea of admitting more adversaries into the community is clearly not welcomed.

Amongst the Czech groups, this positioning towards countries further to the east as potential EU members is replicated. Josef in Ostrava worries that 'the biggest problem for us is going to be if Ukraine comes into the euro [sic], all of those countries – Belarus, Russia, Uzbekistan, the Tartars, whatever ... we're going to be between them and the West, they'll be crossing over us, they'll get to us first, so there'll be problems here.' One also finds awareness that those to the west are positioning the Czechs as economically unwelcome within the EU. In an intervention supported by Václav and Zdeněk, Onřej responds to a question about the economic consequences of enlarging the EU: 'Britain, France and Germany are all countries which are starting to ask themselves why they should have to fund the poor countries if those countries contribute hardly anything. Suddenly the Germans are discovering they've got the same problems with work, with the labour market, they're all closing in on themselves so that we don't go and work there, even though each of us knows it wouldn't be a problem if they opened up. There'd be maybe a thousand people more there but it's small numbers, those who want to work abroad went abroad a long time ago. And those who can't are not going to go even if they give us work there, because of family reasons and language problems, those kinds of problem.' There is thus a certain reciprocity about the act of positioning. While it would certainly be too strong to say that the opponents are positioned as enemies – they are not assumed to pose an existential threat, rather they are

a 'drain on the resources' – it is clear that their acceptance as members of the political community is contested and that the agonistic rather than antagonistic nature of the dynamic can hardly be taken for granted.

Chapter 5 highlighted the widespread assumption that problems of *Economics* are beyond the control of political authority, and the evident scepticism therefore concerning the possibility of a political project in this domain. The important point to note here is that the widely-made assumption that national governments have little capacity to remedy economic problems leads not to the conclusion that a European polity might have greater capacity, but to the transferral of the same assumption from the national to the European level. The EU is very rarely mentioned in these interviews as a means of addressing economic problems which cannot be addressed by a national government. Amongst the Czech groups, the EU is occasionally given some credit for having helped to improve Czech infrastructure: Román in Plzeň notes judiciously, to the agreement of his co-participants: 'it can be said that in the time we've been in the EU the situation's improved.' Míra confirms: 'the Union's contributed to the construction of every bridge here, large and small.' It remains doubtful however whether such EU action is seen as a genuine expression of agency, a meaningful response to a call for organised action, or some kind of *deus ex machina* whose mysterious arrival on the scene brings a welcome change in fortunes. Generally, with most economic problems linked in discussion to global forces assumed to be scarcely amenable to control, little positive role is accorded to a European polity.

Indeed, across all groups, various current policies of the EU are often heavily entwined in discussion with some of the key problems in this domain, such that the Union is treated either as an expression or as an exacerbation of them. This can be seen in many instances. Discussion of the introduction of the euro, for example, often exhibits the motif of the little / normal people being taken advantage of by the rich or the financial corporations. 'The euro helps firms,' says Zdeněk at Ostrava, since it saves them the costs of the exchange rate, 'but the euro doesn't help normal people.' 'For us it'll all be one and the same,' says Josef, 'we're the small guys, we're really small ... We'll pay to swap our taxi-meters, we'll have new digital ones with euros on them rather than crowns, but that'll be it.' At Norwich, one finds the possible sacrifice of the pound for the euro discussed as another example of that which rightfully belongs to 'us' being sold off by the people at the top. British Telecom, the railways, the pound ... 'it belongs to the people of the country', says Leyton to general agreement, and now it is being given away 'lock, stock and barrel'. What would the people who died for the country in World War Two think if they could see this happening?, ask

Leyton and Gavin. Who benefits? ‘Business people, rich people,’ says Barry, widening the point: ‘It doesn’t matter who’s in, Labour or Conservative, the rich have always benefited. You take your Labour politicians who speak socialism, they’ve all got two houses. Us in the middle there, who do our best ... [L: Got a job keeping one house, haven’t you ...] We’ll argue about it passionately, they will as well, they’ll stand there, but basically they’ll all go home to big houses.’ The motif of inevitability is widespread, despite the indignation. The Ostrava group talk of the euro as a ‘catastrophe’, but unavoidable nonetheless. The Plzeň group agree that the euro is coming, ‘the only question is when’ says Petr – with the caveat that the EU may break up before then. At Swansea, Lee reports: ‘I picked a guy up at the station, took him to Three Crosses, big massive house at Three Crosses. He works for the government and he’s working on the euro at the moment, and he has said that we will definitely be in the euro. Definitely be in the euro within five years, without a shadow of a doubt. He said, if it goes to a referendum, if they say no, we *will* be going into the euro, everything will be fixed. “We will be in the euro”, he said, “I’m working on it now.”’ Thus one of the ‘big people’ (with a big house) tells one of the ‘little people’ what is going to happen. The anecdote is convincing to Andy, who has already expressed his concerns about the adoption of the euro.

Likewise, the EU is frequently absorbed into discussion of the problem of price and wage inequalities. As was seen in Chapter 5, when Barry in Norwich refers back to the decline of British industry in the 1970s he cites the economics of the European Community as part of the problem: ‘We couldn’t compete with their coal price. Common Market ... Use our own coal, use our own steel, eat our own fish, our own farming produce first, then you export what’s left. You might still have a bit of a coal industry ... If we just supplied ourselves, rather than worrying about exporting first ... If every country did look after themselves first ...’. There is no indication that the EU might be a way of controlling wider economic processes. ‘This country should go back to its old morals and produce more stuff for itself,’ suggests Lee in Swansea. In a passage from the Lübeck discussion, a specific grievance with discrepancies created by the EU is linked together with a more general sense of powerlessness before economic forces assumed to be global:

J: All these Polish workers, the manual labourers – tilers, bricklayers, for example – they work here in such favourable conditions because they don’t have to contribute social-security taxes [W: Right ...] like a German labourer has to. A German labourer is checked to make sure he makes all his contributions. And a Polish worker comes over and says ‘yeah, I’ll do that,’ but no-one bothers about him so long as he’s not caught, so long as no-one catches him doing black labour, so he can

afford to offer attractive prices. He can work as a bricklayer, a tiler, he's flexible. And naturally unemployment isn't going to get better like that, it's going to get worse.

W: I find it really, really bad, if that ... what the EU Directive says, concerning the free movement of services, if that goes through, then Polish and Czech employees, or from Lithuania too ... If they're allowed to work with us here under their own conditions then no small entrepreneur's going to be able to survive here. The German master-bricklayer, or the bricklayer, or the tiler who works for himself, he has to pay his taxes, his contributions to the professional association, he has to contribute his share to employees' health insurance, pension insurance etc., and none of them have that so they can set more attractive prices. And so that also disturbs our economy.

JW: Is there any solution to this kind of problem ... can one do anything about it?

J: Well, the world is heading ever more towards globalisation, and globalisation is ... in the future an equalisation between poor countries and rich countries ... And this process won't be complete within the next few years, it'll be very, very slow, it'll last a really long time, until Uzbekistan has the same standard of living as we do, for example, as the Federal Republic of Germany. And then sometime far off in the distant future – fiction really – this problem will naturally be solved. But that'll definitely take generations.

N: The standards are closing towards each other ... Not everyone is going to get such a high standard as here ...

W: It'll go down here and go up for the others, that's clear.

J: You can see that already in the EU. That some countries profit from it and other countries ... [W: ... suffer from it ...] suffer from it.

JW: Which ones profit, for example?

J: The ones who profit are the poorer countries with the low GNP. And the industrial countries, they basically have to step down from their level, surrender their achievements. To put it simply.

JW: What do you expect of the government in this context? [J: Difficult ...] What can it do?

W: Very, very difficult ... [N: ... to find solutions ...]

J: Many say we should go back, we should have the Deutschmark instead of the euro, the borders must be ... the walls must be erected again, then everything will be better again. But whether that's the solution, I'd strongly doubt it. [N: I don't think so either.]

W: This process is no longer reversible.

Globalisation, understood as the levelling out of global wealth inequalities, is presented as something inevitable or 'too late to stop'. Attempts to put barriers in its way are likely to be in vain, for it is an irreversible process that must be played out over generations. The implicit metaphor seems to be that of the flood, which ends only when the waters find their level and the unevenness dissipates. Changes associated with the EU, such as the opening of borders and the introduction of the euro, are spoken of merely as symptoms of this broader

economic globalisation which produces problems for ‘people like us’.<sup>2</sup> Note ‘you can see that already in the EU’ – implying that the EU is the first or the most immediate expression of globalisation. The euro comes across as neither positive nor negative, neither a remedy nor a mistake; it is the extension of a pattern. In this and other groups, participants do raise complaints about the *manner* in which the euro was introduced – ‘no-one asked us, there should have been a referendum,’ says Ali from the Lübeck group; ‘it was simply fixed by politicians’ says Andreas in Erfurt – but this is not matched by a sense that the outcome might have been different.

One extended passage from the Würzburg discussion is useful for illustrating many of these themes coming together. It begins with Oliver lamenting the movement of companies from Germany to eastern Europe:

O: The population is a little sour, to pick up the example of Siemens-VDO<sup>3</sup> again. Germany pays a great deal into the EU pot, a contributing country for new accession candidates like the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic says to Siemens, ‘if you set up a company here, then for the first year we’ll pay the people ourselves. They’ll work for you for free.’ Siemens says ‘oh, lovely, we can do that.’ But in principle it’s also a boomerang effect for Germany. We pay for the construction of the East and in return they entice the companies away. And here, the people who actually pay for that ... [R: Exactly], they’re punished even higher than.

R: ... Cutting off the branch you’re sitting on ... [...] Key word is larger internal market, that’s why these countries – it wasn’t so long ago – were brought into the EU. The door was opened by us, to encourage development, and now there’s this boomerang effect. The idea was to build up the markets there – that was the point of the thing I think, the enlargement of the EU – Poland, Czech Republic, Slovenia etc., to build up new markets there, so that the people there can also, how should I say, boost the economy here, so they can buy the products which are produced here. It was already noted even then – I can remember – in the political discussion that things would turn out as they have now, with this migration to the East. It was known even then, when all this was opened up. It was done anyway, and now ... you asked earlier what can be done about it, it sounds very hard and sad when I say it, but actually nothing. ... It has its own dynamic, the door has been opened and now it’s open! You can’t close it any more. So I ... the proposals that we could possibly make, they’re of a theoretical nature, probably nothing will happen. Because the EU will carry on existing in its current form, the contributions and the subsidies will also be paid to the eastern countries just as up till now ... I don’t believe that anything will somehow be dismantled there ... and the borders are open ...

O: We hope of course, in the German case, if we’ve been paying in for years ... have been net contributors for Spain for example, which meanwhile has growth figures much bigger than Germany, we’re the tail-light when it comes to growth ... We hope naturally that at some point there’ll be a ‘return on investment’ so that it goes the other way too a bit, so that the Spanish also give up a bit of the cake. That’s the hope. And everyone hopes of course that that works out, and that when they lose the Spanish ... and the smaller states, that when they lose they don’t just say ‘goodbye, we’re leaving the EU’.

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<sup>2</sup> During the recruitment process in Lübeck, a driver who was unable to participate in the discussion spent a couple of minutes outlining certain economic problems to me: amongst these, he too was quick to emphasise the detrimental effect of the EU’s policy of open borders to Poland on local levels of employment in the city.

<sup>3</sup> A supplier of electronics for the car industry. Its plant in Würzburg was due to be closed at the end of 2007 and relocated to Ostrava (Czech Republic), causing significant job losses.

- R: But that's ... if I think back to the past, whenever it was a question of the payment of contributions, there was always a great deal of argy-bargy. They always dug in hard. That's also a very difficult development, that one forces other countries to pay more ... Lots of protest and outcry, and opposition ... Great Britain is a good example there isn't it. It's famously notorious for that.
- O: Great Britain has kept itself out, out of the EU ... The Germans and French at the moment are paying not just for unification – the Germans for unification – but also for abroad, for neighbouring EU countries. And that puts a brake on growth of course. ... The British have simply decided against that and have said 'we're not going to be a part of this crap, we see only negative growth there, we're keeping out.' Same with Switzerland.
- R: Yeah but Britain ... Britain *is* a member of the EU. [O: They're in politically but ...] Britain isn't part of the currency union ... [O: They have their pound ...] But they're a member nonetheless, of the economic union? [O: Yeah, they're cunning ...] The Irish have the euro, don't they? And they've had a strong economic boom as a result, from what I can gather. [O: They're takers too ...] Yeah, sure, they've profited a lot from it, from these subsidies you mean ...? [O: Exactly] The Irish have ... that was structurally a pretty weak country. [O: A small country too ... so the growth is naturally greater.] Anyway from what I've heard, the prices have really gone up too. I recently drove a businessman who spends most of his time in Ireland and he said that the prices are now almost higher than in Germany. In Dublin, the hotels etc, the gastronomy, it's all to do with the EU ...
- O: Likewise in Greece the prices have gone up ... massively ... [R: ... Mmmm, mmmm ...] Another disadvantage for ...
- R: Also in the south-European countries ... Italy's become downright expensive, Spain has gone up a lot ... It's all a consequence of the EU. But I mean ... [O: There are winners and losers ...] Yeah, that's it ...
- JW: Who are the losers? Who suffers the most from it, would you say?
- O: The population, they're losers. The people who have to pay more for something. For example for a car. A Greek person must now pay more for something like a car. A Greek person, because of the euro, now has to put down more money than before. A winner would perhaps be a guest-worker – someone who can easily go to another EU country, can move there, can start work there immediately, he's a winner. Losers are perhaps the people in the countryside who aren't mobile ...
- R: Yeah, and when it comes to countries, I'd say at the moment that *we* are the losers.
- U: Well we always were in the EU. It was always Germany ... [O: ... yeah ...] I mean, the Spanish were the great winners ... [R: Sure, but ...], they're the ones who've been subsidised the most ...
- R: But at least earlier we had lower unemployment, we had a good standard of living ... And the social-security system functioned properly, it was all the best, so one happily paid higher contributions and put up with being the largest contributor, but now, as far as the substance goes, nothing functions like that any more, it's all different ...
- O: Losers, for example, are people like us. States like Bavaria start to cut their budget. The local authorities receive less, like Würzburg for example. What do the local authorities do? They raise the costs, the fees in other words. Each one of us, in the last ten years, has 50% higher additional expenses, like rent and rubbish collection for example, right? Everything goes up, and the local authorities want to draw in the money again. Each one of us in the last ten years has considerably less money in our pockets. We earn six or seven euros or whatever like before, on average, but the consumption ... the household has really suffered in Germany [R: Mmmm, I'd definitely call us losers ...] Yes, we're losers. The entrepreneurs who are flexible and who go abroad, they're winners; the little man in Germany at least is a loser, because he has considerably less money. We're not able to go out to the pub each week and have a beer and eat good food, that's simply no longer an option. We have considerably less money in our pockets.

Note the rather pessimistic assumptions here concerning the possibilities for dealing with economic problems in an organised fashion. Rainer's lengthy intervention towards the beginning of the extract, concerning the creation of the single market, displays many of the motifs that were identified in Chapter 5 being applied to the EU specifically. A sense of inevitability comes though clearly. The critical decisions surrounding the single market were taken in the past, and the move to extend EU membership to countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia was made despite informed political discussion of the fact that it would lead to the movement of companies and jobs eastwards. 'It was already known about, but it was done anyway.' Now that the process is in motion it has its own dynamic, the borders have been opened and they can no longer be closed. Concrete proposals about how to tackle such problems could only be 'of a theoretical nature,' since it is unlikely that anything will change.

One sees also the motif of the political subjects as contributors being applied in the EU context, with discussion of the EU's finances prompting the 'we' to be constructed in national terms ('the population', 'Germany' as a 'contributing country') and regional terms (Bavaria). The number of different ways found to convey the idea that 'we' are the ones on whom the burden to contribute falls is indicative of a strong sense of injustice here: not only do 'we' pay, but 'we' lose our jobs too.<sup>4</sup> The adversaries – the 'takers' – are also constructed along national lines as 'the smaller states', 'eastern countries' or (like the Czech Republic) 'the new accession countries'. These are all described as unitary actors rather than as environments. That they are assumed to be in competition with one another is clear – there is the sense that Germany is losing out to its rivals, as indicated by the notion that she is the 'tail-light' amongst the European economies (the same term is also used in the Kassel discussion). Though there is no call for such countries to be expelled from the Union, there is clearly – from Oliver's side at least – little trust towards them, since it is supposed that should these countries cease to profit from the Union they might simply decide to leave it.

Mixed in amongst this however is a discursive pattern more conducive to a political bond. As was noted in Chapter 4, when the subjects are formulated not as those who contribute but as the 'little people' opposed by the economically powerful, a tendency to draw comparisons and to evoke 'people like us' elsewhere is considerably more evident. One sees here the discussion taking a turn of this kind as it moves away from the problem of

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<sup>4</sup> One can also speculate, from a more psychological perspective, that a certain satisfaction is found in emphasising how narrow is the circle of 'we contributors' who bear the burden and who can thereby claim the moral high ground.

EU finances, with comparisons then drawn with certain other European countries regarding economic conditions – prices in particular, due to the introduction of the euro. When this happens, other Europeans are portrayed not so much as competitors but as counterparts facing the same challenges. This sense of shared predicament seems evident in the reference to the Greek person who now has to pay more in order to own a car. This fits well with the positioning of the political subjects in this section as ‘the little man’, who is being squeezed by rising costs and who ends up with less money in his pocket as a result. Here, the idea of a political bond is considerably more plausible than when the positioning is such that the adversaries are national competitors.

When discussion turns to problems to do with *Relations between Peoples*, one finds further reference to ‘Europe’ and the EU, though with less frequency than in the domain of *Economics*. As we have seen, questions of conflict and the threat of conflict are generally not conceived as domestic to the majority-peoples of ‘the West’, as these are constructed in discussion. Relations between western peoples are generally assumed to be peaceful: whatever their differences in ‘national character’, war between them is unlikely. As we heard Rainer in Würzburg put it, ‘the only conflicts which are left are far away from us, and here in Central Europe, in Europe, in the EU area we have a very peaceful shared existence. I think that’s very important, that’s a historical step forward. Germany-Britain, the bombardment in the Second World War, this hard enmity is gone, gone once and for all.’ Differences between European nationalities are minimised, and the idea that they might dangerously threaten each other is not raised. Perhaps because this assumption is made so readily, any role for the EU in coordinating harmonious relations between them – one of its classic justifications, after all – is hardly mentioned at all. The organised maintenance of peace is unnecessary, it seems, for the very reason that peacefulness is taken to be characteristic. Rainer does credit the EU with having consolidated peace on the continent, but Uwe from the same group expresses his doubts: ‘I don’t think the EU helps Europeans live together – economic interests, yeah, but not the ability to live together. I mean, I don’t find a foreigner nicer or less nice just because he’s in the EU, that doesn’t matter. It’s got nothing to do with it, I’d say.’ Hardly anywhere in the discussions is a positive role as peace-maker foreseen for the EU. The most prevalent form of collective positioning in this domain, whereby other peoples of ‘the West’ are treated as ‘people like us’, seems to render such a role of little consequence.

Nor does a positive role tend to be accorded to the EU as regards those inter-people relations which are quite clearly problematised. Building up ‘Europe’ as a global power in

military and defence terms so as to manage threats emerging from outside ‘the West’ – another possible form of collective action, whether normatively desirable or not – is a proposal heard rarely in these discussions. The fact that ‘the West’ evokes something broader than the specifically European probably weakens the extent to which addressing these problems with collective action at a European level is given credence. Also, the appeal of a collective western or European foreign policy is perhaps diminished by the assumption that the opponents are held to be living *within* the home and comparable environments, not just beyond them. While an association is undoubtedly made between Arabs / Muslims and a certain part of the world (broadly, the Middle East), at the same time they are assumed to be close at hand – perhaps sitting at the next table in the pub, or walking the city streets. When the problem is constructed in this way as one of daily exposure, the relevance of foreign and defence policy is much diminished. Furthermore, within ‘the West’, the power of ‘the Americans’ tends to be emphasised. When Jürgen in Lübeck suggests that ‘the bigger Europe becomes, the more weight it has in global politics,’ the reaction from the other participants is rather muted. ‘Does Europe really have any power though?’ asks Ali. Jürgen maintains his point, though rather cautiously: ‘No, power probably not, but its weight will increase. So you can’t ... from the American perspective it gets more difficult just to ride roughshod and say “what Europe says is totally unimportant to us.” [N: Definitely.] Not *totally* unimportant, I said. As opposed to if Germany alone said “I don’t like that”.’ Amongst the Czech groups, the possibility of projecting global power is not even discussed.

