

[A Political Sociology of European “Anti-Politics” and Dissent]

Abstract: The democratic nature of the European integration project is contested, and contestation and dissent seem to be on the increase, or at least becoming more visible, with the current economic crisis. A European project confined to transnational market-making is found wanting in terms of social competence as well as civic-democratic enablement. It seems undeniable that the attempts by the European Union (EU) to enhance its democratic standing have so far had limited success. For a political sociology of European democracy, an increasing gap between a European society and the formal-political world of the EU raises a host of significant and interesting questions. The article will tie in with some of the recent sociological studies that focus on European democracy, civil society, and social movements, and will contribute to the delineation of a specifically political-sociological approach to European democracy. The approach will link political theory with sociological insights, the latter in particular taken from the sociology of critical capacity as developed by Boltanski and Thévenot and others. Such an approach seems particularly useful in terms of the sociological exploration of different forms of critique and various repertoires of justification regarding the European polity, not least those expressed by “anti-political” and dissenting movements.

Keywords: Anti-politics; Democratic deficit; Dissent; EU; Political Sociology; Social Movements.

The democratic nature of the European integration project is contested, and contestation seems to be on the increase, or at least becoming more visible, with the current economic crisis. What seems increasingly clear is that a European project confined to transnational market-making, referring to a rather thin «output-oriented legitimacy», is found wanting in terms of social competence as well as civic-democratic enablement (cf. Delanty 2009). One way in which the European institutions have attempted to respond to perceived deficits in legitimacy and accountability is by introducing reforms ostensibly intended to enhance citizens’ involvement in European policy-making, in particular through forms of open consultation and civil society «invitation» (cf. Della Porta 2009a: 101).

It seems however undeniable that the attempts by the European Union (EU) to enhance its democratic standing have so far had limited success. This lack of success in terms of enhanced social legitimacy is further exacerbated by the recent “autocratic” tendencies in handling the financial and economic crisis, which have stimulated rather widespread, and sometimes cross-national, protests against imposed austerity programmes. For political sociology, an increasing gap between a European society¹ and the formal-political world of the EU raises a host of significant and interesting questions.

A focus on European society, and contestation and (supranational) social movements in particular, ties in with a number of recent and emerging trends in the study of European integration. In general terms, such a focus ties in with a (political) sociology of European integration, democracy, and civil society, and more specifically with the study of critique, contestation, and dissent.

I suggest that a focus on the latter can be particularly useful in a number of ways. Firstly, the significance

¹ Intended here as social relations distinct from the formal EU institutions, including, but not confined to national societies. In terms of Delanty and Rumford, European society entails «the cultural presuppositions and societal structures and processes by which social relations are constituted» (Delanty, Rumford 2005: 1).

of more radical, non-institutionalized forms of «anti-politics», including civil disobedience, lies not least in its bringing into clear relief of the increasing gap between European citizens and European elites (cf. Murray-Leach 2012). It also points to the (problematic) lack of «civic voice» in the European political system. Secondly, some of the articulated critique can provide a valuable resource for the elaboration of critical ideas on existing or instituted reality, in that it «tests» democracy and points to structural imperfections, and helps to re-imagine European democracy² (cf. Kaldor et al. 2012). Thirdly, alternative forms of politics (“anti-politics” or “anti-political politics”) might provide a not insignificant and promising counter-trend in times of general “depoliticization” and the turning away from politics. In a more general sense, I suggest that it is particularly in times of crisis, when existing, instituted imaginaries tend to lose their grip on reality, that critical perspectives can provide fruitful hints as to alternative trajectories.

The article will tie in with some of the sociological trends in EU studies mentioned above, and will contribute to the delineation of a specifically political-sociological approach to European democracy. I will, first, briefly discuss the emergence of (political) sociological approaches to European integration. Second, I will argue for the need for a political-sociological approach in the context of wider European studies. Third, I will outline one possible way of elaborating a political sociology of European democracy by turning to French pragmatic sociology or the sociology of critical capacity, as developed by Boltanski and Thévenot and others³. Such an approach seems particularly useful in terms of the exploration of the critique on, and thereby the contours and limits of, the existing, instituted European polity. Fourthly, I will further elaborate such an interpretative approach by relating it to normative political theory. And, finally, the article closes with a brief excursus into an empirical application of the approach by looking into critique on European democracy as articulated recently by European social movements.