The main approach advocated for tackling problems to do with *Relations between Peoples* is, as we saw, the minimisation of mutual exposure. This is something which the national government rather than the EU is assumed to have control over (though as we have seen, the effectiveness of the former is somewhat doubted on the grounds that politicians may be too soft to take action and that the will of the opponents is stronger). A European approach, either based on supranational regulation or cooperation with the ‘comparable’ countries, is generally not advocated: again, perhaps because the problems are already seen to be in the local environment, one sees little of a ‘fortress Europe’ motif. Andy in Swansea at one point asks: ‘If Brussels is supposed to be the centre of Europe and all the politicians are there, why can’t they turn round to Germany and say “well look, you *have* got to take some [immigrants]. France, you *have* got to take some ...?” You know what I mean, instead of putting them on the back of lorries and shipping them over here. Surely Brussels, if they’ve got all the power, should be saying “well *you* got to have some, *you* got to have some”, and spread it out, instead of them all coming over here.’ The sense that fairness

demands that comparable countries be treated equally may suggest that there is the basis for a European approach, but his point is not picked up by the rest of the group, and indeed Andy himself says he ‘doesn’t have much faith’ in the idea. For problems to do with *Relations between Peoples*, the plausibility of any kind of political project centred on a European polity seems weak, even setting aside the issue of normative desirability.

In fact, rather than being treated as a possible means by which to address perceived problems, the EU is again occasionally treated as a contributing factor, its policies increasing the degree to which ‘people like us’ are exposed to those positioned as opponents. The prospect of Turkish membership of the EU, when treated as a problem of *Relations between Peoples* just as when treated as an economic problem, is a notable instance of this. In Lübeck, Jürgen comments with collective approval that ‘these differences in mentality, they’re particularly serious with regard to Turkey’s entry [into the EU] ... It’ll get even more extreme. Because that’s where the Orient meets the Occident, isn’t it. Practically two different cultures. I think that’s really, really difficult.’ Ali agrees: ‘That’s going to be a really difficult topic when Turkey comes in.’ Mention is not made of Bosnia and Albania, two further countries which might one day join the EU and which in principle might be associated with war on the one hand and the presence of Muslims on the other; one suspects though that here too the EU might easily be treated as the source of the perceived problem. Existing patterns of discursive practice do little to make sense of the EU in this domain.

In Chapter 3 it was noted that there is another body of problems which appear occasionally in these discussions, related to topics such as the environment, hygiene and the quality of services, which can be loosely summarised under the heading *Quality of Life*. These problems, it was argued, once articulated tend to be put to one side, with their importance questioned or with attention diverted towards other problématiques. However, in those instances where one does find problematisation of this kind – with discussion of pollution or food-and-safety standards, for example – ‘Europe’ and the EU are invoked with some frequency, and in ways consistent with the idea of a European political bond.<sup>5</sup> For such problems, the ‘people like us’ would be a fairly inclusive category: after all, potentially everyone is affected by environmental pollution, by the purity of the water supply or the meat which goes into sausages. Unlike in the other domains, here one finds the positioning of ‘Europe’ in adversarial opposition both to ‘the East’ and ‘America’. Briefly – and rather

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<sup>5</sup> The number of such instances is admittedly small (around ten or so, across all the interviews), and so generalisations are suggested with caution.

casually – discussing environmental pollution, Murda in Reading accuses Americans of using too many aeroplanes (‘that’s why America never wants to sign any of those [environmental] treaties’) and proposes that ‘the little buggers can go from one state to another on a bicycle.’ At Norwich, Mickey says that ‘the Americans ... cause more pollution than any other nation put together,’ Leyton confirms that, according to something he has read, ‘the Americans’ contribute a third of the world’s pollution output, and Barry adds that in a few years India and China will be ‘up there too’. Where EU regulations are mentioned, they are presented as well-intentioned and probably appropriate: at Kassel, all participants speak approvingly of the EU legislation which they say is designed to deal with fine-particulate pollution, the environmental problem of the day. Perhaps such regulations can also deal with the old and dirty second-hand cars which Dieter reports are still driven in ‘the eastern bloc’ (i.e. eastern Europe), ‘the really old vehicles, the things that here would’ve failed their M.O.T. long ago.’<sup>6</sup> In the Plzeň discussion, all participants note that the environment in the Czech Republic has improved considerably in recent years (reference is made to reductions in factory emissions, improvement in the quality of buses and their exhaust fumes, and the disappearance of dirty old cars like the Trabant and the Tatra), and there is general consensus that the adoption of the EU’s standards account for this. Román, with Petr’s agreement, makes an explicit link to EU accession: ‘if we hadn’t been obliged to change, who’d have bothered?’

These problems to do with *Quality of Life* tend to be marginalised however, and with them the potentially positive role of a European polity in dealing with them. This is true even amongst the Czech groups, where discussion of such problems – probably for the very reason of recent adaptation to EU legislation – is the most common. One sees something of this in a passage from Plzeň, which begins with Petr responding to the question whether he was in favour of the Czech Republic joining the EU:

P: ... Now I’m no longer as sure as I was before, but back then when it was happening I was in favour.

M: I think in the future it’s going to be a good thing but for now there’s nothing in it ... [R: What do you mean, nothing?] For us right now there’s nothing good in it.

R: What do you mean? ... We’ve just been talking about the transport improvements and stuff ...

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<sup>6</sup> For problems to do with *Quality of Life*, the Kassel group puts forward plenty of possibilities for action: people should be further encouraged to recycle by extending the deposit (*Pfand*) system to more goods, by the use of insurance schemes, pools systems and ‘solidarity funds’, and there is general consensus on Hans’ point that ‘the polluter-pays principle I find particularly good. In other words that firms which produce a thing [D: yeah, yeah] are then taken up on their responsibility.’

- M: Yeah that's one thing but a second thing is all the new stuff which they're implementing: the registration office ... pubs need to have toilets, kitchens, everything. You've got to buy a 10,000CK walkie-talkie for the car ...
- P: Exactly, yeah, this is why I don't see it like I used to any more ... [M: Right ...]
- R: Fine but how can you say you don't see anything in it when the quality of services is going up? The quality of everything is going up.
- P: Because I have to buy a different walkie-talkie ... Ok, that's one thing, another thing ...
- R: In any case I've heard they're dividing the radio band into quarters so a lot more people can use it. It's all about improvements. The others don't have the right frequencies ... [P: I know, but ...]
- M: It's an improvement but you don't notice the improvement. Where do you notice it?
- R: Where? ... Well, right now the band is so mashed up that ... it's not separated out ... [P: That's true, sure, but ...]
- M: OK so let's talk about the toilets here in the pub. What I notice is that it smells lovely and everything's pretty, but the snag is the landlord has to install some photocell on each urinal and for each one he has to pay 70,000CK. The quality improves, but at the expense of the one who has to pay for it.
- P: Our walkie-talkies are a trivial thing, it's true. But another thing for example are the butchers. Today you're not allowed to have the producer and the slaughterer together in one place like in a classical abattoir, so the classical butcher has to cease business. Schneider, he's ok, he's got a slaughterer there and a producer there ... [M: Is he ok?] Isn't he? Relatively, compared to the average butcher ... [R: Which was the one that closed? The slaughterhouse ...] [One of them closed ...] But Schneider ...
- R: You're both talking about whether it's better for you yourselves ...
- P: Yeah well how *is* it better for me if I liked that particular sausage, if all the hygiene norms come in and ... It's been eaten for decades and it's never hurt anyone ...
- R: Of course but you notice it in the quality. In the toilets for example, if you go to a pub and you've got one tiny piece of soap ...
- P: Fine but that's just a detail I think, the old toilets would've been fine if someone looked after them. [M: Right ...]
- R: No ... now you've got liquid soap ... the regulations ... [P: Fine but that's ...] Those are norms ...
- P: Those are things which cost hundreds of crowns ...
- R: Those are things you encounter every day ...
- M: The services improve but at someone's expense – someone somewhere has to pay for that improvement.
- R: Yeah of course. It's a demanding investment.

One must be careful with such a passage not to overstate the link which is being made specifically with the EU and its policies: for the Czech groups, it is quite probable that EU accession carries a symbolic significance as one part of a wider process of 'democratisation'

and ‘liberalisation’, that it functions as much as a *signifier* for a whole range of developments as it is their assumed *cause*. Nonetheless, there *is* a linkage being made here between EU accession and various aspects of daily life, and one way to read the exchange of views is as a contest over the ‘meaning’ of EU accession. On the one hand it is presented, mainly by Román, as improving the quality of various ‘services’, from radio signals to toilets to sausages (i.e. addressing problems to do with *Quality of Life*), whereas on the other hand it is presented, mainly by Petr and Míra, as engendering new costs for the little people (i.e. creating further problems in *Economics*). In the one view, the benefits are general, and one should not ask simply ‘whether it’s better for you yourselves’; in the other ‘the quality improves at the expense of those who have to pay for it.’ While the debate is not resolved conclusively here, Román has to argue strongly to prevent the collective benefits being crowded out of the discussion. Both Míra and Petr suggest these improvements are either scarcely appreciable or represent no more than ‘details’, that they improve something which did not need to be improved whilst creating new difficulties. A few minutes later, Míra is back to the same kind of argument, asking the others whether they have a fire extinguisher in their taxis. ‘It’s the same thing: it’s a good thing, but you have to pay for it.’ Insofar then as it is problématiques such as these which tend most often to prompt a favourable reference to the EU and its policies – and, to repeat, this happens most amongst the Czech groups, and to some extent the German ones – this positive basis for a political bond coextensive with the EU is undermined by the doubt which is cast on the seriousness of the problems at stake. The kind of positioning and the relatively strong sense of agency are appropriate to such a bond, but the problems involved amount at most to a quite minor part of the political common.

The observations of this section allow us to reaffirm the thrust of our analysis. The bond that was sketched in Chapter 1 as a normative ideal for a European polity appears only quite sporadically in the empirical material. This is not because speakers fail in the articulation of matters of common concern: they do this with considerable fluidity, and there is little evidence of disengagement from the substance of politics. Where a political bond supportive of a European polity fails to take shape, or does so only weakly, is in matters of collective positioning and the expectation of organised collective action. For the problems which are discussed in depth, acts of positioning characterised by the transnationalisation of ‘us’ and a basic tolerance of ‘them’ are contradicted by converse practices more parochial in their inclusion or more hostile in their exclusion. For these same problems, the EU tends not to be

invoked as a possible means for their remedy, since the expression of transnational shared predicament tends not to follow the contours of the EU polity, and since there is widespread scepticism concerning the very possibility of remedy. More often the EU is treated as yet another manifestation of these problems. Only to a quite limited extent, and mainly for problems of secondary importance, is the EU ‘made sense of’ by existing discursive patterns.

### Towards a Political Bond

If the concept of the political bond is only weakly representational, this might be read as grounds to abandon it. Why persist with a perspective which cannot easily be associated with the status quo? Why not pick an alternative ideal, one that is a bit more ‘realistic’? While this might seem an attractive option, it would be to neglect what was suggested in Chapter 1, that there is no conceptualisation of the common capable of performing a perfect descriptive role. All visions of the collective bond require an idealisation of sorts, and since alternative visions are normatively unappealing there are good reasons to seek a political conceptualisation of the common. Moreover, unless one is of a conservative disposition, the challenge presented by divergences from an ideal need not be seen as discouraging. They indicate that the ideal is sufficiently demanding that it can perform a critical-diagnostic function and suggest new lines of possible development.

Exploring the concept empirically has highlighted the need to foster alternative discursive practices if a political bond supportive of a European polity is to emerge. Given that discussion of the EU tends to absorb motifs which are present in the discussion of matters of political relevance more widely, any attempt to alter the political significance which is ascribed to the EU will have to proceed by addressing at the same time these broader discursive patterns. Making sense of a European polity as a *political* phenomenon connected to substantive problems of shared concern requires addressing the larger context. This question of change is what we shall consider here, exploring some of the alterations which would be necessary in order for a political bond to become a more representational as well as normative concept.

When thinking about how discursive practice might be refashioned, the challenge clearly is not that of imagining an entirely new set of practices to be projected onto a *tabula rasa*. One does not have this kind of freedom. It can be taken as a guiding principle that successful innovation depends not so much upon a simple genius for invention, but upon the

pragmatic ability to make adjustments to existing repertoires of practice, to retrieve older repertoires which have become subordinated, to foster changes of emphasis, and to introduce new discursive resources in ways such that they respond to the patterns which pre-exist them. Herein lies the task for the ‘discursive architects’ who would seek to effect a Europe-wide political bond. Existing patterns of discursive practice constitute both the target to be taken aim at, since certain commonly-made assumptions there is the necessity to challenge, but also a pool of resources to be utilised, since there is the possibility of altering the speech act potential of existing formulations, whether by dislodging existing associations and ascribing new ones, or by extending patterns of usage such that the weight of old formulations may be put to new purpose. Rather like the ‘innovating ideologists’ of the seventeenth century, whose strategies for legitimising the new socio-economic practices of capitalist society Quentin Skinner has discussed, those who would seek to realise a political bond supportive of a European polity are in this sense ‘obliged to march backwards into battle’, to keep their eye on the discursive landscape which is behind them.<sup>7</sup> For the same reason, in the section that follows, a certain accent is placed upon linking possible alterations in discursive practice to the patterns we have uncovered in the research, and attention is drawn to the ways in which potential new trends are prefigured in existing tendencies.

The possible identity of these ‘discursive architects’ who would take it upon themselves to develop alternative repertoires is something that will be discussed in the section after this one. There is of course no guarantee that such actors would be successful in carrying these innovations through. Like architects, they would design and promote blueprints that can be acted upon, but they do not by themselves ensure these come to fruition in the form of everyday practice. Such innovation would be a matter for ongoing political effort. Our points in what follows can be related to each of the three conceptual dimensions of a political bond: the make-up of the political common, prevalent acts of collective positioning, and assumptions about the worth of a political project. Since the first of these (the political common) is most general in scope, its consideration is postponed until last.

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<sup>7</sup> Quentin Skinner, ‘Moral Principles and Social Change’, in Quentin Skinner (ed.), *Visions of Politics*, Vol. 1: *Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.150. Skinner suggests that the task of innovating ideologists is ‘that of legitimising some form of social behaviour generally agreed to be questionable.’ (p.148) The scenario is analogous to that of establishing the legitimacy of an emerging polity: there is the need to render acceptable and commonsensical that which is new, and which for the very reason that it is new seems questionable.

## 1. Positioning (I): The Opponents as Adversaries, not Enemies

That opponents of the 'people like us' be accepted as legitimate adversaries to be engaged with (if only to be consistently opposed) is a basic condition of any political bond, whether associated with a European polity or with some other political configuration. It has been seen that, by and large, this criterion is generally met in the discourse across the sample groups for problems to do with *Society and the Law*. However, for problems to do with *Relations between Peoples*, it is generally not met. Instead, one finds an antagonistic relationship being posited between the political subjects and their counterparts on the one hand (principally expressed with categories such as 'the West', with certain racial connotations) and their enemies (with particular reference to Arabs / Muslims) on the other. What kind of discursive change does this call for?

One approach to 'taming' the relationship such that it is agonistic rather than antagonistic would be to dislodge some of the characteristics which are ascribed to the opponents. Instead of them being positioned undifferentiatedly as irrational, aggressive and intransigent, one would want to see them portrayed as actors rationally advancing their own agenda. To emphasise the irrationality, aggression and intransigence of the other is largely to give up on the possibility of a political bond, since these take on the quality of essential attributes which are not susceptible to change and which do not permit the possibility of compromise. The assumption needs to be entrenched that it is 'conflict' itself which is the problem, not the opponents as such, and that the opponents too may be seeking a way to resolve such conflict.<sup>8</sup> Note that this does not imply the necessity of counter-arguments which negate the idea of fundamental difference to the point of affirming that all people(s) are essentially the same. Opponents do not need to be seen as 'people like us', and assertions along the lines that 'everyone fundamentally shares the same values' or that 'to be offended by foreign-looking cultural symbols in your neighbourhood is morally wrong' may be both unproductive and unwise. However well-intentioned and however appealing at first glance, they are likely to fall foul of the common criticism that politicians and political parties are too soft in dealing with these problems of conflict, that they wish to paper over them. The challenge is not so much to construct discourses of friendship as to construct discourses of agonism rather than antagonism. Some reification of the categories of 'them' and 'us' is

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<sup>8</sup> This perspective is usefully described by Bellamy when laying out the republican ideal of compromise through negotiation: 'Instead of viewing a conflict as a battle to be won or lost, the parties see it as a collective problem to be solved.' Richard Bellamy, *Liberalism and Pluralism: Towards a Politics of Compromise* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.101.

acceptable therefore, provided that the dynamic between these two is articulated in a certain way.<sup>9</sup> It will be recalled that at least two major explanatory motifs for inter-people conflict were observed in our research discussions: one concerned the supposedly hostile essential characteristics of the opponents, while the other concerned the contest for collective power. The first emphasises irrationality, the second rationality. Insofar as the latter offers the possibility of reasoned compromise whereas the former does not, it may be that one already has a motif available with which to conjure a more agonistic relationship. Of course, conflicts for power can certainly ‘turn nasty’ too, but it might be that the promulgation of this motif provides a better basis for their resolution.

A second approach to taming the hostile dynamic posited on problems to do with *Relations between Peoples* would involve focusing rather on the formulations used to demarcate the ‘people like us’. In particular, this might include seeking to undermine the frequency with which the category of ‘the West’ is adopted, since this generally seems to be used with either racial implications or implications of good sense and peacefulness. While in principle the term could simply be a remnant of the Cold War period, without an association with any such markers, its deployment in the context of discussion of current conflicts tends to be rather more laden. The difficulty, it need scarcely be added, is not that race is an inherently negative category, but that it is an exclusive and essentialising one which gives any conflict delineated in its terms a sense of permanence and naturalness. Likewise, it is not that ‘good sense and peacefulness’ should be thought of as negative characteristics: the difficulty is rather that if they are claimed as intrinsic to the ‘people like us’ then this will, almost inevitably, result in those treated as opponents being positioned as deficient in these qualities. Eradicating the concept of ‘the West’ altogether is of course an implausible and dubious objective, but it may be that one would want to promote alternative formulations which can make no claim to embody white-majority countries as a whole. Of the possible new subject-positions to make more readily available, ‘Europe’ is advantageous in this sense, and perhaps also serves to increase the extent to which collective action at a European level is held to ‘make sense’. An argument of this kind is often made to support the prospect of Turkish membership of the EU: it weakens the plausibility of the EU as a ‘Christian club’. There is indeed something attractive about this proposition – but it concerns the kind of membership question which is beyond the scope of this work.

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<sup>9</sup> Though it will not be possible to explore the point further here, this implies an alignment with multiculturalist rather than assimilationist conceptions of citizenship – cf. e.g. Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000).

This brings us to the question of positioning in the *Economics* domain. The conclusion above was that the opponents here (which includes ‘the rich’, large companies, financial institutions, in some cases those dependent on state welfare, and those ‘eastern Europeans’ who both compete for jobs and benefit from wealth redistribution) are generally positioned as adversaries rather than enemies, but that this remains a precarious condition in need of consolidation. Likewise, particularly when discussion is focused on the question of who contributes to and who takes from the EU’s finances, the adversaries tend to be demarcated along country lines, a pattern which is generally not conducive to a political bond, and which again can result in the expression of resentment towards eastern Europeans. The persistent danger is that the poverty or ‘cheapness’ which is ascribed to ‘them’, and which stands as the reason why they are seen to be threatening the jobs, wages, earnings and benefits of ‘people like us’, comes to be regarded as an essential attribute rather than a contingent circumstance. The essentialisation of attributes, as we have noted, tends to herald an antagonistic rather than an agonistic positioning of the opponents. The question is therefore how to undermine any tendency towards essentialisation.

Two possible argumentative strategies stand out. In one of them, the contingency of these attributes is affirmed by suggesting that inequalities in wealth between western and eastern Europe will level themselves out naturally over time. The argument would be that companies will continue to invest and create jobs in eastern Europe in the short term while wages there are more attractive than in the west, but that this in turn will boost average earnings there to the point at which the very economic disparities which make eastern Europe favourable to such companies will no longer exist, prompting those companies to move on, leaving eastern Europe in a similar predicament to ‘ours’ today. Such an argument serves well to highlight the contingency of wealth inequalities, and implies that the opponents are not fundamentally different from the ‘people like us’. However, while it is supportive of a political bond in this respect, at the same time it works to undermine the plausibility of a political project to tackle problems to do with *Economics*, since it makes the resolution of such problems dependent upon the inclinations of private companies and the market signals to which they respond. It follows the very logic of inevitability and of uncontrollable cycles of good fortune and bad which, as was seen in Chapter 5, is precisely the source of a sense of powerlessness towards problems in this domain. It does not respond to the sense that something should be done about these problems; it merely suggests that they will go away at some point. A second argumentative strategy, on the other hand, would involve highlighting the contingency of wealth inequalities and the problems caused by them by suggesting that

there are things which can be done about them. Wage competition would be presented not as an eternal and unavoidable fact but as the consequence of, for instance, the absence of a minimum wage and harmonised levels of taxation, or the absence of wealth redistribution from ‘the rich’ and ‘shareholders’ (i.e. other adversaries) in western Europe. That a gap exists also in eastern Europe between ‘the rich’ and ‘the little people’ might be emphasised, and likewise that there too there are ‘contributors’ as well as ‘non-contributors’, inviting some sense of shared predicament. The clear advantage of this approach is that it tempers the idea that eastern Europeans might be permanent adversaries without undermining the sense of agency which is also necessary for a political bond.

As with *Relations between Peoples*, a repositioning of the opponents may require undermining or refashioning certain common formulations for the ‘people like us’. The frequency with which participants in discussion position only themselves as being ‘the ones who contribute’ is problematic, since it can be mobilised to discredit any kind of political project involving state interference. The burden – e.g. of taxation or regulation – can be presented as always falling upon ‘us’, and the benefits ‘draining away’ elsewhere, provoking the misleading conclusion that it is the attempt at democratic control itself which represents the problem. Any alternative formulation would do well to preserve the active voice (as one finds with ‘the contributors’) while avoiding the potential for anti-political manipulation. One strategy that presents itself is to seek to refashion the subject position of ‘the working man / people’ so as to loosen its association with *contribution* and to play up its association with other economic problems currently linked more strongly to terms such as ‘the little people’. Unlike the latter, ‘working people’ seems to carry overtones of activeness and links better to a sense of the possibilities for action. Such a shift in the term’s usage is a considerable task of course, but arguably it has performed this role in the past, in the vocabulary both of trade unions and the revolutionary Left, and so there is an older pattern of usage to be rediscovered.

Alternatively, as a second strategy, one might accept the emphasis placed on ‘us’ being contributors, but seek to prevent this leading to the construction of opponents whose legitimate presence in the political community may be doubted. For ‘eastern Europeans’ one would want to substitute a category which is *not* demarcated in national terms, and which is therefore less liable to invite the move to exclude. A deflection of this kind could perhaps be achieved with the category of ‘the rich’. As suggested in Chapter 4, when matters of contribution are at stake, ‘the rich’ tend to be invoked less frequently, and contribution to the tax system tends to be discussed more in simple do-or-don’t terms (which draws attention

towards the non-contributors ‘below’ and invites them to be positioned as opponents) rather than in more-or-less terms (which might draw attention rather towards those at ‘the top’ who do contribute, but less than they might). However, the possibility that the contribution motif can be combined with a gaze ‘upwards’ rather than ‘laterally’ or ‘downwards’ is confirmed by this passage from the Kassel discussion:

H: ... The state has always taxed the most those people who have relatively little.

P: Why? Because the people who have the least have always been the biggest in number. [S: Exactly ...] It’s quite simple. Why are the little people – let’s say everyone who’s sitting here now – why are they paying taxes and why are the big guys not paying taxes like that? The big guys are such a small proportion ... even if they did pay it’d be a drop in the ocean. But us below, because there’s a mass of us, there the taxes can really be raked in. But not with those few people at the top.

H: No, no. That’s ... when you think that, what is it, 85% of the population has very little money and only 15% of the capital ... how is it, 80% of the capital is managed or held by 15% of the people. And I think, if taxation was done properly ... [D: done properly ...] then that would be quite a considerable amount ... [D: Yeah, absolutely ...]

More of this kind of talk would, one may imagine, enable less of the talk which positions other EU citizens as opponents by virtue of their nationality.

## **2. Positioning (II): Other European Countries as Comparable Environments, Not Competitive Actors**

The demarcation of opponents using the category of nationality is avoided, we have argued, when the member-states that make up the EU are regarded not as unitary actors but as environments in which problems are encountered. It is then that the recognition becomes possible of ‘counterparts’ who face predicaments similar to those faced by ‘people like us’, and hence the possibility of new kinds of collective action in opposition to shared adversaries. From a political-bond perspective, what is important is not so much that citizens readily profess enthusiasm for the current configuration of the EU and its institutions. Rather, what is important is that problems in each of the domains of the political common are seen to be arising more widely than just in the home environment.

In terms of discursive practices, this means in particular the readiness to make transnational comparisons. As we have seen, there is already a notable tendency to make these with regard to problems of *Economics* and *Relations between Peoples*: the decline of industry, wage and price levels, and (the challenges which have been noted notwithstanding)

the conflicts arising from the encounter of different ‘peoples’ are all problems on which comparisons are spontaneously made in discussion. Indeed, such problems are rather more common than those which prompt nation-based formulations for the political subjects (of these, EU financing was the major one). However, more comparisons would undoubtedly be beneficial, and could extend also to problems in *Society and the Law*: frequently-cited problems such as a supposed decline in public-spiritedness, the ineffectiveness of mechanisms of criminal punishment, and the quality of school discipline and education would be plausible candidates in this regard. There is one precedent for this in the interviews: the Erfurt group makes spontaneous reference to the findings of the EU’s PISA Study on the relative achievements of different education systems in Europe. Finland’s positive evaluation is the source of considerable interest on the grounds that it adopted the school-system of the GDR. Andreas expresses scepticism towards the methods of the study – ‘for me the PISA Study is a purely statistical thing ... Why do I have to make a European contest out of the knowledge of little children?’ – but he, like all the other participants, is supportive of the principle that Germany can usefully compare its education system with those of other European countries, and perhaps learn from them. This reference, admittedly found only in the one interview, indicates the potential for transnational comparisons in this domain of problems also. More such comparisons would perhaps bring this advantage: awareness that the same problems are replicated elsewhere might serve to undermine the tendency which is found with regard to some of them – crime and antisocial behaviour especially – to demonise particular individuals in the home environment as being responsible for them. It is conceivable that comparisons encourage a more structural rather than actor-based perspective to be taken, something which would diminish the tendency to position certain opponents as enemies rather than adversaries.

A promising feature of the discursive patterns observed is the tendency not only to make comparisons but, for economic problems at least, to express surprise at the extent to which conditions in neighbouring, ‘comparable’ countries might actually be rather different. Price differences, for example, regularly provoked expressions of bemusement and the sense that things should be more similar than they were. David provides an example of this at Reading, to the agreement of Murda: ‘Now, we’re into Europe, but we don’t all have the same rules. You can go to France, it’s exactly what you’re saying, you buy stuff in France – wine, do the beer trips and the fag trips ... We’re into Europe, and you can get on a boat for a pound or whatever it is and come back with a sack load of fags if you want to, you only got to go twenty miles across the Channel ... We’re in Europe, but we all got different prices.’

Price and wage differences on a *global* scale are not described in these tones – they tend to be treated much more as predictable facts of life. True, this ‘surprise’ only extends towards conditions in those EU countries treated as broadly comparable: price differences between western and eastern Europe tend to be normalised amongst all the groups. Nonetheless, there is at least some basis here on which to promote the sense of shared predicament.

Not all kinds of comparison are constructive of a political bond. Comparisons between countries which are based on a competitive principle may instead be corrosive, since they encourage the demarcation of opponents according to nationality, and where this is the defining feature of the parties to agonistic struggle the effect is likely to be to undermine the plausibility of joint political action. For example, the notion put forward by several of the German participants of Germany as the ‘tail-light’ in economic growth evokes a competition along national lines in which some countries must be winners and others losers. It positions those who are the winners as the opponents, something which is likely to cast doubt on the acceptability of being bound together in the same political community. One sees this in some comments from Peter at Kassel, though the point is contested by Dieter:

P: And another thing I can’t understand, in Germany we’re the tail-light in terms of economic development in Europe.

S: We still have very high standards though. [D: Just what I wanted to say ...]

P: Yeah but on the one hand we’re the tail-light and on the other hand we’re the main contributor to the EU. That somehow ... that can’t all fit together any more. [D: Yes but ...] And we don’t have a single politician who goes to town and says ‘That’s enough, we need to re-regulate the whole thing.’ Just not there.

D: We’re talking about two different things. We’re the tail-light when it comes to growth. That means for a very long time we were probably out in front ... [P: Gone to sleep, we’ve gone to sleep ...] No, we’ve been out in front for a very long time and we were the leaders in development. Now what’s happened meanwhile is that, because of EU enlargement, the other states have caught up and naturally their level of development is ... That’s the problem. [H: That’s the problem ...] That’s the problem. It’s not that we’re worse than the others, it’s simply that their development potential ... it’s being raised.

P: On the contrary, it’s said that we’re getting worse. [D: That’s rubbish.]

On balance, the idea that other parts of Europe, including the new EU members of eastern Europe, represent environments rather than rivals is probably maintained in this passage – Dieter, Sebastian and Hans are all adopting this position – but the motif of the ‘tail-light’ which Peter refers to points rather in the contrary direction.

It was noted in the previous section that accounts of the economic problems faced by the political subjects quite often make reference to the EU and its policies, either as

expressions or as causes of such problems. The EU's legislation on the free movement of workers and the introduction of the euro are two salient examples of this. Interestingly, problems of this kind for which a close linkage to the EU is made often attract transnational comparisons with other European countries, as though it is precisely the EU connection which fosters some basic sense of shared predicament. The group in Plzeň for example, while generally like the other Czech groups indisposed to make comparisons with western Europe on economic issues, shows a fair degree of interest in the experiences of these countries with the euro. Petr refers to how prices have risen in Germany due to the euro, and to the reluctance of Britain to give up the pound sterling; Míra draws attention to those in Italy who want the country to withdraw from the euro system (Petr and Román have heard the same, though Román dismisses them as 'just voices'), and all are willing to draw conclusions from these experiences for those that might be felt in the Czech Republic were it too to join. One observes something similar in the Norwich discussion:

- B: If we've all got the euro, all of Europe including us, then everything's got to be the same prices, like your petrol abroad, your petrol here, your fags, blah blah. And I'm pretty sure, whatever government is in in this country would never give up the revenue off cigarettes, beer and fags. So we'd be getting the same wages as our European counterparts but we'd be paying more, so our standard of living would go down yet again. [...]
- L: They've all got mugged on the bloody euro, don't you worry yourself about that. Because you go out to Spain and see how much it bloody costs you.
- B: The Dutch don't like it, the Germans are struggling with it.
- M: I tell you who didn't struggle with the euro – financial institutions. They made a packet on it.

The recognition of 'European counterparts' which this specifically European 'problem' invites can be read in at least two ways. In one perspective, it is 'the EU' which is the problem, and any sense of shared predicament it may generate is un conducive to a political bond since a sense of 'the people' comes at the expense of a sense of the worth of the polity. In a second perspective, it is the specific policy (the euro) which is the problem, since it has a particular harmful effect on the 'people like us' and their counterparts (rising prices) while benefiting their adversaries (the 'financial institutions'). In this perspective, a Europe-wide sense of shared predicament could emerge on the back of dissatisfaction with certain kinds of economic policy, and could then contribute to the collective bond required for a quite different kind of polity pursuing different policies. Fostering a political bond would seem to require resisting the first perspective while promoting something akin to the second. That this is possible in principle seems to be evident from a passage from the Erfurt discussion.

Here one sees how dissatisfaction with a particular problem – in this case, the arrival of workers from abroad working to different conditions – coupled with the idea that ‘things should be the same’ in economic terms across Europe can result in rejection of the policy combined with affirmation of the idea of a European polity:

H-J: ... If Europe is going to function as a single whole then there can't be one law for Poland, one law for Portugal and whatever, there needs to be one single European law ... [U: yeah]. And that applies to all the questions of employment law, questions of tax law ... If it's not done like that then there'll always be this roaming around in Europe and nothing fair will come of it because the cherries will always be picked out for a few individuals who are able to take advantage of it and the bulk of people will be left behind. And it can't function like that. I'm not going to say that I find it all crap, but I do find it crap how it's being executed. It doesn't work. [A: I agree] I think if it was done in an orderly way then it'd be a simplification. You can set free so much potential.

A: Ok, and then the EU itself would have proper authority ... [H-J: Yeah, naturally ...] And not like it is at the moment ... [H-J: Like it is at the moment it doesn't work.]

### **3. A Political Project: New Discourses on the Possibilities for Action**

A theme of our empirical findings has been that positive assumptions about the possibilities for organised, collective address of the problems of the political common are unevenly distributed across the problem domains, and in some areas rather thin. They are most strongly present as regards *Society and the Law*, but less so as regards *Relations between Peoples* and *Economics*, even though the capacities of ‘politicians’ and ‘the government’ remain a topic of considerable salience. A political bond supportive of a European polity would require two important changes in discursive practice: a multiplication of the frequency with which it is assumed that political problems in these second two domains can be addressed; and a multiplication of the frequency with which ‘Europe’ and the EU are invoked as credible means by which to tackle such problems. Both of these are likely to necessitate new discursive repertoires which spell out some of the available possibilities for action. It is important however not to merge these two points: while a political bond does require that problems facing the ‘people like us’ be treated as amenable to address (since otherwise the perspective is an anti-political one), it does not require that *all* such problems be treated as in need of address by European-level institutions. To say this would be to foreclose in favour of a unitary state what should be a matter for ongoing debate: the distribution of ‘competences’ amongst different political actors. (The next section will return to this question.) Rather, it requires only that a plural – though unspecifiable – number of salient problems be treated as plausible *candidates* for address at the European level.

There is, from this perspective, no strong reason why problems to do with *Society and the Law* should call for a political project specifically European in focus. A broader sense of space based on a greater number of transnational comparisons would arguably be welcome, since it may have a positive effect on the kinds of positioning performed, but this does not imply the necessity of an active European polity in this domain. Nor therefore is there necessarily a need for new explanatory discourses which challenge the tendency to assume that these problems arise primarily from local causes. Were one to look for these, several options would be available: one would be to conceive new explanatory motifs specific to the domain (such as technological change, as suggested in Chapter 5); another would be to play further on the link which is sometimes drawn already in these discussions to the *Economics* domain – the Würzburg group in particular explores some of the possible connections between criminal behaviour and economic disadvantage (e.g. unemployment and wealth inequality). But such changes in discursive pattern are not essential to the emergence of a political bond supportive of a European polity, since *Society and the Law* represents just one of the domains of the common, and since the assumption of agency is already quite discernible in this domain.

For problems to do with *Relations between Peoples*, on the other hand, the sense that the specifically European context is of no particular relevance is generally coupled with a tendency to doubt whether such problems are amenable to address. Clearly such an assumption would need to be challenged, and the possibilities for doing so follow on from our observations concerning positioning. New discourses of agency are required: not ones which simply raise the expectation that the opponents can be defeated, e.g. by emphasising ‘our’ resolve, since this would be likely only to increase the extent to which the opponents are positioned as enemies. Rather, as we have said, the focus would need to be on ‘conflict’ as the problem. Attempts to ‘deproblematise’ it – for instance, by suggesting that relations between peoples are already fully harmonious, or by attempting to deconstruct the very idea of ‘peoples’ – would arguably be utopian and potentially counter-productive, their instinctive appeal notwithstanding. More effective may be to accept such conflict as a problem, and to challenge the assumption that it is inevitable by disputing assumptions to do with the irrationality of opponents and by undermining formulations for the subjects which carry racial nuances, as – we have argued – that of ‘the West’ does. Local instances of conflict in the neighbourhood might then have a more realistic chance of being debated and compromised on in local discussion forums.

The need for new discourses of agency in the *Economics* domain is quite clear, and given the transnational context so readily evoked it would be natural to place emphasis here on the potential for tackling such problems at a European level. Such a move most likely requires both diffusing the sense of mystery that surrounds many economic problems and disputing the tendency to explain large numbers of them with reference to distant places of relevant contrast. Narrowing the sense of political space is itself probably conducive to heightening the plausibility of a political project. More specifically, there is probably a need to dispute the tendency to attribute causality to the dictates of the global market. For example, it was seen in the analysis of the empirical material that the problem of job losses and the resultant unemployment is frequently attributed to the simple fact of cheaper labour costs in places such as eastern Europe and Asia, and thereby given a sense of unavailability. Possible counter-narratives are easily conceived, and need by no means be of a higher level of complexity. For instance, in many cases, both in manufacturing and the service industry, redundancies can be plausibly attributed to acts of down-sizing which follow takeover deals designed to boost share price. (That ‘shareholders’ are already positioned as economic opponents in several of the group discussions suggests that such an argument might be met receptively.) When the cause is presented in these terms, a number of clear, agential responses become available: strong regulations and strong trade unions are obvious ones, and basically consistent with liberal-economic orthodoxy; wider state ownership of industries, to insulate decision-making from short-term considerations of share price, represent another, more radical possibility.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the commonly cited problem of rising house prices is presented in many of the discussions as – like all instances of rising prices – a mystery. ‘Owning a house is just a dream for the ordinary person,’ says Jürgen in Lübeck. There is a clear sense of injustice – it hits ‘people like us’ particularly hard – and yet also a clear lack of discursive resources with which to explain it. A stronger sense of agency might emerge were a link more readily drawn to wealth inequality: rising house prices could plausibly be attributed to the concentration of wealth, in particular the rising earnings of the top strata of society, which increases the purchasing power of a few buyers and allows sellers to raise their prices. From such an explanation there follow clear possibilities for action, including policies of wealth redistribution. That such policies are best pursued at a European rather than a national level is of course a contention which some would challenge, and the purpose here is not to attempt to formulate a conclusive case that this is so but rather to suggest that

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<sup>10</sup> Some of these arguments are explored in Will Hutton, *The Writing on the Wall: China and the West in the 21st Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2007).

such is the kind of argument which would need to be made in order to foster a political bond for a European polity. Such an argument serves at once to weaken the sense of powerlessness before economic problems and to weaken the association which is made between the EU and the source or the expression of these problems, refashioning it instead as a means of collective agency.

In thus outlining some of the possibilities for new kinds of discursive practice regarding the problems of *Society and the Law*, *Economics* and *Relations between Peoples*, we have treated them as largely independent of one another. There has been no implication that by fostering a stronger sense of agency in one domain, or encouraging different acts of positioning therein, this may have some automatic (positive) effects on the same in the other domains, nor has any hierarchy of importance been implied such that one domain is in some way more fundamental than the others. A Marxist perspective, while less concerned with ideational issues, and using entirely different terminology, would probably argue just this of course: that the *Economics* domain is more basic than the other two, and that problematisation in the domains of *Society and the Law* and *Relations between Peoples* occurs largely as a consequence of the false appraisal of the economic.

This is a perspective one may reject partly on the grounds that it derives from a materialist ontology in which economic interests are taken to be pre-ideational facts largely determinative of historical (including discursive) action. By reducing the political to the economic in this way – rather like those conceptualising a commercial bond, and analogously to those who conceptualise a cultural bond – this perspective also overlooks that political goals are various and potentially incommensurable. To seek to reduce them to one set of underlying goals is to pursue a coherence which is probably illusory.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, it overlooks the normative appeal of a plurality of domains of equal status. As we have seen, the different discursive patterns associated with the domains give rise to different acts of positioning: this implies not only multiple forms of exclusion (i.e. ways of positioning as adversaries) but also multiple possibilities of inclusion (i.e. ways of positioning as counterparts). Those citizens to whom the motifs of one domain are applied so as to position them as opponents may, according to the logic of another domain, be positioned rather as something much closer to the ‘people like us’. It is exactly this absence of one single axis of inclusion and exclusion which works to prevent the establishment of hard and impermeable

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<sup>11</sup> On incommensurable goods and values, see e.g. Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Bellamy, *Liberalism and Pluralism*.

boundaries towards opponents of the kind which might prove destructive of a collective bond.

As was seen in Chapter 4, criteria drawn from the *Economics* domain can be used to position those who are outsiders in some way as being nevertheless ‘people like us’: it was noted how participants from the Norwich group deploy the argument that ‘anybody can come here providing they do their bit,’ and Hans-Jürgen in Erfurt expresses his admiration for the immigrant who ‘wants to work, he wants to learn. He’s not costing anyone else any money.’ Andreas from the same group points out that ‘it’ll always be the case that there are foreigners who want to move to another country because the economy there’s better. Everyone’s done that – the Germans have done that too. [H-J: And it’s understandable ...] Because there’s a better future to be had there ... [U: It’s understandable, it’s completely normal.]’ Motifs from the *Relations between Peoples* domain can also be used for inclusive purposes. Barry at Norwich, for instance, knows of a girl in his area, ‘blimey, can’t think of the name of the country now, where the Tutsis slaughtered the ... the Tutsis slaughtered ... Rwanda. I mean, she was a genuine ... her family died, they were slaughtered, so I’ve got no problem ... genuine refugee. Kosovans ... Genuine people like that who were in fear of their lives for political beliefs and like that ...’. ‘I’ve got no problem with that either,’ says Mickey, and a little later continues: ‘people should be able to have free speech. If people can’t have that free speech and they want to have that free speech, and they’ve got the bottle to try and do something about it, and in the end if they’re going to be killed for it, then come and stay at my house, mate. Eat me food, I don’t mind.’ Thus the political subjects express the good sense and fair-mindedness that is characteristic of them and extend a kind of honorary status of subject to those non-Westerners who have been victims of conflict themselves and seek peace in the West.

Now, what clearly cannot be established on the basis of examples such as these is which motifs are preferred in concrete cases when participants might have to choose whether to extend the status of ‘costing no-one else money’ (or not) or ‘being genuine’ (or not) to particular individuals and groups. One cannot infer directly from the discursive practice the other kinds of behavioural practice which might accompany it. One *can* say, however, that a collective bond which incorporates this plurality of domains as a feature of its ideal, rather than emphasising one domain at the expense of the others, offers a greater range of resources for softening the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Indeed, it may be that the proper goal is to increase the number of domains rather than reduce them or rank them, i.e. expand the political common.

#### 4. Expanding the Political Common

It follows from the definition in Chapter 1 that to ‘expand’ the political common would be to increase the number of important common problems which are assumed to exist and be in need of address. From a political-bond perspective, this would be advantageous because it offers further opportunities for collective positioning and the construction of ‘people like us’ which, if understood at least in some cases in transnational, potentially European-wide terms, and if accompanied by the appropriate sense of the plausibility of a political project, could advance the degree to which a European polity ‘makes sense’ to its citizens. While it is usually unwise to speculate on the future course of political contestation, since arguably human freedom is dependent on the substance of politics being resistant to this kind of theorising, nonetheless a few short considerations may be given.

Such expansion of the common could take the form of new problems being articulated in close alignment with the logics of the three domains we have focused on so far, *Economics, Society and the Law* and *Relations between Peoples*. One could imagine further problematisation of economic inequality for example, or of social atomisation, or of various features of international relations (e.g. justifications for the possession of nuclear weapons). This would not in itself advance a political bond supportive of a European polity, but would widen the terrain on which the arguments for such a polity could be made. Expansion of the common could also involve the development of further linkages between these problem domains, such that there is greater facility for the reproblematisation of the problems of one domain according to the logic of another. By promoting the sense that all political problems are linked together, that problems to do with *Relations between Peoples* can be treated as problems of *Economics*, that problems of *Economics* can be treated as problems to do with social relations, the significance of multiple resources for inclusion and exclusion could be underscored. At the same time, of course, the danger of one domain achieving a dominant status could thereby increase: one can imagine the negative possibility, for instance, that large number of problématiques come to be problematised as matters of collective security. There is much to be said for valorising the independence of each domain.

Expansion of the common could also take the form of the development of new problem domains, i.e. new problematisations which bring with them distinctive acts of positioning and sets of assumption. The body of articulated but marginalised problems which we have referred to under the loose heading of *Quality of Life* would be an appropriate

starting-point, particularly given that the EU is already a frequently cited and generally positive point of reference for problems of this kind, and since changes in policy seem to require transnational cooperation to be effective. Pollution and rapid changes to the regional and global environment would have to be treated as more salient problems than they were at the time of interview. The kinds of positioning associated with a domain such as this might tend to be globalist, since it can plausibly be argued that the consequences of such problems are evenly spread across all humans, ultimately if not in the short term. A globalist, universalist perspective would be quite contrary to a political bond if replicated across all domains, since it would undermine the agonistic dynamic and point towards depoliticised administration. Even if just found in one domain, it might tempt a retreat from those matters of common concern where an adversarial dimension is more to the fore. The protection of flora and fauna, for example, represents a cause which most will agree is worthy and on which adversaries tend to be few in number. One can imagine that the reassuring moral certitude which this invites – the confidence of being ‘on the right side’ – might prove all too alluring and might divert political engagement away from other, more contentious, domains. Nonetheless as one strand amongst a plurality of domains, a more universalist positioning of this kind could provide a valuable counterpoint to some of the acts of positioning we have encountered.

Something which is not problematised in any depth in our empirical material, and yet which is clearly a matter of some political significance, is the reliability of the news media. Participants were certainly readers of newspapers and listeners to the radio (see the Methodological Appendix), and displayed levels of knowledge and sophistication in their discussions which indicate an active encounter with such news sources (note for instance detailed references to the Middle-East conflict, or to specific cases of corruption in public life). But the reliability of these sources is barely problematised, other than a few very general remarks about how ‘you can’t trust anything in the newspapers’, how editors just want to sell more copies, or how the ‘only things you can be sure about are the girls and the sport’. The reliability of the media is a problématique which does not reduce easily to any of the domains that have been discussed so far, and which might in principle form the basis for a distinctive discursive repertoire. One can imagine formulations for the political subjects as those who ‘want to get to the truth of matters’, demarcated against those who are thoughtless or who are actively seeking to dupe or mislead the ‘people like us’. Román in Plzeň is not the only participant to note that different TV programmes and different newspapers ‘narrate things differently’, and that one needs to keep an eye on several. Of course, problematisation

of this kind would by no means point necessarily towards the worth of a political project centred on a European polity to tackle such problems, but one can suppose that transnational comparisons might come quite naturally in this domain: interest in what the media in other European member-states are saying, and the extent to which they are telling a different story, plus the possibilities available for becoming less reliant on just one set of news sources, would seem fully conceivable. However – and this is a point rarely made in discussions of the possibility of a European public sphere – this widening of the sense of space would only be likely as an outcome of problematisation, and not simply as a consequence of some general broadening of horizons and widening of the sphere of curiosity.

### Some Conditions for the Achievement of a Political Bond

Our ideal of a political bond has highlighted some of the ways in which current patterns of discursive practice serve to undermine the extent to which a European polity ‘makes sense’ to those who are ruled through its institutions. The general approach throughout this work has been to focus not so much on questions to do with the EU’s formal democratic accountability or the quality of representation but on the importance of ‘ways of talking’ in opening out certain expectations and possibilities while closing down others. In the field of EU studies there is an enthusiasm for conceptualising the weaknesses of the contemporary EU in terms of ‘deficits’: notice has been given of the existence of a ‘democratic deficit’, a ‘federal deficit’, a ‘constitutional deficit’ and, more generally, a ‘legitimacy deficit’.<sup>12</sup> Although these are contested terms, they generally point consistently towards institutional factors:<sup>13</sup> to the weak ability of citizens to exert influence on decision-making at the European level, the untransparency of certain EU institutions, or to the ambiguous and unsettled distribution of powers between them. Our analysis, though not generally incompatible with these, notes that formal opportunities and structures require social practices that consolidate them, and points therefore to what one might call a ‘deficit of discursive resources’, to the lack of suitable ways of seeing the political world such as to foster the kind of collective bond appropriate to a European polity. From this has been deduced the importance of making available new types of discursive resource more

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<sup>12</sup> For some discussion see e.g. Bellamy and Castiglione, 'Democracy, Sovereignty and the Constitution of the European Union'.

<sup>13</sup> The main exception would be one usage of the term ‘democratic deficit’, where this refers to the absence of a ‘European demos’, i.e. to the debate discussed in Chapter 1.

conducive to such a bond. If change in discursive practice is necessary then one may properly wonder what might lead to it. Who, one may ask, are to be the discursive architects? Who is equipped to fashion new formulations for political subjects and opponents, to foster transnational comparisons, to conceive plausible means (some centred on the EU) to address collective problems, and to explore new kinds of problematisation?

Successful discursive architects would need to be visible, well-financed, credible and non-transient. They would need to be in a position to set their own agenda, undominated by the very political forces which they might wish to oppose. They would not necessarily need to have direct access to formal political power, but political institutions would need to be sufficiently receptive to respond to the demands for which they were successful in mobilising. There are obvious candidates for this architectural role, but several have significant drawbacks. Certainly a top-down approach does not seem plausible: the European Commission has neither the economic nor the reputational resources to act as a discursive architect. The traditional media may have the requisite credibility and visibility, but their capacity to lead innovation in the ways suggested is questionable. Media outlets, as several scholars have noted, are concentrated in ever fewer hands and run increasingly as commodities which must be managed to maximise shareholder value. In the ever greater competition for advertising revenue, clear parameters are set to their editorial line, and it is by no means clear that the innovations in content which would be necessary represent a reliable source of readership-based profits: there is likely to be more money in appealing to existing discursive practices, in ‘telling people what they want to hear.’ The public-sector media likewise follow increasingly a commercial model, seeking to maximise their market share so as to stave off the threat of cut-backs. While discursive innovation of some kind will always emerge in such settings – as a theoretical necessity, given the fluidity of language, and as the amplification of changes that originate elsewhere – and while the market will continue to reward on a smaller scale those media outfits that resist such trends, the pattern on the mass scale in the immediate future is more likely to be towards the depoliticisation of content, towards simplification, sensationalism and the theatricalising of news and public affairs.<sup>14</sup> The new digital-based media ostensibly offer a more promising venue for change, though whether discursive architects will be found here is a matter of some doubt too. While the broader influence of internet bloggers is increasing, there remains a

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<sup>14</sup> On these and other points to do with the media in contemporary democracy see: Thomas Meyer and Lew Hinchman, *Media Democracy: How the Media Colonise Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Colin Crouch, *Post-Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

significant ‘digital divide’ in the wider society as regards computer literacy and access to equipment. Moreover, the selectivity with which information can be accessed encourages internet users to immerse themselves in the familiar, reducing their exposure to sources of potential innovation.<sup>15</sup>

The most convincing source of such discursive change would seem to be the same as it has been since the arrival of mass suffrage: the political movement or party, headed by one or several ‘charismatic individuals’, and responding to the pressures of smaller organised groups. It is actors of this kind which are best placed to provide alternative ways of conceptualising not just individual issues but whole domains of problems, and to do so consistently over periods of time. Social movements, in which much hope has been invested by those critical of the status quo, have an important auxiliary role to play. As independent actors, their impact tends to be hampered by the specificity of their focus and by various organisational impediments, but as influences on political parties they may be effective in disseminating the discursive resources which can form the basis of a political programme, and in pressuring the party to pursue that programme.<sup>16</sup> Small-distribution publications can have the same function, as may think-tanks – depending of course on their access to sources of income that allow them sufficient freedom to innovate. It is not necessary, in order to be supportive of a European polity, that the political parties at the centre of this network be organised on a European scale; parties organised at a national or sub-national level could be equally or more effective, provided they directed at least some of their claims to the European level.<sup>17</sup>

Mass political parties have traditionally – until the 1980s at least – been crucial innovators of the kind required. They have served both to coin ideas and to project the will to realise them, thereby endowing them with a dynamism which few other actors can match.<sup>18</sup> Now, of course, it is widely observed that such parties are in a state of crisis and perhaps long-term decline, as membership rates fall, partisan support ebbs away and funding

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<sup>15</sup> On the dangers of ‘cascade’ effects, see Cass Sunstein, *Republic.com* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, final chapter, and Dryzek, *Deliberative Democracy and Beyond*. On the challenges that face social movements, see Claus Offe, ‘Reflections on the Institutional Self-Transformation of Movement Politics: A Tentative Stage Model’, in Russell J. Dalton and Manfred Kuechler (eds.), *Challenging the Political Order: New Social and Political Movements in Western Democracies* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

<sup>17</sup> One should look in other words for the ‘Europeanisation’ of domestic political actors as much as the emergence of new transnational ones, a point which has been well made by those studying contentious politics: see Imig and Tarrow, ‘Political Contention in a Europeanising Polity’.

<sup>18</sup> In the suggestive words of Gramsci, the role of the party is ‘at one and the same time the organiser and the active, operative expression’ of a collective will. ‘Brief Notes on Machiavelli’s Politics’, in ‘The Modern Prince’, Antonio Gramsci (ed.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971).

sources become increasingly unpredictable.<sup>19</sup> In the EU-zone and elsewhere, politics at the elite level it seems has become professionalised, with loyalty to party leaders increasing at the expense of the representative function, and a dislocation emerging between the party leadership and its circle of advisors and favoured lobbies on the one hand and the traditional base on the other. As the leadership seeks to adapt to the media environment and tries to anticipate its cues, political messages are reduced to the banal, and the ‘body politics’ of actor-politicians comes to replace the ideas-led ‘briefcase politics’ of the traditional party.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, ordinary citizens are deemed to be increasingly sceptical or apathetic towards these traditional channels of political activity, and more inclined to act individually or through charity organisations than to seek collective political voice.<sup>21</sup> While there is truth in such claims, much does seem to depend upon some questionable assumptions – both in the scholarship on this subject and amongst party actors themselves – about the political (dis)inclinations of ordinary citizens. Given that relatively few mass parties in contemporary Europe address in a distinctive fashion the full range of political problems discussed in our empirical material, it seems premature to dismiss their potential appeal, and therefore unwarranted to treat as inevitable these moves towards a more elite-style politics. Our material provides numerous expressions of political engagement, and it may be that the widespread assumption of the apathy of citizens is just one more discursive motif to be challenged. To the extent that disengagement *is* a serious phenomenon, the convergence in many western democracies of the major parties at the middle of the political spectrum has most likely been an important contributory factor, and parties which diverge from this political consensus may achieve a greater level of mobilisation.<sup>22</sup> To seek a structural explanation for this ideological convergence is to rule out the possibility of actor-led political change, and is thus an anti-democratic move which one may choose to resist.

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Mair, 'Ruling the Void?'

<sup>20</sup> As Crouch puts it, ‘the headline was the father of the sound bite.’ (Crouch, *Post-Democracy*, p.47.) Meyer speaks of ‘presentism’ and ‘the tyranny of media time over political time,’ and emphasises the pre-emptive tendency in policy-making, concluding that ‘even if a more critical political consciousness should emerge in a citizen body, its members’ opportunities for influencing politics would already have been limited in advance.’ Meyer and Hinchman, *Media Democracy*, p.104, p.108.

<sup>21</sup> See Mair, 'Ruling the Void?'; Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics*; also the literature on political cynicism and distrust, e.g. Russell J. Dalton, *Democratic Challenges, Democratic Choices: the Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Of course, these are not all parties that one would want to endorse – the success of certain ‘right-wing populist’ parties in recent years can be treated as an expression of the same. Cf. Mouffe, *On the Political*. Also on populism, see Laclau, *On Populist Reason*; Cas Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition*, 39/4 (2004); Francisco Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2005).

By conceptualising a political bond in terms of discursive practice, one invites the charge of having underplayed the importance of the material world, of the things that one can stub one's toe on. Highlighting the role of political parties as 'discursive architects' is one way to introduce a more tangible, organisational component. Another is to consider the kind of institutional forms which might be required for a political bond to be maintained. Although institutions cannot themselves establish the sense of the common which may be the condition of their viability, arguably they are in a position to promote it. Without institutions receptive to political claims a political bond would probably melt away: an agonist model of democracy requires that the outcome of the agonistic contest have genuine consequences for decision-making.<sup>23</sup> While formal institutions and democratic opportunities are meaningless without the discursive practices which animate them, so such practices need means by which they are to be amplified, subjected to debate and converted into policies that regulate the common. One may turn briefly therefore to the question of what kind of 'governance regime' would be suitable for sustaining a European polity underpinned by a political bond.<sup>24</sup>

The literature on EU regimes, i.e. on the current status and projected destination of European political integration, can be divided into two broad families: those visions that look to a polycentric or 'compound' Europe, and those that look to a centred or 'simple' (though usually federal) Europe.<sup>25</sup> In a compound or polycentric regime, no single branch of government, either at the national or the European level, has supreme authority over the others. Supranational, national and regional actors coexist with one another in a condition of mutual checking and balancing, sometimes described as a 'multi-level governance system'. As Sergio Fabbrini puts it, 'one might say that the imperative of a compound democracy is to promote an *anti-hegemonic political order*.'<sup>26</sup> The distribution of powers may be fairly

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<sup>23</sup> See e.g. James Tully, 'A New Kind of Europe? Democratic Integration in the European Union', *Queen's University Belfast Constitutionalism Web-Papers* (4, 2006), p.6: 'What holds the diverse members together and generates bonds of belonging to the community as a whole across ongoing differences and disagreements is that the prevailing institutions, procedures and norms of integration are always open to free and democratic negotiation and experimentation with alternatives by those subject to them.'

<sup>24</sup> On the distinction between 'regime' and 'polity', see Richard Bellamy and Dario Castiglione, 'The Uses of Democracy: Reflections on the European Democratic Deficit', in Erik O. Eriksen and John E. Fossum (eds.), *Democracy in the European Union: Integration through Deliberation?* (London: Routledge, 2000), and Bellamy and Castiglione, 'The Normative Challenge of a European Polity'.

<sup>25</sup> There are many ways to express the same and related distinctions. Sergio Fabbrini contrasts 'compound democracies' with 'fusion-of-power models' and associates both the US and the EU with the former (Sergio Fabbrini, 'Madison in Brussels: The EU and the US as Compound Democracies', *European Political Science*, 4 (2005)), while Glyn Morgan speaks of 'post-sovereign' versus 'sovereign' models and associates both the US and the ideal EU with the latter (Morgan, *The Idea of a European Superstate*, p.111). Leaving aside the categorisation question, Morgan's distinction is misleading in that it may be read as implying a clash of views on the principle of popular sovereignty – the 'democratic principle' as it was referred to in the Introduction – when in fact neither side need abandon this principle, and neither side generally does.

<sup>26</sup> Fabbrini, 'Madison in Brussels', p.190.

stable and coherent, with a constitutional settlement that preserves much of the existing member-state governmental apparatus, as in the legalist visions of Weiler and Neil MacCormick.<sup>27</sup> Alternatively it may be characterised by considerable flux and asymmetry, with competences allocated and reallocated as part of an ongoing process, perhaps on an issue-by-issue basis, as in Philippe Schmitter's *condominio* model or the republican model of 'mixed government' endorsed by authors such as Tully, Bellamy and Castiglione.<sup>28</sup> In such a vision, it is precisely the inability of any single actor to achieve dominance over the others which is celebrated: such a regime may be said to secure 'freedom as non-domination' for its citizens.<sup>29</sup> Whether fixed or in flux, the distribution of competences in these perspectives does not amount to a hierarchy. A centred vision, by contrast, involves replicating on a larger scale the model of government broadly associated with the nation-state. While certain powers would probably be delegated to national and regional levels, following the federal model, ultimate decision-making authority would be located at the European level. This vision has recently been described favourably by Glyn Morgan, in his endorsement of a European 'superstate'.<sup>30</sup>

With what kind of regime is the ideal of a political bond compatible? One's instinct is to say that a useful conceptualisation of 'the people' who are to share in a common polity should be compatible with *any* of the possible institutional configurations that citizens might wish to establish for that polity. The question of 'peoplehood', one wants to say, must be kept separate from the question of institutional regime, for one is a question of boundaries and the other is a question of the internal distribution of power, and to mix the two is muddled thinking. However, we have argued that the question of 'peoplehood' is properly understood not as a membership question (where to set boundaries) but as a question of the collective bond (how to make sense of the life in common), and that a sense of shared predicament deriving from the appraisal of common substantive problems, together with the expectation that something collectively may be done about those problems, may plausibly be made the basis of such a bond. Once one imagines the bond in this political way, the

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<sup>27</sup> J.H.H. Weiler, 'Federalism without Constitutionalism: Europe's *Sonderweg*', in Kalypso Nicolaidis and Robert Howse (eds.), *The Federal Vision: Legitimacy and Levels of Governance in the United States and the European Union* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Neil MacCormick, *Questioning Sovereignty: Law, State, and Nation in the European Commonwealth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter, 'Examining the Present Euro-Polity with the Help of Past Theories', in Gary Marks et al. (eds.), *Governance in the European Union* (London: Sage, 1996). Bellamy and Castiglione, 'Democracy, Sovereignty and the Constitution of the European Union', Tully, 'A New Kind of Europe?'

<sup>29</sup> Bellamy, *Liberalism and Pluralism*; Pettit, *Republicanism*.

<sup>30</sup> Morgan, *The Idea of a European Superstate*.

questions of polity and regime become difficult to separate, and one needs to examine more closely the extent to which different types of regime are appropriate.

The political model advanced by Weiler, and the conceptualisation of the collective bond on which it is premised, was discussed in Chapter 1. His polycentric vision (shared in large part by MacCormick) is intended to balance the preservation of cultural traditions at the national level ('Eros') with the veneration of humanist-rationalist values at the European level ('Civilisation'), and this balance is to be achieved by ensuring that political dominance is exercised neither by the nation-state nor by the institutions of the EU. Aside from the doubts raised earlier concerning the appropriateness of such goals, Weiler's vision seems only weakly compatible with the idea of a political bond, since it is broadly accepting of things as they stand. For him, Europe's 'unique brand of constitutional federalism – the status quo – represents not only its most original political asset but also its deepest set of values,' and that which 'works' need not be 'fixed'.<sup>31</sup> It may be that some fixing is necessary however. Realising the possibility of a political project designed to tackle problems to do with *Economics*, for example, may require alterations to the existing institutional regime, in which both the European Court of Justice and the Commission have been strongly able and willing to pursue policies which weaken the responsiveness of the economy to democratic control.<sup>32</sup> Many of the problems which, in our empirical material, were constructed as facing 'people like us' may perhaps find little relief under the current institutional order, in which the 'four freedoms' of the market are enshrined in Community law and interpreted often (though not always) rather expansively by the ECJ. The assumption, found frequently in these interviews, that the current EU is little more than the cause and/or expression of a range of economic problems is unlikely to be shifted without some departure at least from existing arrangements: material changes, as well as changes in discursive practice, are likely to be required.<sup>33</sup> Thus a polycentric perspective which simply celebrates the product of integration as it stands seems inadequate even to the most minimal version of a political bond.

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<sup>31</sup> Weiler, 'Federalism without Constitutionalism', p.61, p.70. Weiler is not the only major scholar to suggest that the EU needs no more than minor institutional adjustments at most: cf. Moravcsik, 'In Defence of the 'Democratic Deficit''. Or, outside academia, Commission of European Communities, 'Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: The Commission's Contribution to the Period of Reflection and Beyond: Plan-D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate ', (2005).

<sup>32</sup> On this familiar topic, see e.g. Magette, *What Is the European Union?*.

<sup>33</sup> Material changes may also advance some of the changes in discursive practice discussed in the previous section. It can be imagined for example that a European-level system of taxation, with contributions levied according to individual wealth rather than national quota, would help to substitute class-based for national positioning, and would encourage other European countries to be treated not as competing actors (as was the

The centred vision proposed by Morgan, involving the creation of a European ‘superstate’ in which ultimate authority is at the European level, albeit specific powers are dispersed in federal form, clearly offers the potential for a more responsive and politicised regime. In principle it implies the combination of further supranational control of those policy-areas (or problem domains) in which a transnational perspective makes sense to citizens with the retention of more local decision-making in other areas. Thus problems to do with *Society and the Law*, for which a European-level approach is not obviously necessary, and indeed for which the invocation of wider explanatory factors so as to justify policy-making at a higher level might undermine what sense of agency exists, could be left to national or subnational institutions while problems to do with *Economics* and *Relations between Peoples* could be tackled at a transnational level. The fairly fixed, coherent division of competences which a federal system demands, perhaps laid out in a constitution, is less in tune with the political-bond perspective, since it has been stressed that the problems which form the substance of politics are always a ‘moving target’. The political common is composed of *problematizations*, constructed phenomena which evolve across time, some emerging and others receding, and which for normative reasons it may be desirable to seek to multiply. Such a difficulty could nonetheless perhaps be circumvented with a process of periodic constitutional reappraisal and amendment.

Specifically the kind of superstate which Morgan proposes is not the most apt from our perspective though. In seeking justifications for a European state, he puts overwhelming emphasis on one particular problem in one particular domain: the ability to mobilise substantial military force in order to respond to external threats in the international system. Only this justification, he argues, meets the three Rawlsian criteria of publicity, accessibility and sufficiency. Reliance on the capabilities of the US is too compromising a position, suggests Morgan, and only by collectively building up European resources can the EU’s member-states acquire the necessary means of self-defence. Yet advocating a process of military build-up may well have quite negative consequences. If our analysis has been correct, what should be a source of concern is the ease with which ‘enemy-peoples’ are constructed in discussion of such problems: the threats, it tends to be assumed, are posed not to individuals like ‘me’ by other individuals, but to ‘us’ by ‘them’, where ‘they’ are assumed to have aggressive and irrational intentions and to be living not just far away but also ‘here’ in the home environment. Quite aside from the question of whether a European-level

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case in these discussions whenever the finances of the EU were raised) but as environments in which similar economic problems and struggles unfold.

approach would be welcomed, and how it would overcome the supposed existence of enemies within the home environment, a policy which involved strengthening military capacity might well have the consequence of increasing the popular appeal of preventive wars designed to crush ‘them’ before ‘they’ strike ‘us’. As noted in Chapter 5, such a view is already found occasionally in the British discussions, i.e. in that country whose military capabilities are, of the three, already most advanced and exercised. As well as potentially negative consequences in international terms, the capacity to maintain an uncompromising stance towards opponents outside the community would, one can imagine, encourage the adoption of a similar stance towards those *within* the community with whom these external opponents are readily associated, entrenching a fearful perspective which posits enemies within and without. From a political-bond perspective, what one wants rather to do is *undermine* the positioning of opponents as enemies and increase the plausibility of compromise. While an increase in military capacity might undoubtedly have certain benefits for the EU in terms of freedom from US influence, and perhaps more widely in terms of the advantages of a multipolar world order, it seems highly risky to propose it as the sole justification for a European polity. Nor, it should be added, is it clear that the gains justify such risks. Morgan is right to identify terrorism as one of the key security threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and to this one might add two more: dependence on foreign powers for energy sources, and the possibility of destabilising climate change.<sup>34</sup> It is by no means obvious that any of these threats is best met by the development of conventional military capabilities. Perhaps a better objective – to speculate further – is a European-level approach not to defence but to non-military foreign policy, the achievement of which might usefully serve to undermine the subject-position of ‘the West’, and to sever its racial undertones.

By basing the argument for a European superstate on security alone, Morgan also abandons too easily the difficult question of how a European polity should relate to the economic sphere. As suggested by our empirical material, economic problems form a large proportion of those which are constructed in discussion and seem to have an immediate salience to participants; any attempt to found a European polity on a political rationale, rather than some cultural or values-based one, cannot afford to sidestep this crucial set of problems. A European polity based on a political bond would need to offer some possibilities for the redress of problems such as these, which are so widely assumed to be of a transnational kind. Morgan attempts to discount their significance for European integration by distinguishing

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<sup>34</sup> Morgan, *The Idea of a European Superstate*, Conclusion.

between ‘principled’ and ‘unprincipled’ arguments for a European polity. His suggestion is that all concerned parties are likely to agree on the goal of ‘welfare’, but to disagree (because of ‘partisan policy preferences’) on the means by which they believe it can be best achieved.<sup>35</sup> Since disagreement is restricted to the means rather than the ends, any argument for a European polity which made reference to its value in promoting a market-oriented or state-oriented economy would be an unprincipled one, would fall foul of the Rawlsian principle of publicity, and would therefore need to be discounted.<sup>36</sup> However, from a political-bond perspective, the issue of ‘freedom from non-domination’ which Morgan rightly raises with regard to security issues, though from which he draws questionable conclusions, is just as relevant to the *Economics* domain, since here too – if one is to take the principle of popular sovereignty seriously – what is at stake is the extent to which citizens can exert democratic control over the decisions which directly affect them. Means and ends are indivisible, here as in matters of security.

While a federal regime *of some kind* would not be incompatible with a political bond, it is probably the second of the two polycentric or compound models which is the most appropriate. Bellamy and Castiglione summarise it as ‘democratic liberalism’. In this perspective, powers are dispersed across a range of institutional actors, creating a regime which is multifocal. All actors must be sufficiently empowered as to be able to pursue their political goals in agonistic confrontation – no doubt an appropriate principle with which to address the weak sense of agency expressed in our empirical material, particularly with regard to the *Economics* domain, and to make the institutional changes needed to support a counter-view. The agonistic struggle is restrained by the principle of *audi alteram partem*, ‘always listen to the other side’,<sup>37</sup> a principle which neatly captures the distinction between ‘enemy’ and ‘adversary’. In tune with a problem-oriented approach, and a concern with the frequent irrationalising of the opponents in matters to do with *Relations between Peoples*, democratic liberalism envisages negotiation based on compromise so as to achieve mutually acceptable solutions to shared problems. Such compromise is to be reached by parties justifying their position in terms that the others can recognise (the ‘politics of reciprocity’); it requires a spirit of reasonableness by all parties, but need not aim at the fulfilment of a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Chapter 3. See also pp.155ff.

<sup>36</sup> ‘The aim of the publicity requirement is to filter out conceptions of the good that not all Europeans have a good reason to share. The precise role of the state in the provision of life’s ‘necessaries and conveniences’ is an issue best left up to democratic majorities. It cannot form the grounds for the very existence of a European polity.’ Ibid. p.160.

<sup>37</sup> Tully, ‘The Unfreedom of the Moderns’, p.218.

rational consensus.<sup>38</sup> ‘Liberty’, as Bellamy and Castiglione suggest, ‘is seen as a civic achievement rather than a natural attribute,’<sup>39</sup> and because no institutional actor is able to enjoy an enduring position of hegemony over the others, the ideal of freedom as non-domination can be realistically pursued. This perspective also rejects the desire for a ‘grand settlement’ of constitutional questions, preferring to see these as part of an ongoing and evolving process of political practice.<sup>40</sup> This chimes with our theoretical emphasis on the point that discursive practices can, do and should be encouraged to evolve, and our empirical observation that the different ways of talking associated with different sets of problems are varied enough to make difficult a final delineation of boundaries.<sup>41</sup> It corresponds to the rejection of an over-arching identity which all citizens are to adopt, and helps avoid the tendency to think in terms of ‘Europeans’ or ‘nationals’ and to make decision-making authority correspond to these categories without sensitivity to the issue-area in question.

One of the most developed visions of a multifocal regime for the EU is to be found in the work of Charles Sabel and his co-authors.<sup>42</sup> In their reading, the EU is characterised as an emerging ‘directly-deliberative polyarchy’, a form of government in which power is decentralised to sub-units of the polity so as to give greater voice and freedom to local actors, while at the same time enlarging their frame of reference and the knowledge resources of the wider polity by means of information pooling and peer review. Particular prominence is given to new decision-making methods such as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), in which the ongoing assessment, comparison and political reappraisal of policies, rather than the use of centralised directives and ECJ overview, guides the policy process. As is evident in the moniker they choose, Sabel *et al.* generally ground their perspective in *deliberative* democratic theory: theirs is not however a strongly consensus-oriented model,<sup>43</sup> and from the

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<sup>38</sup> Bellamy and Castiglione, 'Democracy, Sovereignty and the Constitution of the European Union'; Bellamy, *Liberalism and Pluralism*.

<sup>39</sup> Bellamy and Castiglione, 'Democracy, Sovereignty and the Constitution of the European Union', p.181.

<sup>40</sup> See e.g. Tully, 'The Unfreedom of the Moderns', p.218.

<sup>41</sup> For a historical perspective on the question of coherence and the boundaries of polities, see Wagner, 'Crises of Modernity'.

<sup>42</sup> See in particular Charles F. Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, 'Learning from Difference: The New Architecture of Experimentalist Governance in the European Union', *European Governance Papers*, C-07-02 (2007); Joshua Cohen and Charles F. Sabel, 'Sovereignty and Solidarity: EU and US', in David Trubek and Jonathan Zeitlin (eds.), *Governing Work and Welfare in a New Economy: European and American Experiments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Oliver Gerstenberg and Charles F. Sabel, 'Directly-Deliberative Polyarchy: An Institutional Ideal for Europe?' in Renaud Dehousse and Christian Joerges (eds.), *Good Governance in Europe's Integrated Market* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). These accounts draw on ideas articulated for the US context in Joshua Cohen and Charles F. Sabel, 'Directly-Deliberative Polyarchy', *European Law Journal*, 3/4 (1997); Michael C. Dorf and Charles F. Sabel, 'A Constitution of Democratic Experimentalism', *Columbia Law Review*, 98/2 (1998).

<sup>43</sup> As Sabel and Dorf make explicit, the guiding objective is not to replace conflict with consensus but to enrich the adversarial debate. Dorf and Sabel, 'A Constitution of Democratic Experimentalism', p.288.

perspective of a political bond it has a number of features which are attractive. Firstly it is firmly rooted in the American pragmatist tradition, and is therefore problem-oriented in its focus. The perspective assumes that citizens are linked to one another by a certain level of basic agreement regarding the existence of common problems in need of address, even if there exists diversity of opinion regarding what can and should be done.<sup>44</sup> It rests, one might say, on the premise that there is a *political common*, and that regularity of cultural attributes, values or clearly defined interests need not be supposed – indeed, that it would be undesirable. Secondly, the perspective combines this focus on everyday problems and local experimentalism with an emphasis on the importance of *comparisons* as a means by which to generalise to a wider context. It is precisely the idea that others living outside the home environment should be recognised as facing similar problems, and that a common framework for the development of remedies may be needed, which in this perspective provides the point of mediation between the world of daily experience and the broader life of the polity.<sup>45</sup> One can imagine then that an institutional regime constructed on these principles would be conducive to a political bond, since it would foster the systematic collection and publicising of transnational comparative data. This is, to a degree, what the OMC already encourages. To be sure, such a regime is insufficient on its own to guarantee the emergence of a political bond. As suggested above, comparisons which set sub-units of the polity in competition with one another may be subversive of a sense of the collective, and may be tenable only by the evocation of an alternative bond in substitute. Furthermore, when the notion of ‘best practice’ is taken to imply that policies may be right or wrong, regardless of the context of their application (as certain applications of the OMC sometimes suggest), or when the criteria by which ‘performance’ is measured are unproblematised such that they weigh consistently in favour of a narrow range of practices, then such a regime acquires a depoliticising tendency which is unfaithful to the pragmatist tradition. It remains the role of discursive architects to contest exactly these points, and to ensure that the possibility of far-reaching change does not get lost in local experimentalism. They would do so, however, in conditions which are favourable to them, given the regime’s responsiveness to political pressure, the absence of an overweening concentration of power, and the prevalence of comparative data.

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<sup>44</sup> A clear statement can be found in Cohen and Sabel, 'Directly-Deliberative Polyarchy', p.323.

<sup>45</sup> Cohen and Sabel, 'Directly-Deliberative Polyarchy', p.314.

Compound-republican visions of how the EU's institutional regime might look have been elaborated by various authors in some depth and need not be further reproduced here.<sup>46</sup> While our argument does not stand or fall by them, it is nonetheless worth addressing some of the criticisms which are frequently levelled. One of the principal objections is that a polycentric state is an externally weak state: its multiple centres of power disrupt the ability to develop and organise a coherent military force with which to defend its borders and project its interests overseas. It is for precisely this reason, so the argument runs, that republican states such as were to be found in early Renaissance Italy, or during the American Confederacy, died out in the early modern period, to be replaced by liberal sovereign states. Agonism, as it is now called, is but a short step (if it is anything) from crippling factionalism, while 'directly-deliberative polyarchy' is no basis on which to secure a polity. As Morgan puts the point, 'it is difficult to understand how Europe could even begin to match the power of the United States without becoming a unitary federal polity,' and 'those who refuse to accept this conclusion are either deluding themselves or they are prepared to see Europe remain a weak and dependent power.'<sup>47</sup> Yet rather a lot turns here on the meaning of power, and if the US is to be put forward as the model then one may fairly wonder whether US foreign policy has really been characterised (even in the post-Cold War period) by the exercise of power rather than simple military force. The 2003 invasion of Iraq undoubtedly bore the hallmarks of foreign policy conducted by a sovereign power – it enjoyed strong consensus at home facilitated by the silencing of dissident voices in the administration; it was unconstrained by the search for multilateral approval abroad; and it was launched using a well-organised and technologically advanced military machine under the direct control of the Commander in Chief. But, insofar as one gauges power by the ability to realise one's objectives, historians may judge it as a grand expression of weakness. Indeed, it may be that this is attributable precisely to some of these trappings of strong state sovereignty: a government forced to work within the constraints of a polycentric regime might have found it less easy to push through such a policy. Nor is the comparison with pre-modern republicanism necessarily fruitful: international law has developed some way since then, and the kind of threats against which international law provides no protection (such as terrorism) are the same threats against which conventional military power is of little use.

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<sup>46</sup> See the works of Bellamy, Bellamy and Castiglione, and Tully, all cited above. Likewise, proposing that the EU should be seen as a compound republic in the Madisonian tradition, see Fabbrini, 'Madison in Brussels'.

<sup>47</sup> Morgan, *The Idea of a European Superstate*, p.149, p.161. The broader argument is inspired by Hendrik Spruyt, *The Sovereign State and Its Competitors: An Analysis of Systems Change* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Internally, a compound-republican regime raises other questions. There is a danger that it attaches insufficient emphasis to the virtue of simplicity, that a bewildering arrangement of balances, checks, partnerships and lines of contestation emerges under the fuzzy heading of 'network governance'. In such a system, perhaps even more so than in the system of hierarchical bureaucracy that emerged with the Westphalian state, the opportunity to influence decision-making may go unnoticed. Significantly, the democratic experimentalism favoured by Sabel and his collaborators, while it is intended to facilitate greater participation, is not presented as *intrinsically* democratic, since deliberative polyarchy may exist even in an institutional setting quite unmoved by the broader currents of society.<sup>48</sup> The EU's system of 'comitology' for example can conceivably be read as deliberative, but few would want to claim that it expresses the full range of adversarial encounters played out in contemporary populations. A multifocal regime may increase the responsiveness of institutions, but arguably this alone does not democratise them. This point links to the difficult question of participation. Republican approaches are generally considered, by advocates and critics alike, to require a greater degree of popular participation in political activity than is commonly the case in liberal states, whether justified on the grounds of individual development or the protection of individual and collective freedom.<sup>49</sup> The objection to this may come in two forms. In one version, it is questioned (as a critique to desirability) whether there is the widespread will for greater participation, whether the coercion that might be required to ensure it would be acceptable, and whether wider participation would have favourable effects on the kinds of policy enacted. In a second version (as a critique to practicality), it is suggested that, whether or not such will exists, it is unclear how, in large modern states as opposed to medieval city-states, further participation could be meaningfully accommodated.<sup>50</sup>

These objections it should be possible for us to sidestep, since the argument for a political bond hinges less on the practice of participation itself than on equipping people with the expectations that could point towards participation. This is, one might say, a more basic condition for the eventual renewal of democracy, and for which institutional structures can only provide the enabling environment. We have suggested that certain kinds of discursive practice are more compatible with a European polity than others, and have stressed the importance of strengthening those that are favourable; we have not, however, made

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Cohen and Sabel, 'Sovereignty and Solidarity: EU and US', pp.730ff., and Sabel and Zeitlin, 'Learning from Difference', p.46.

<sup>49</sup> For one overview of these two strands of republican thought, see Held, *Models of Democracy*.

<sup>50</sup> In the EU context, such arguments can be found in Moravcsik, 'In Defence of the 'Democratic Deficit''.

participation of an intense, day-to-day kind a central feature of our perspective, still less suggested that lay discussions be monitored as the laboratories of rational consensu. Forms of political discussion seem – amongst taxi-drivers at least – not to be unnatural occurrences, given the cross-references made in the interviews to earlier discussions amongst participants, and this practice one would want to see maintained and indeed extended. But the extent to which it is followed up by participation in policy-making itself is a separate issue, and one which goes beyond this work.<sup>51</sup> What is necessary from our perspective is that, at the appropriate opportunities, the solid assumption be expressed that ‘people like us’ can have an effect on policy-making if ‘we’ want to, combined with a basic level of tolerant restraint concerning the kind of action that ‘we’ might want to pursue, and combined furthermore with the existence of an institutional regime which is sufficiently responsive to the efforts of those who do wish to get involved. To the extent that the discursive practices examined here diverge from the ideal in certain crucial respects, the solution is likely to lie not so much in experiments in further popular participation – intriguing as these may be – but in the arrival of political movements which set out to challenge popular assumptions and to remake them in positive ways. New discursive resources with which to further the horizon of expectation, rather than new initiatives to get people ‘involved’, are the advance that is needed the most.

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<sup>51</sup> Clearly though, to the extent that a political bond can be associated with participation itself, the logic would be largely instrumental rather than developmental. Such a bond would ‘make sense’ of a European polity not on the (Arendtian) grounds that it provides the arena for the kind of political activity necessary to human flourishing, but on the grounds that it might provide some of the means to address the problems of the political common which people describe as being important to them.

# Conclusion

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‘To constitute and give life to a body politic is to put some things in common,’ writes Pierre Manent. ‘Men are political animals because they “put things in common”. [...] The problem of the Europeans is that they do not know what they want to put in common.’<sup>1</sup> The European demos debate with which we began in Chapter 1 owes much to this uncertainty about the ‘things in common’ appropriate to a European polity. Many authors writing on this question have treated it as a matter of what Europeans *have* in common, or of what they crucially do not; such writers have examined the history of the nation-state and the theoretical accounts of its conditions of emergence, leading to a familiar set of conceptualisations of the collective bond necessary for a viable democratic polity. Bonds of commercial interest, shared culture, or trust and solidarity have been proposed as plausible foundations for a European polity or, alternatively, as theoretical arguments by which to dismiss the possibility of such a polity in the foreseeable future. Other writers have accepted that the question is rather what it is that can be *put* in common, of political justification for the life in common rather than of the pre-political regularity of a certain collectivity. These writers have concluded either that there are insufficient resources for an enterprise such as this on a European scale, or alternatively that there are common values which Europeans share and of which they can be made more aware, or that will emerge in public debate.

Our point of departure was that none of these approaches was satisfactory. To reduce the question to what Europeans *have* in common was to place a strong curtailment on the possibilities for human action and creativity, and to do so unjustifiably. Conversely, to speak of the values which citizens might share and be encouraged to share was to place undue emphasis on consensus and harmony, and in so doing to conceive a collective bond which was either too anodyne or alternatively too limiting. A different conceptualisation of the collective bond was necessary, it was argued: one which paid sufficient attention to affective engagement while allowing that such engagement must sometimes lead to reasonable disagreement. It was on this basis that we foregrounded the importance of political problems, the lines of opposition they inspire, and the possibilities recognised for

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<sup>1</sup> Manent, *A World Beyond Politics?*, p.67.

their settlement. A 'political bond' based on some of the ideas of agonistic democracy was put forward, thereby linking the question of the demos with other debates in the study of European politics to do with the principle of democratic control and its health in contemporary democracy. The question of community in today's Europe, now that the certainties of organised modernity in the nation-state era are gone, was, it was suggested, indivisible from the question of democratic voice and political ends. The demos debate had to be thought about as at the same time a debate about models of democracy. To think about the question of community necessarily involved thinking about the vitality of democratic control over the problems which ordinary people see themselves as facing.

This led us into the area of discursive practice, and for two reasons. Firstly, the nature of political problems and who it is that they affect are not simply matters of objective description: problems can be constructed in different ways, not out of thin air, but from basic material situations which are ambiguous and in need of interpretation. Taking seriously the popular dimension of democracy means taking seriously (though not uncritically) the ways people problematise the world around them, what it is that causes grievance and that they would like to see changed. Secondly, the extent to which democratic control can be exercised on these problems is not just a matter of institutional mechanisms and organisation, important and complex enough though these factors are. Democratic practice is a matter of expectations also, and it is here that language and tacit assumptions can be seen as crucial. In the absence of the resources for formulating problems in ways which permit the possibility of meaningful collective action to address them, a political project such as the European polity is hardly likely to make sense to its intended audience, hardly likely to be received as an augmentation of popular sovereignty. Likewise, the same will be true when certain assumptions encourage that which is problematised to be normalised and accepted. Writers in the republican tradition, adopting a perspective of freedom as non-domination rather than as non-interference, have noted this with particular clarity.<sup>2</sup> To explore the possibility of a political bond, and to use this concept in a diagnostic function, is therefore to study the patterns that people draw on when problematising their common experiences.

Talking in groups with taxi-drivers in Britain, Germany and the Czech Republic gave us the opportunity to explore these ideas in a specific temporal and spatial context. Group discussions were conceived as a site where one could study discursive practices in some depth; the talk of taxi-drivers, it was assumed, would act as a particularly rich site for looking

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Pettit, *Republicanism*, pp.131ff.

at practices that could be found more widely. By setting the concept of a 'political bond' in a reciprocal relationship with this empirical material, it was possible to pursue both description and normative evaluation. We were able to develop the analytical ideas of the political common, of collective positioning and of the plausibility of a political project, in a way such as to make them empirically grounded; at the same time, for the very reason that these analytical tools had been constructed with a theoretical ideal in mind, it was possible to assess our empirical findings with a critical eye. As was seen in Chapter 3, a wide range of common problems was articulated in these discussions, and in quite similar ways across the interview groups. A *political common* seemed to be readily discernible, albeit the attempt to summarise it would inevitably be partial. The importance of accommodating the adversarial dimension in any conceptualisation of the collective bond seemed to be borne out in Chapter 4, where we saw the marked tendency for all formulations of the 'people like us' to be defined in contra-distinction to a set of opponents. We saw some tendency for 'counterparts' in other countries to be evoked by means of transnational comparisons regarding substantive problems, but noted that such practices were domain-specific, and that they rarely corresponded to the contours of any recognisable European polity. In Chapter 5 a connection was drawn between the motifs used to explain problems and the extent to which these problems were assumed susceptible to organised address. It was suggested that the prevalence of localist and globalist motifs, combined with the rarity of more distinctively 'European' ones, served to weaken the plausibility of a *political project* focused on the EU. Indeed, as was then seen in Chapter 6, when the EU was invoked in discussion it was the role of certain policies in the generation and expression of problems which tended to be foregrounded. Our conclusions for a European polity, as these were finalised using our concepts for more critical purpose, highlighted the need for certain changes in discursive practice if such a polity is to be supported by a desirable collective bond.

There is no doubt a sense in which it is counter-intuitive to put forward a *political* bond in an age which many see as characterised by increasing political scepticism and the hollowing of democracy. A whole range of trends negative to lively and purposeful politics has been noted by scholars of national democracy, including the decline of ideological cleavages, the weakening of political parties, the supposed disengagement of non-elites, the trivialisation of the news media, and the withering of practices of collective solidarity and organised bargaining.<sup>3</sup> From this perspective, meaningful politics at the national level seems

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<sup>3</sup> Mair, 'Ruling the Void?', p.33.

to be under assault from all sides, leaving the thought that to propose a politics-based bond for a newly emerging polity is to be severely out of tune with the times. Indeed, some might go further and question whether there was ever a 'golden age' of politics when these notions of popular sovereignty were realised in practice for the good of the polity. To an elitist such as Schumpeter, a 'political bond' would no doubt have seemed quaint indeed: to imagine 'the people' as anything more than an audience would be misguided and probably dangerous. If popular voice was always no more than an illusion or a pleasant ideal, it must be time to 'get real'. Moravcsik is no doubt just one of a large number of political scientists for whom it is important to separate the *ideal* from the *real*.<sup>4</sup> Of course, such authors can easily be accused of falling into a version of the naturalist fallacy, of deciding that the real *is* the ideal, or of choosing their ideals such that they believe the status quo will confirm them. But ultimately, one must wonder, are they not right that one must begin with 'the way things are', and proceed with one's theorising from there?

On this they are indeed correct, and it was precisely this concern for 'the real' which inspired an empirical mode of enquiry. The concepts which one brings to the political world are usefully subjected to empirical scrutiny. In substantial part our disagreement with elitists would be based not on their supposed realism in contrast to our idealism, but on a divergent understanding of what constitutes 'the real.' A brute fact which emerges strongly in this research, and which cannot be overlooked, is the extent to which ordinary people are willing to voice a wide range of common problems about which it is felt that something should be done. In no sense have grievances given way to apathy: grievances remain strongly present. This, combined with the fact that with regard to some problems there is a considerable degree of scepticism concerning what can be achieved through traditional political channels, is what makes the situation urgent, both for nation-state democracy and for the European Union. The kind of assumptions we have traced, whereby a large number of problems are articulated and yet a substantial proportion of them give rise to a sense of impotence, provide ample grounds for illiberal movements to gain support: the so-called 'right-wing populist' movements which have come to prominence in many European countries in recent years may be read as testament to this. Nor can social scientists engaged in the study of European integration afford to dismiss the significance of mass politics so as to focus on elite bargaining: the impact of the results of the 2005 referenda in France and the Netherlands on the

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<sup>4</sup> Moravcsik, 'In Defence of the 'Democratic Deficit'', p.605: 'While perhaps useful for philosophical purposes, the use of idealistic standards no modern government can meet obscures the social context of contemporary European policy-making – the real-world practices of existing governments and the multi-level political system in which they act.'

Constitutional Treaty demonstrate the extent to which the integration process is dependent upon the kinds of discursive practice prevalent amongst the voting public. As many analysts have suggested, these voters were animated not just by the abstract idea of a constitution, but by various associations made between the EU and its policies on the one hand and a whole range of problematised developments on the other, most notably the effects of neoliberal economic policies, of increased rates of immigration into the EU and migration between its member-states, and the prospect of Turkish membership of the Union. It is the very significance of recent and contemporary events connected to popular politics, and of the widespread inclination to articulate common problems, which arguably makes the ‘political bond’ a concept of some relevance. To ignore these issues of popular involvement and to focus purely on the constitutional aspect of democracy would be idealism of the most unjustifiable kind.

Furthermore, as these interviews have indicated, the competence of non-elites – to use the ugly term – to discuss substantive political issues with a high degree of sophistication should not be underestimated. We have seen problems elaborated in complex ways, a rich set of links between them drawn, and an ability to combine media-inspired messages and information with personal experiences and inherited knowledge. One sees here far more than the politics of personality and party-branding. Nor is there unredeemed cynicism about public life: while there is useful work to be done by political psychologists on the responses triggered by certain key words, cynicism (as opposed to pessimism) is not the dominant tone of these discussions. One does not find the major concerns of public life reduced to a small set of problems to do with corruption and ‘government waste’, as newspaper commentaries may sometimes suggest. Interest in political issues, and the competence to talk about them, is much in evidence, even if accompanied by doubt about the ability to effect change. Importantly, from a more objective perspective, there is no reason to consider the problems raised in these discussions as fabricated from nothing, and the people who articulate them as whingers. These are not problems which must be dismissed as facts of life about which one ‘mustn’t grumble.’ It may be that one wishes to reject the terms in which some are discussed, and it may be that one feels certain issues are neglected in discussion, but there is no reason to attribute failings of this kind to incapacity on the part of the speakers. Rather, one should see these as reasons to question, contest and expand the set of discursive resources on which speakers are able to draw.

The emergence of a European polity should in principle provide a useful opportunity to do this, for not only does it signal the possibility of tackling common problems at a

transnational level, it is also a polity unable to invoke the collective bonds that underpinned the emergence of the nation-state, and for that reason is dependent on justifications of a mainly political kind. A new polity provides the opportunity to reconsider the question of democratic control and political ends – a point not lost on those elitists who would happily see the principle of popular sovereignty marginalised further in favour of a technocratic, regulatory politics.<sup>5</sup> In this new context, both moves towards further politicisation and further depoliticisation are possible. Advance of the former is likely to be dependent upon political parties of mass appeal being willing to promote ideas that make political sense of the EU and thereby build a case for its development

The need to revitalise more active conceptions of citizenship and reaffirm the plausibility of dealing collectively with common problems is not a sufficient argument for a European polity. There can be no *sufficient* argument for a European polity, since this would be to suppose that the proper boundaries of political membership can be settled by appeal to a theoretical idea. As we have argued, ‘the people’ can never be captured in a single thought, for it/they represent(s) a floating category which can be defined in a multitude of ways. A political bond is a perspective from which to conceptualise the collective bond, to justify the life in common. It does not indicate where one would draw boundaries on a pristine map. It demands some acceptance of the idea of a European polity, whatever the particular institutional structures one may associate this with and whatever the external boundaries one may wish to see for such a polity.

Of course, some reject such a vision and call for a return to the nation-state. There are reasons to be sceptical of this position. A very large number of socio-economic practices in contemporary Europe transcend the boundaries of states, and could be re-confined to them only with considerable loss. Moreover, as our empirical material suggests, collective positioning today is considerably more complex than can be accommodated by the old categories such as ‘national identity’: there is a notable tendency, with regard to certain problems in particular, to evoke a political context which is considerably broader than just the nation-state, and to the extent that there exist doubts about the possibility of political action at a European level, these are matched to a considerable degree by doubts about the political agency of national governments. Neither a return to the nation-state, nor to a confederal European system in which the European dimension is a function solely of nation-state bargaining, seem plausible alternatives under these conditions.

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<sup>5</sup> See the discussion e.g. of Majone in Chapter 1.

If one takes seriously the idea of a European polity, the question of the collective bond is difficult to avoid. It seems inadequate to suppose, as some advocates of further European integration may, that a viable democratic polity can be secured simply with better publicising of the alleged achievements of the EU and some adjustments to the Union's institutional architecture. Institutional issues, particularly those in 'distant Brussels', do not tend to be a subject of fevered discussion amongst European citizens, nor does it seem likely that, just by offering further opportunities for casting a vote, interest and enthusiasm will emerge spontaneously concerning the possibilities which these venues offer. Instead, one would need to 'prepare the ground' with clear ideas about what those institutions may be engaged to achieve and why it makes sense to share in them with others. Emphasising the address of common problems presents itself as the most appropriate basis on which to animate a European polity. But this perspective on the common will be without resonance unless one addresses at the same time the typical ways in which the political world is interpreted: those routine acts of positioning and unquestioned assumptions that structure expectations of what should and can be achieved.



# Methodological Appendix

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Taxi-driving is a job which mixes bursts of activity with a fair bit of killing of time. Some hours are busier than others, varying according to the city, locations within the city, and the type of customers catered to. For those who tend to work a railway-station rank, the busy times coincide with the arrival of long-distance and peak-time commuter trains: early mornings especially can be heavy. For those who tend to work a rank in the town-centre, the busy times tend to follow shopping hours: early mornings can be quiet, but work picks up towards the lunchtime rush. Those who work nights will probably mix lonely hours in the middle of the week with considerable activity at weekends. A Munich taxi-driver – in a conversation separate from the body of this research – told me that, with people increasingly saving on luxuries such as taxi journeys (the euro had made everyone poorer), the only times when custom was reliable were Friday and Saturday nights between 1am and 6am.<sup>457</sup> Whatever the variations in individual routine, most drivers can expect quite considerable periods of hanging around, especially when a job has been recently completed and the driver returns to the back of the rank, turns off the engine and waits for those in front to take customers.

Such time is spent in a range of ways. A few drivers install portable televisions in their vehicles, but for the majority listening to the radio or reading the newspaper is the most likely activity. ‘I think a lot of the guys read the paper,’ Murda in Reading told me. ‘Half the time they don’t move up in their queue because they’re reading the bloody paper, or nattering away to somebody ...’. Local and tabloid-style newspapers are much in evidence on the rank, and were the most commonly cited when participants were asked at the end of the interviews how they passed their spare time. Barry in Norwich reads ‘any sort of newspaper, always got an interest in the newspapers. I listen to the radio all day so I’ve got the news on, and I do watch Sky News at night, flip it on, keep an eye on what’s going on in the world.’ In some cities, Swansea for instance, reading the local newspaper meant exposure to very local, city-based stories; in other cities the coverage could be much wider: the *Main Post*, cited by Uwe in Würzburg, carried international as well as local and national news. That significant time is spent reading the newspaper and listening to the radio is

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<sup>457</sup> Private conversation, Munich (Schwabing), Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2005, 5am.

evident from the frequency with which these news sources were cited in the discussions. Headlines, or something which was ‘just heard on the radio’, crop up with some frequency, though sometimes in unexpected ways: when Barry in Norwich refers to a photograph in yesterday’s *Evening News* featuring a group of mothers and children, he focuses not on the paedophile they were protesting against but the fact that they all seemed to be single mothers, and hence probably unemployed. One also finds in the interviews pieces of information, for instance to do with the conflict in Rwanda or the sale of weapons to China, which would be difficult to account for other than as a result of exposure to media sources (on or off the job). At the same time, many drivers were keen to trivialise the time they spent with newspapers: Murda in Reading was emphatic that he is ‘never that much up to date’ with the news, ‘about ten years behind’, and direct questioning about newspapers (as opposed to when they were spontaneously invoked in the discussions) would reliably lead to jokes about topless women. For Zdeněk at Ostrava, the only really credible thing in the newspapers is ‘the sex’: ‘no-one’s going to deceive me on that. They can write what they want but that’s something I know about, I know how that functions.’ No doubt the sport sections of newspapers would be read by many in a similar spirit.

These daily pastimes have to be easily interruptible. Not only is there the need to move up on the rank but for many drivers there is the prospect of being greeted by other drivers and engaged in conversation. Jürgen in Lübeck explains: ‘you can’t really read the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* [i.e. a serious newspaper] here on the rank ... there’s always someone coming past your door, “come on, let’s go for coffee,” you can hardly read even one article in peace. I really don’t understand how some of our colleagues can read a book in the car – really big books sometimes ... [N & W: yeah, yeah ...].’ Except for when it is raining or particularly cold, quite a few drivers near the back of the rank are likely to get out of their vehicles and stand around talking in small groups. On larger ranks, like the one at Würzburg station, they may also have a hut to go to. Apart from at peak times, when there is the continual need to move cars forward and pick up passengers, one rarely sees a whole rank of drivers sitting alone in their vehicles: conversations are a common way of whiling away the quieter moments. Where the drivers are employed by a firm and more than one firm works the same rank, these social relations seem to take place mainly amongst drivers working for the same firm. The more lonely periods are likely to be the night shifts, not least because fewer drivers do these. In the daytime though, most ranks are fairly social places and the job generates plenty of group contexts, aside from the interaction involved in transporting customers.

My arrival at the taxi-rank was intended to coincide with those times when a large number of drivers would be working but when customer demand would be relatively low. Sometime after 9am or sometime after 2pm were generally the times I chose. The interviews were not arranged in advance: I simply selected the largest of the ranks in the city and attempted to recruit directly. I styled myself as what I was: a student doing research. Wearing jeans and a jacket and carrying a folder of papers under my arm, I tried to appear both young and serious. Just as I did not want to look too casual, I wanted to avoid giving any impression of formality or officialdom: the fraud inspector represents an ominous figure for many taxi-drivers, and anyone asking questions at the rank does well to ensure they are not mistaken. Also, the image of the student, with what I assumed to be connotations of someone reliant on a favour, perhaps a little naïve in the ways of the world and in need of having things carefully explained, was one which I thought might benefit my research both during recruitment and during the discussions themselves.

Several theoretical considerations need to be borne in mind when adopting group discussions as a research method. Important decisions need to be made about the size of the groups to be formed, the degree to which these groups are to be 'natural' (in part a matter of whether participants will be familiar to one another or strangers), and the degree to which they are to be 'homogeneous' (as evaluated by any number of criteria, including ethnic and socio-economic make-up). Much of the earlier writing on this research method (c. the 1980s) was connected to commercial market research, where 'focus groups' were intended to provide insights into the reception of advertising campaigns and the associations made with brand images. For this purpose, the recommendations were generally that the group should be fairly large (six to eight people), that participants should be strangers to one another, and often that they should be drawn from diverse backgrounds. Such groups would allow the researcher in a quite short period of time to gather a range of spontaneous, instinctive responses from a broad section of society to whatever stimuli the client was keen to have tested. My purposes were different however, and like much of the later, academic applications of this method I felt able to reject some of these stipulations.<sup>458</sup> With taxi-

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<sup>458</sup> For academic work on the focus-group method, see Bloor et al., *Focus Groups in Social Research*; Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*; Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994); Lynne J. Millward, 'Focus Groups', in Glynis M. Breakwell, Sean Hammond, and Chris Fife-Shaw (eds.), *Research Methods in Psychology* (London: Sage, 2000); Claudia Puchta and Jonathan Potter, *Focus Group Practice* (London: Sage, 2004); Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis, *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* (London: Sage, 2004). Kitzinger and Barbour, 'The Challenge and Promise of Focus Groups'. The terms 'group discussion' or 'group interview' have been preferred in this work to 'focus group', so as to avoid some of the scientific connotations of the latter; but cf. Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, pp.5ff.

drivers often already engaged in conversations with one another when I approached them on the rank, and often familiar even with those with whom they did not happen to be talking at that moment, any attempt to recruit groups of strangers would have been highly impractical, and also rather perverse. I was interested not in the short, impulsive responses of individuals (like marketing research) but in how discussions were built up collectively and pursued in depth, a pursuit which is ‘normally’ likely to take place amongst acquaintances rather than strangers. Also, I had chosen taxi-drivers as people for whom a group discussion of the kind I wanted would not represent a major upheaval in their schedule, and this would be truer where the participants were already in discussion. Furthermore, individuals are more likely to participate if their acquaintances are keen also, and so the success of the recruitment process can generally be improved by taking advantage of existing social relations.

The groups which I assembled were to some degree ‘natural’ in the sense that the core of the group was often drawn from a pre-existing conversation on the rank between two or three of the participants. Not all participants knew each other in advance, but there were always at least a couple who were familiar with everyone, and perhaps a general expectation that drivers on the rank had some degree of acquaintanceship with one another. ‘It’s like a little institute,’ was the description Leyton in Norwich gave of the drivers at the rank. When, during recruitment in Würzburg, Oliver suggested to Rainer enlisting the participation of Uwe, Rainer seemed not to know him, but Oliver still felt it realistic to try to jog his memory: ‘you know, the guy who plays the piano.’ Rainer himself was identifiable to several of the other drivers on the rank by way of his hobby – running marathons. Many of the discussions also featured cross-references to conversations which participants had had with one another on prior occasions. Admittedly, this degree of mutual familiarity did carry certain dangers: where drivers were helping me with the recruitment of further participants, they might be inclined to ‘invite up’, as Gamson has put it<sup>459</sup> – i.e. encourage those whom they considered better-educated or more thoughtful to take part while dismissing the candidacy of others – or they might lose enthusiasm for participating if someone they disliked looked ready to get involved. At Kassel, Dieter asked me whether he should single out some ‘sensible’ drivers to take part (I said it was not important), while in Swansea one driver confidentially made their participation conditional on another particular individual not participating, a condition which was made irrelevant when the latter was forced to depart with a customer. Even once the discussions were underway, what was said or not said might perhaps be influenced by past

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<sup>459</sup> Gamson, *Talking Politics*, p.190.

conversations in ways which I would be unable to appreciate.<sup>460</sup> These dangers, however, seemed to be outweighed by the likelihood that ‘political talk’ occurs more naturally amongst acquaintances than strangers.<sup>461</sup>

With a concern for depth of discussion, I wanted groups smaller than six to eight people: most of my interviews were composed of four participants, though in three of them there were just three participants. Groups of this relatively small size facilitate contributions from all participants rather than just a dominant few, and they reduce the likelihood of fragmentation into multiple, simultaneous side-discussions which are both smaller than one wishes and exceptionally difficult to transcribe from a single-source microphone. A group of three to four participants can be moderated with a light touch, whereas larger groups may require stronger control, either to coax participants to speak or to ensure some focus of discursive attention.<sup>462</sup> More practically, assembling more than four participants would have been a considerable challenge. At ranks where turnover was fast, one was always liable to lose those who had pledged participation by lingering for more: the arrival of one or two customers could force withdrawals, which in turn could generate scepticism amongst those remaining about the likelihood of the exercise going ahead, and soon one would need to start the recruitment process again. Also, while most cities had a dominant taxi-rank – usually either by the train station or in the town centre – some would have a series of smaller ranks equal in size, perhaps with a typical presence of around five vehicles. In these cases, a few rejections on a small rank could result in a kind of ‘negative inertia’ whereby other drivers would quickly reject participation too, either deciding I was clearly up to no good or, if they did listen to the proposal, perhaps judging the chances of it going ahead rather slim. This happened to me in Plzeň, and after many hours of attempting to recruit I decided to settle for just three drivers; many more (e.g. six to eight) would have been entirely unrealistic. In Ostrava meanwhile, the problem was not just that the taxis were divided between different ranks: it was simply that there was a quite limited number of taxis anywhere, and no large or medium-sized rank available at the time of interview. Although it was the biggest city I interviewed in, Ostrava was also the poorest, something which probably contributed to the absence. A couple of vehicles waited at the railway station, but too few to make an approach worthwhile. In the city centre, the square where a few taxis would normally park was being dug up, and only a few isolated taxis could be seen on the roads nearby. I was lucky to

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<sup>460</sup> For the same thought, see Perrin, *Citizen Speak*, p.59.

<sup>461</sup> Cf. Conover, Searing, and Crewe, 'The Deliberative Potential of Discussion'.

<sup>462</sup> Cf. Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, pp.42-3 for sensible remarks on this.

discover a taxi-hut still manned on the square, and when the three drivers inside all expressed enthusiasm for taking part, and it became clear that they would all most likely be vocal contributors in discussion, I decided to proceed with the interview. To search for a fourth participant might well have meant losing one of them if a job arose; to attempt an interview with double or more this number would have been, for these practical reasons alone, quite impossible.

The question of homogeneity is always a rather elusive one, given the range of criteria by which it can be assessed and the uncertainty surrounding which criteria are relevant. One never knows how far the standard criteria – e.g. class, gender, ethnic background – are likely to have a bearing on the kind of discourse produced, and there is a danger that once one starts making assumptions about their relevance one slips back into a determinist perspective whereby what people say is accounted for by ‘who they are’. Such a perspective, while perhaps appealing to the traditional sociologist, is objectionable from a political-theory perspective, and the resultant dilemma is typical of those faced when one works at the interface of two disciplines, each with its own body of interests and concerns. The difficulty cannot be avoided simply by attempting to include in the sample variation on all possible criteria, such that no prior assumptions are made, since there will always be more criteria than one can hope to address. Attempting to control methodically for the heterogeneity or homogeneity of the groups would clearly have disrupted any naturalness achieved in the selection of participants on the rank, since it would have involved introducing ‘artificial’ variation into the sample. Moreover, how one isolates variables in this case is by no means obvious. For example, one might wish to introduce variation according to income levels, an objective which – given the reticence of drivers about their earnings – one would probably operationalise indirectly by interviewing night-drivers (whose earnings are generally higher) as well as day-drivers. Night-drivers, however, are also far more likely to be single, since their hours are difficult to combine with a family. One would therefore be introducing variation according to marital status too, something (potentially) just as significant. And the variables proliferate. Night-drivers are likely to spend less time in each other’s company than day-drivers; night-drivers will spend less time reading newspapers (because they are more busy, and because it is dark) but will spend more time listening to the radio; the content of night-time radio tends to differ from that of day-time radio, and so on.

For these reasons, recruitment for these interviews was guided by quite simple criteria. I was not interested in questions of statistical significance, and therefore the representativity of my sample in this sense was not a great concern to me. A balance of ages

was sought for each interview, with the youngest driver being in his 20s or 30s and the oldest in his 50s or 60s. Where ethnic minorities were strongly represented on the taxi-rank (this was the case at Reading), it was made certain that the sample reflected this (three of the four participants in Reading were of first- or second-generation Asian background, though all had been living in the city for at least a decade).<sup>463</sup> Female drivers were very rare in the ten cities studied, and while no specific attempt was made to exclude them from the sample, in practice they did not feature.

The very nature of the group-interview method makes issues of homogeneity and heterogeneity, and in particular of statistical representativity, difficult to control in practice, even should one wish to do so. Unlike, for example, taking part in a short survey questionnaire, a two-hour interview represents a major commitment of time and energy even for those in the most flexible of professions, and well-intentioned sampling procedures can easily be undone by low response rates and last-minute withdrawals. Gamson reports that his attempts to follow a statistics-based procedure had to be abandoned due to the fact that typically only ten percent of those he selected for participation would eventually follow through on the exercise.<sup>464</sup> Self-selection is virtually impossible to eliminate, indeed it is usually the dominant fact, and so there are no sturdy grounds for the application of statistical probability. Even once the interview is underway, there are plenty of opportunities for the unexpected. At Erfurt, I had decided to conduct the interview with three drivers due to the low numbers available on the rank that morning. We settled down as a group in a *Kneipe* opposite the station, alongside tables of elderly men having their first beer of the morning, and went through the card exercise with which each discussion began. Just as we had finished and were poised to open out the discussion, Hans-Jürgen's mobile telephone rang: it was the boss calling, asking them to move their taxis because they were blocking the rank. The interview had to be interrupted while Hans-Jürgen, Uwe and Mike went off to resolve this, leaving me playing with my place-mat and wondering whether I needed to be assertive in some way. A few minutes later, they returned with the good news that new parking spots have been found and accompanied, by the way, by a fourth driver interested to join the discussion, Andreas. After making a quick assessment of Andreas's level of good will, and after explaining to him what had been decided in the card exercise, I restarted the discussion and we continued for a further two, highly productive hours. In the face of this kind of

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<sup>463</sup> There was only one other non-white participant in the study: Ali, a first-generation Iranian immigrant, who took part in the discussion in Lübeck.

<sup>464</sup> Gamson, *Talking Politics*, p.190.

unpredictability, an inflexible, positivistic stance would not have served me well. Disallowing the participation of Andreas because I had not selected him myself, or declaring the interview void due to the few minutes of interruption, would not only have cost me a very rich amount of data but would probably have so alienated the three participants with whom I had begun the interview that the chances of recruiting a new set of drivers later in the day would have been slim.

While my sample was not drawn on a statistical basis, and makes no claim to statistical representativeness, it is nonetheless important to ask what kinds of factor might have informed the self-selection process such that some drivers agreed to take part and others declined. In almost all cities (Ostrava was the exception) I encountered at least some drivers who were unwilling to take part, and in the cases of Swansea, Würzburg and Plzeň it was several hours before I was finally able to assemble a willing team. Significant remuneration was on offer, set at a rate above waiting-time and intended to represent a sound return on two hours' work for most drivers (though it was never so high that a driver might not – in principle at least – have made the same amount in the same time from fare-paying customers).<sup>465</sup> The money was clearly by no means the sole factor however in determining the success or failure of recruitment, and my impression is that the decision to accept or reject was rarely based principally on an assessment of the interview's financial worth. Certainly it was made universally clear to me that no-one was going to give up their time for free, and a few drivers needed reassuring that I was not attempting to cheat them and that I really did possess the money I was claiming to offer.<sup>466</sup> But the majority of both participants and non-participants who were approached expressed the opinion that the sum on offer was favourable. Some drivers who declined participation did state inadequate remuneration as their reason, but there were some doubts as to whether this was their 'real reason' – other drivers would often intervene along the lines of 'well you'll be lucky if you make that much in the next two hours.' Also, drivers who had rejected the offer could often be seen inert on the rank for long periods thereafter, earning no money at all. If one can fairly say that the level of remuneration was more often an excuse than a reason for non-participation, then it is

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<sup>465</sup> In Britain and Germany the rates were €60-70 per head; in the Czech Republic c. €40. These rates would have been more or less appealing of course according to the time of day: at peak times (which I tried to avoid) they might have represented a loss on expected earnings, and therefore would have been insufficient to attract any but the most curious. Likewise, for drivers at the front of the rank, for whom a new fare was likely to be imminent, these figures would have been less attractive than for those at the back, on whom I concentrated my energies.

<sup>466</sup> I kept an envelope in my jacket pocket with the money counted out per head for the purpose of convincing the sceptical that I was serious about what I was doing. Only in one instance – in Plzeň – did the participants nonetheless insist on being paid before the interview began.

worth considering what other motivations there may have been for rejection. Moments where the research seemed to be ‘failing’, with an absence of volunteers and a number of refusals, provided a good opportunity to explore the likely nature of my sample, and by asking those who declined for their reasons I made sure that they too were a part of my study.

Some reasons for non-participation were quite straightforward. Drivers might have regular bookings that needed to be honoured, requiring them to decline because the timing clashed. In Swansea, large numbers were unavailable mid-afternoon because they were committed to taking children home from school; clearly, it would not make sense to sacrifice a regular customer, however interested the driver might be in participating (and some did express regret). The weather was another practical constraint on the recruitment process: not only might an outbreak of rain significantly increase the supply of customers, thereby thinning the rank and reducing the appeal of my offer, but it would also keep the drivers who remained on the rank inside their taxis. This would remove the possibility of approaching pre-existing groups, meaning that I would have to convince drivers one by one. This was always a more difficult approach – groups tended to be more willing to ‘hear me out’, perhaps because the individuals involved would feel less trapped than when cornered alone. I was lucky with the weather and did not have to face this problem, though it could well have impeded the recruitment.

A third practical obstacle to participation derived from the fact that on most ranks there was a mixture of employed and self-employed drivers. The latter had considerably more flexibility than the former, who might be required to produce records to their boss to account for their day’s earnings. Several drivers expressed the concern that their boss would raise awkward questions if they agreed to take part, even if (or indeed especially if) they were to set their meter to run on waiting-time for two hours. This was a reason for reluctance frequently cited in Würzburg, and was considered fully credible by Rainer, an eventual participant. In Plzeň, another city in which recruitment was difficult, some of the taxi firms appeared to be quite small, and by engaging four drivers from the same firm I could well have taken that firm off the road for two hours, again something to displease the boss. Generally, in order to participate it seemed that drivers would have either to be self-employed or, if they were not, to enjoy decent relations with their boss (as Rainer said he did) or to be indifferent to potential complications of that sort, and perhaps to be attached to a firm large enough to accommodate their absence without great disruption. Whilst these were not especially demanding hurdles – even a sceptical boss could probably later be convinced that worthwhile money had been gained – they were nonetheless enough to rule out some.

However, rejections also came from those for whom these practical issues would not have been a major difficulty. General scepticism towards unusual propositions, especially when voiced by outsiders, might have accounted for a number of the refusals to participate. This was a reason frequently cited by drivers who were sympathetic to my project, or who had committed to participate themselves, to explain the reluctance of some of their colleagues. In Swansea I was told by one such driver that ‘people are very suspicious around here’, and a driver in Plzeň implied something similar when he said ‘that’s Plzeň for you.’ In Würzburg, I was told the problem was that this was ‘a small, pretty little town’ and that people were generally wary of outsiders. ‘They just want to go to and fro from the station, no distractions,’ said one driver. Rainer drew a comparison with another occasion when a stranger had approached the rank offering fifty euros to whichever driver would lend him a hand in putting up a sign: ‘no-one was willing to do it but me, I thought I couldn’t be hearing right, what was wrong with them?’ Aversion to commercial polling and advertising also seemed to be evident – a non-participant in Swansea told me he was ‘sick of people ringing up to ask questions’, and my insistence that I was from a university rather than a private company was of no relevance to him. This diffuse scepticism towards the unknown, what one might call an hostility towards intrusion, was no doubt compounded when drivers saw other drivers declining my offer: negative inertia could build quickly in these circumstances, and there was a danger that I could develop the reputation of a pest. (This was starting to happen in Plzeň, before Petr took up my case and lent some legitimacy to my requests.) In Britain, mixed in with these concerns was probably the more specific one that I might be an inspector from the fraud office wanting to take a look at the accounts. For drivers with something to hide, this might have been another reason for wanting to be left alone.

My status as a foreigner could also have played a role. As someone who grew up in London, I could have passed for a local in the two cities in southern England where I interviewed, Norwich and Reading. Indeed, in Reading the participants readily assumed I was from Reading University. But at Swansea, despite my knowledge of the city due to family connections, I would have been clearly classifiable as English rather than Welsh, and in the cities in Germany and the Czech Republic I would have been fairly easy to place as British, even had I not introduced myself as such. Generally I had no reason to believe that this was adversely affecting the recruitment process (for consideration of how it might have affected the interviews themselves, see below). However, in Würzburg it may well have been significant. This is a city which was heavily bombed by the British RAF at the end of the Second World War, and where an association might readily be made between a historical

event, a broader set of national antagonisms, and a modern-day visitor who seemed to be looking for favours. I asked Rainer during the interview why he thought I had had such difficulty in recruiting participants that morning: ‘well I spoke to one of them, Franz ... [now to Uwe and Oliver:] Franz Biedermann, the one who drives 16.1. I’ve always assumed he was a very reasonable person so I was a bit surprised when he reacted like that. But it was something to do with the British ... your country, the World War 2 context. I don’t know ... whether ... he didn’t say anything more concrete, but perhaps it was to do with the bombing here in Würzburg.’ All participants (predictably!) suggested that this was inappropriate of Franz, but they seemed to take Rainer’s explanation as credible. Hostility of this kind was not something which I was aware of during the several hours I spent recruiting: indeed, several non-participants tried to help me find willing participants, and one driver gave me the phone-number of a taxi-company to call. In particular, Franz himself had given me the slightly different – but equally plausible – explanation that he felt it was not possible for him to express the kind of opinions he wanted to in public. ‘If I say what I want to say they’d put me in prison,’ was his remark. Another driver claimed that his own views were ‘not allowed’ in today’s Germany. A counter-reading to Rainer’s account would therefore be that Franz (and others like him) declined to participate not principally because of hostility to the British but because of an awareness that certain opinions could not be expressed – perhaps in particular in the presence of an outsider. This is a reason for non-participation which one could summarise as the feeling of ‘unsayability’.

Unsayability might have been of special significance in the Würzburg case. The day before that particular interview, then-Chancellor Schröder had given a speech to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp Buchenwald, and had spoken of the special responsibility of Germans to ensure that anti-Semitism and racism did not re-emerge. This speech was reported and headlined in the newspapers that the taxi-drivers were reading the following morning as I was recruiting, and it is quite possible that certain drivers were hostile to this speech, with its emphasis on German war-guilt, but were unwilling to discuss their hostility in a public place, perhaps all the more so in my presence as a British person. One non-participant, who spoke to me on political issues for about five minutes from behind his driving-wheel, was certainly very quick to raise this subject, and spoke indignantly of how ‘you can’t say what you want to in Germany. You’re not allowed to be proud to be German, if you ever criticise the Jews they say “he’s anti-Semitic!” and they immediately bring up the Holocaust.’ Assuming that this problem of ‘unsayability’ did affect his decision to decline participation – and on these

essentially cognitive questions there can be little certainty – this suggests that my research method is likely to generate a sample which excludes those inclined to speak in a certain way: that it might, loosely speaking, contain a ‘liberal bias’. There are, however, reasons to think that this was not a major problem, not least the fact that the German discussions (Würzburg included) covered in considerable detail precisely the issues which it was being suggested here were unsayable. While some non-participating drivers might take pleasure in positioning themselves as no-nonsense types whose common-sense wisdom was too painful and too truthful to be aired, other participating drivers were quite able to bring these inhibitions with them and handle and reflect upon them in the course of the group discussion. In other words, while some drivers might use these discursive motifs as reasons to exclude themselves from the discussion, this did not mean that the motifs themselves were excluded; they were simply brought along by others.

A largely similar argument can be made with regard to a final reason for non-participation which was cited by some drivers: that ‘politics’ did not interest them and that they had nothing really to say on the subject. This was a reaction I had anticipated, and when recruiting on the rank I generally tried to avoid using the word ‘politics’ on the assumption that it might carry associations rather narrower than I intended. Given the current everyday usage of the term, ‘politics’ might be taken to mean no more than a certain set of individuals and institutions, without regard for the substantive issues which these might address, and maybe with connotations of self-indulgent, empty talk. Cramer Walsh describes how, for the ‘Old Timers’ whose coffeeshop conversations she would listen to, ‘politics is about impasse and petty griping,’ ‘controversy and the stuff of people who lack common sense ...’.<sup>467</sup> I wanted to be able to recruit those who might ‘talk politics’ even without knowing or intending it. I wanted to avoid reactions like that of one non-participant in Würzburg, who – having given me five minutes of opinions about the euro, the state of German society and the problem of imported goods – rejected participation in the discussion simply on the grounds that ‘politicians are liars, the politicians shit on me and I shit on them.’ Moreover, I wanted to avoid presenting the proposed discussion as something akin to a knowledge test: to declare that I was looking for ‘opinions on politics’ would maximise the risk that drivers felt unqualified to take part.

Instead, I tended to use rather vague phrases such as ‘your thoughts on problems in public life’, ‘the kind of problems people encounter in daily life’, and ‘positive and negative

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<sup>467</sup> Cramer Walsh, *Talking About Politics*, p.39, p.38.

developments in society’, hoping to allow potential participants to fill this ambiguity with their own expectations. To some extent this worked, as could be observed when enthusiastic drivers were trying to convince colleagues to take part: a wide range of descriptions was produced, including ‘he’s interested in our views about everyday problems ... the way society’s going ... political views ... opinions about the times we live in,’ or as Rainer in Würzburg put it, ‘*Weltanschauungen*’. For many drivers, this was quite enough information to be getting on with: ‘yeah, I’ll give him a few views’, or ‘God, yeah, where do I start’ were typical responses, with each of us acting as though we fully knew what the other was referring to. However, there were a significant number of instances when I was pressed for further details – ‘what is it you’re looking for exactly?’ – and on these occasions I would make some kind of reference to ‘politics’ since with further vagueness I would probably lose the listener’s attention. There is therefore undoubtedly the possibility that some drivers refused participation because they heard a word they did not like. What are the implications of this? Does the sample contain a ‘politico bias’? This would only be the case if those who participated could be classed as being unusually enthusiastic about politics, marked out from their colleagues in this regard. There does not seem to be much grounds for believing this: indeed, participants to the discussions could express considerable disillusionment with political institutions, individuals and processes, as we have seen in the analysis. Perhaps particularly striking is a comment which Oliver made at the end of the Würzburg interview when asked about where he got his news from: he did not read much in the newspapers, he said, because he was generally ‘cynical about politics’! Thus Oliver, who had contributed fully and with considerable sophistication throughout the course of the two-hour discussion, was moved to say something little different in tone from the non-participant on the rank who, as well as ‘talking politics’ for a while, had denounced all politicians as liars. Clearly, a self-declared aversion to ‘politics’ understood narrowly did not indicate a lack of competence to speak about substantive common problems, and while this aversion may have induced some drivers not to participate, other drivers who also voiced it were nonetheless willing to do so.

Once three or four drivers had been secured for participation, we proceeded directly to the pub, bar or café in which the discussion would take place. Although sometimes the drivers themselves would have a place in mind, generally I chose the location myself in advance. For obvious reasons to do with the recording, a fairly quiet location was required. Upstairs cafés, away from the noise of the street and swinging doors, tended to be ideal where available; pubs (and their German and Czech equivalents) could be suitable in the hours

before lunchtime, when generally there were few customers and no music playing; hotel bars were also a reliable option. A location which was deathly quiet on the other hand would be one to avoid, since I did not want participants to feel that they might be overheard, either by neighbouring tables or by staff. Operating without an assistant and in ten different cities, it would have been difficult to secure in each case the kind of setting which tends to be described in certain focus-group manuals: a private room laid out with jugs of orange-juice, pots of coffee and a selection of biscuits, maybe observable through a one-way mirror. Such an approach requires considerable preparation and expense for dubious advantage. I wanted, in particular, a location which the participants might plausibly have chosen to spend time in themselves, one in which they would feel, as one puts it, 'at home'. Particularly favourable was if the proposed location was visible from the taxi-rank itself, since this could be used during the recruitment process to heighten the immediacy of the exercise and to diminish any sense of mystery ('we'll just be going to that place over there, you can see it from here'), plus to convince drivers that they would not be abandoning their taxis and that after the discussion they would be able to return quickly to work. The small risk associated with such locations was that some drivers might be reluctant to associate themselves with a place serving alcohol, either on professional or religious/cultural grounds. This was not a protest I encountered on the rank however, and participants themselves seemed content simply not to order alcohol, or to order a small amount.

For the German and Czech interviews I considered employing a local assistant to help me recruit participants and moderate the discussions. This would have facilitated communication, although this was not a sufficient justification since my command of the relevant languages was acceptable and since, in a group interview especially, the role of the moderator can be fairly limited once the discussion 'takes off'. A better reason would have been that a local assistant would ostensibly have neutralised any influence my nationality might have had on what was said in discussion. I did not want, for instance, participants in Germany and the Czech Republic to introduce large numbers of transnational elements into the discussion which they would not have done in the presence of a local moderator, or to assume that – as a foreign national – it must necessarily be their *country* I was interested in rather than the more local environment of their city. Ultimately I rejected the option of assistance however. While a local moderator or assistant might have created functional equivalence on the nationality question, it would have disrupted continuity as regards the numbers involved. The diminutive presence which I was able to achieve as an individual researcher, which I sensed served me well in allowing the drivers to deal confidently with me

and to be undaunted by concerns about the audience, would have been lost had I expanded to a team in this way. Also, one would have encountered all the problems of inter-moderator variation in style and substance which can plague large-scale qualitative studies. Different, or more frequent, interventions can change the tone and direction of the discussion: I preferred to have continuity on this. In the end, the impact of my nationality did not seem strong, though this is an impressionistic judgement. A transnational context was evoked in the British discussions in very similar ways to that in the German and Czech discussions, and amongst the latter there was just as much attention to the local as amongst the former. At Ostrava, for instance, participants made explicit their assumption that I would be interested in developments in their *region* as well as the Czech Republic as a whole.

Once the participants and I were seated around a table, we made some brief introductions and I laid out some of the usual rules associated with group interviews (e.g. that participants should avoid speaking at the same time, and that they should not treat me as someone directing the discussion). I requested permission to make an audio recording, a request which never met objection and which had no appreciable impact on the participants' style of interaction.<sup>468</sup> I then reiterated my interest in 'problems in public life' before feeding directly into the card exercise. There was no pre-interview questionnaire. While this might have produced some interesting biographical data, it would have atomised the group – extended silence is a bad way to begin a discussion – and would have taken up valuable time which, due to the nature of my research, would be better devoted to collective rather than individual activities. Also, questionnaires can be tedious and are liable to create an exam-hall atmosphere. Lee in Swansea was one driver to make his participation conditional on there not being 'any forms to fill out'. I sought to avoid all kinds of fussiness where possible.

In contrast, the card exercise provided an engaging, argument-generating, collective way to initiate the session. Aside from the theoretical rationale for it outlined in Chapter 3, it was intended in practical terms to 'warm up' the participants so that the transition to a free discussion would be smooth. In this respect it was successful, and there were generally no indications that it was received either as patronising or dull; overall, there was confirmation of the positive experiences which other researchers have reported when using this research

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<sup>468</sup> The use of a video camera, on the other hand, might well have generated a fair degree of self-consciousness, and would have diminished the anonymity that a couple of the drivers had requested. Furthermore, the early phase of a group interview requires establishing a certain rapport with participants and conveying a sense of purpose. In the absence of an assistant, it would have been most unwise for me to spend those early moments absorbed in the adjustment of a complex piece of equipment. Cf. Gamson, *Talking Politics*, p.194 and Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, p.56.

method.<sup>469</sup> Two participants from the group in Kassel displayed some degree of frustration about the difficulty of sorting the cards into piles, arguing that it was possible to link all of the themes displayed to one another, but momentum was maintained by the other two participants. The images and English-language captions chosen for display on the cards can be seen at the end of this Appendix. The intention was to assemble a series of thematically-related visual prompts which could be read in multiple ways. All translations were discussed in depth with native-speakers of German and Czech (who also happened to be political scientists) with the aim of achieving equivalence for the English-language versions. Originally the plan had been to conduct two exercises with these cards, one at the beginning of the discussion – as outlined in Chapter 3 – and one in the later stages, in which participants would be invited to arrange them according to what kind of political institution (if any) should be in charge of developing policies for the redress of the problems which had been articulated. The aim here would have been to explore how readily institutions other than the national government were invoked, in particular how frequently the EU was referred to. Having attempted this second exercise during the Reading discussion, I decided to abandon it. It was clear that it would involve unnecessary repetition of the material which had already arisen spontaneously in discussion, plus the question seemed hard to convey to the participants – perhaps precisely because a problem-oriented rather than an institution-oriented approach was one that made more sense to them. Also, at a practical level, a second exercise at this point in the interview, when the discussion was mature, would have been disruptive of the flow, and might have led to digressions.

The discussions lasted between ninety minutes and two hours. In some cases (e.g. in Erfurt and Würzburg) the discussion could usefully have continued longer, and participants continued to say interesting things after the capacity of my recorder had been exhausted (at which point I switched to a few hand-written notes, though none of these have been cited as quotations). In Swansea and Plzeň, it would have been difficult to extend the discussion much beyond ninety minutes, since repetition was starting to occur.

Relations between myself and the group were generally, from my perspective, rather positive. Eliasoph describes how the people she talked to for her ethnographic research tended to find her project rather ‘quaint’;<sup>470</sup> while I did encounter a slightly avuncular manner from a few drivers, the most common reaction was a fair degree of seriousness about

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<sup>469</sup> Cf. Coxon, *Sorting Data*; Meinhof, 'Europe Viewed from Below'. For the use instead of vignettes and imagined scenarios as means to prompt group discussion, see Gamson, *Talking Politics*; Perrin, *Citizen Speak*.

<sup>470</sup> Eliasoph, *Avoiding Politics*, p.273.

my project, expressed in the sentiment that it was about time that people took the views of ‘people like us’ seriously and that it was perfectly appropriate for a student to be expressing his interest. In the Czech Republic, particularly at Ostrava, there was a sense that it was rather remarkable and commendable that someone had come all the way from London to talk to them. Several of the participants asked why I chose to speak to taxi-drivers; such questions I postponed until the end of the interview (arguing that I did not want to run out of recording time), and then made general remarks about their depth of experience and good connections, remarks which always drew approval. Only from one participant, in Plzeň, did I sense animosity towards me: this driver, who was younger than me, seemed keen to test my credentials for interviewing him, and went to some lengths to work out which university I was from, whether such a university existed, and what my informed opinion was on the problems under discussion. Fortunately the other two members of the group were supportive of my desire to keep questions about myself to the end of the interview. This experience was quite exceptional however: almost all drivers seemed to be little interested in me and my personal biography, and much more interested in making sure that their fellow participants and I were listening to what they had to say about the topics under discussion.

In much ethnographic work there is the need to avoid, or at least to reflect upon, the possibility of ‘going native’ in the course of one’s field-work. Although this is a somewhat ambiguous idea, one takes it to mean the danger of developing emotional attachments to one’s subject-matter, in particular to individual persons, which then alter the conclusions that are drawn. In the context of two-hour interviews, prefaced by a generally short period of recruitment, such a consideration is quite minor. Naturally I warmed to those drivers who helped me to recruit on the rank, and to all those who spoke thoughtfully in discussion, but there was little opportunity for such evaluations to feed back into the data-collection. Likewise, when participants expressed views which in other contexts I might have objected to – for example, that excessive reproduction in the Third World might be tackled by a policy of castration – I was quite able in the brief context of these interviews to react with indifference, using the same news receipts (‘right ...’, ‘hmmm ...’ or a repetition of words) that I used throughout. While the danger remains that judgements of this kind might affect my choice of passages for analysis and quotation, it should be clear from the analytical chapters that no attempt has been made to launder the material in this way.

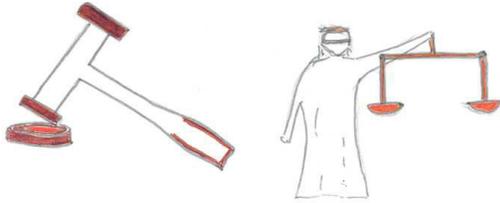
When it came to transcribing the interviews, some of the names were changed, partly to preserve anonymity (though very few drivers insisted on this) and partly to avoid confusion, since a few names recurred. Following Gamson, the transcript notation-style was

kept simple, without recourse to the subtleties employed in linguistic conversation-analysis, which are both time-consuming to honour and difficult for the uninitiated reader to follow.<sup>471</sup> Preliminary coding analysis of the transcripts was carried out using WinMax computer software. As will have been evident in the analytical chapters, the discursive patterns observed and analysed have not been presented with percentages attached following their frequency of occurrence. This decision is directly related to the observations made above concerning the statistical ambiguity of the universe from which the sample was taken, due to the element of self-selection in the recruitment process. Only if the interviewees were taken to be statistically representative of a well-defined broader population would it make sense to take a statistical approach to the motifs evident in their conversation. Such a claim, always a bold one, is one that has been avoided here, and therefore statistics have not been applied.

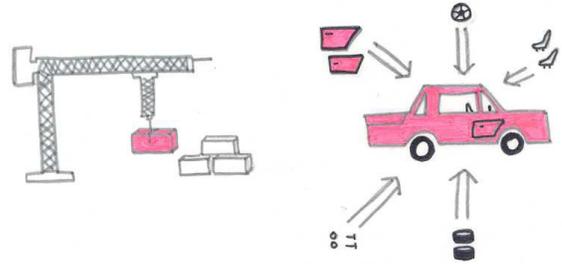
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<sup>471</sup> Gamson, *Talking Politics*, p.194.

# THE LEGAL SYSTEM



# MARKETS + PRODUCTION



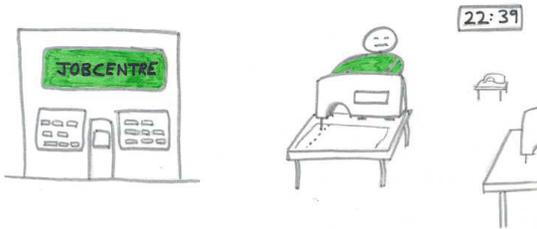
# POLICING



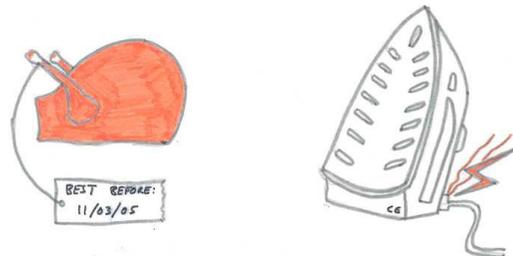
# MONEY + PRICES



# WORK



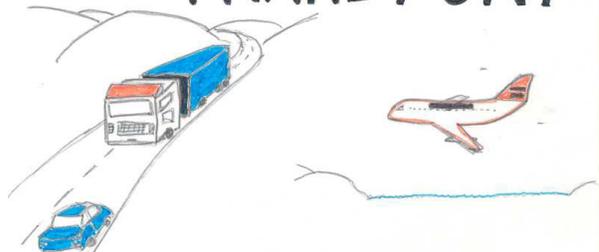
# HEALTH + SAFETY STANDARDS



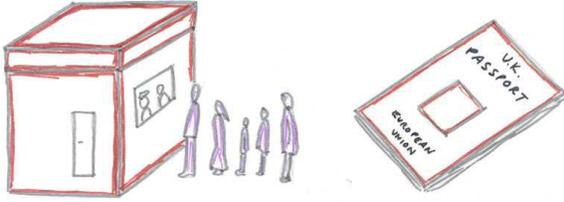
# OVERSEAS AID



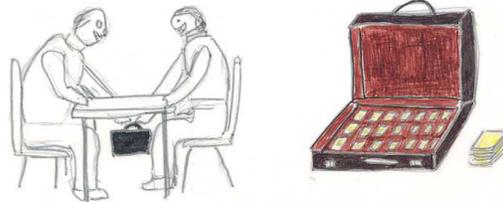
# TRANSPORT



# TREATMENT OF OUTSIDERS



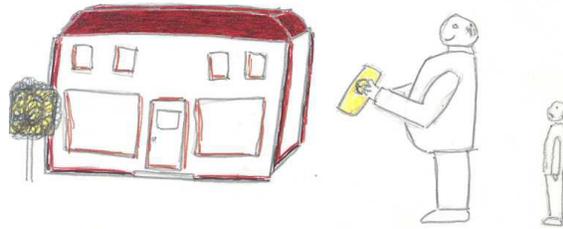
# CORRUPTION



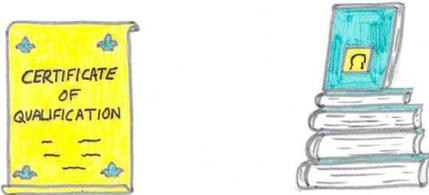
# PEACE + WAR



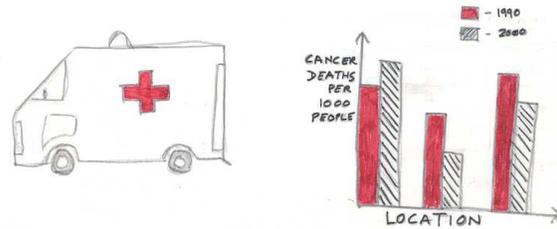
# PURCHASE OF PROPERTY



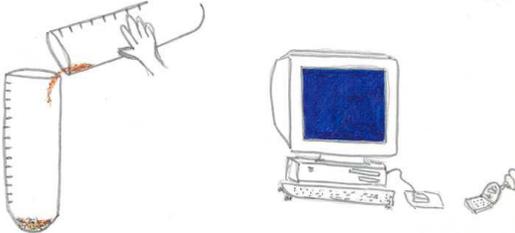
# EDUCATION + TRAINING



# MEDICAL CARE



# SCIENCE + RESEARCH



# TAXATION



# THE ENVIRONMENT





Cards \ Groups	Money / Prices	Markets / Prod.	Purchase Of Prop.	Work	Taxation	Educ. & Train.	Corrup.	Legal System	Policing	Treat. Of Outs.	Peace & War	Overseas Aid	Environ.	Science / Research	Transp.	Medic. Care	Health/ Safety
Reading	Money	Money	Money	Money	Money	Law & Order	Law & Order	Law & Order	Law & Order	Conflict	Conflict	Conflict	General Environ.	General Environ.	General Environ.	Care	Care
Swansea	Money & Work	Educat.	Justice / Law	Justice / Law	Justice / Law	Immigrants	Immigrants	Immigrants	(sep.)	Educat.	(sep.)	(sep.)	Money / Work				
Norwich	Everyday	Everyday	Everyday	Everyday	Britain	Britain	Britain	Britain	Britain	The World	The World	The World	The Future	The Future	Everyday	(sep.)	Every' day
Lübeck	Economy & Occupat.	Economy & Occupat.	(sep.)	Economy & Occupat.	Economy & Occupat.	Economy & Occupat.	Domest. Security	Domest. Security	Domest. Security	Domest. Security	Foreign Policy	Foreign Policy	Environ. & Transprt.	Economy & Occupat.	Environ. & Transprt.	Health	Health
Kassel	Political Economy	Devel- opment	Pol Econ AND Legal Sy	Legal System	Legal System	Legal System	Internat. Relations	Internat. Relations	Devel- opment	Devel- opment	Devel- opment	Health	Health				
Erfurt	'Every- where'	Capitalism	Capitalism	Educat. & Future	Capitalism	Educat. & Future	Legal System	Legal System	Legal System	Foreign Policy	Foreign Policy	Foreign Policy	Quality of Life	Educat. & Future	Quality of Life	Quality of Life	Quality of Life
Würz' burg	Economy & Finances	Economy & Finances	Economy & Finances	Social Surroundings	Economy & Finances	Social Surroundings	'Every- where'	Legal System	Legal System	Legal System	Foreign Policy	Foreign Policy	Quality of Life	Social Surroundings	Quality of Life	Quality of Life	Social Surroundings
Liberec	Financial Situation	Educat.	State Services	State Services	State Services	Security	Security	Aid	Aid	Educat.	State Services	State Services	FinancI Situatn				
Plzeň	Finances	Finances	Finances	Finances	Finances	Educat.	Law	Law	Law	Educat.	Educat.	Aid	Educat.	Educat.	Finances	Aid	Finances
Ostrava	Everyday	State Sector	Educat. & Laws	Everyday	Everyday	Educat. & Laws	Educat. & Laws	Educat. & Laws	Everyday	Everyday	Global	Global	Global	State Sector	State Sector	State Sector	Every' day

### Summary of Card Arrangements

Words indicate the headings given to card piles. '(Sep.)' refers to cards which were not placed in piles but kept separate. For each row, colours generally correspond to card piles, but override these in cases where subsequent discussion suggests to do so. Across the rows, colours correspond approximately to the domains *Economics*, *Society and the Law* and *Relations between Peoples*, and the 'Quality of Life' set.



## **A Note on Transcription and Translation**

Extracts from the interview transcripts have been presented using a simple notation style, the key features of which are as follows. ‘...’ indicates a break in the speaker’s delivery, or the transition from one speaker to the next where there is no pause between the two. Where there is just a short pause, and the first speaker’s intervention was grammatically complete, this is marked by a full stop. Where there is a longer pause, and again the first speaker’s intervention was grammatically complete, this is marked by a full stop followed by ‘[pause]’. Where there is a longer pause, and the first speaker’s intervention seemed to tail off, this is marked by ‘... [pause]’. Short interventions that affirm what a speaker is saying without significantly adding to it are included in the body of that speaker’s text and marked by square brackets. Abridgements of the text are marked by ‘[...]’.

All translations from German and Czech are the work of the author. For the occasional word or phrase for which a translation is difficult, or which has an idiomatic sense that would be lost in translation, the original is included in square brackets.



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