A Sociology of Europe

In recent years, there has clearly been an upsurge in the sociological study of European integration (Rumford 2002; Delanty and Rumford 2005; Favell and Guiraudon 2009; Roche 2010). A key message of these sociological approaches is that the analysis of European integration cannot be confined to European institutions, state-EU interaction, and formal politics, but needs to include attention for social and public interaction within and beyond nation-states, including in an emerging European society (or societies).

Different emphases can be found in the various calls for a sociological study of European integration. Originally, significant attention was paid to a possibly emerging European identity (Delanty 2005, 2011; Kohli 2000) as well as forms of Europeanization, in the social-constructivist sense of the meaning that is attached to emerging European social structures (cf. Delanty and Rumford 2005: chapter 1). Recently, the need for a return to “classical” sociological points of interest has been emphasized in an attempt to stake a specifically sociological substantive sphere of research (social class, social stratification, social cleavages, social mobility, and social movements, see Favell and Guiraudon 2009). Others have explored the fruitfulness of the sociological study of political and legal elites (Cohen and Vauchez 2008), also emphasizing a Bourdieuan emphasis on fields and habitus (Kauppi 2003; Georgakakis and Weisbein 2010). And yet others have focused on the analysis of an emerging European public sphere or set of public spheres (Van de Steeg 2002; Giorgi, von Homeyer and Parsons 2006), public attitudes in different European states (Medrano 2003), as well as the role of civil society (Kohler Koch 2009; Kohler Koch and Rittberger 2007; Smismans 2009) and social movements (Della Porta 2009 a,b) in the European political constellation.

My main aim here is to contribute to what could be called a political sociology of European democracy,

² This is not to say that all suggestions by pro-democratic movements are viable or valid, nor that the movements necessarily express similar view points. As indicated by Pleyers, movements, such as Occupy and the Indignados, «provide alternative meanings to the crisis and reclaim a more democratic society. Their strategies, actions, concepts of social change, movements and democracy however vary considerably, to the point that some of their discourses and tactics may appear contradictory» (Pleyers 2012).

³ See Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 1999. For a recent overview, see Blokker 2011.

in which the main themes include democratic deficits, the challenges faced by (representative) democracy, the relation between society and politics, and different forms of democratic critique and dissent. In this, I will focus on what can be seen as a rather recent, and still relatively marginal, addition to this literature, that is, a political-sociological approach that uses a sociological lens to study the role of civil society, democratic contestation, and (trans-national) movements in the context of European integration (significant examples include Liebert and Trenz 2009; Della Porta 2009a, b; Kaldor et al. 2012). I will particularly explore the way in which a political-sociological approach can be fruitfully combined with insights from both the sociology of critical capacity and political theory in order to explore a plurality of (morally informed) democratic discourses and potential democratic innovation. The latter are particularly significant in the context of what is sometimes labelled «anti-political politics»⁴, which has emerged in the context of the economic crisis, but which in itself can be related to earlier transnational formations of protest such as for instance that regarding «alter-globalization» (Pleyers 2010).

The Relevance of a Political Sociological Approach

Political sociology traditionally tends to focus on the inter-relationships between the state, society, and the individual. As remarked by Rumford, it is however not possible for political sociology to continue in a traditional manner, i.e., by taking the unit of the nation-state for granted and understanding society as reproduced in a largely stable and continuous manner (Rumford 2002: 7-8). In particular in the European context, a key focus of attention of a political sociology has to be the transformations of the democratic state in its liberal, representative and constitutional guise, of society understood as a territorially confined sphere of interaction, and of citizenship as grounded in a singular political community.

It can be argued that the complex transformations that are affecting European states, societies, and citizens are not always at the forefront of European studies. Risking to simplify the extensive debate on the EU, it could be argued that a good part of the attention has gone into defining the nature of the European integration project itself (as based on multi-level governance, grounded in intergovernmentalism, etc.) as well as its (mal-)functioning, or into the analysis of the Europeanization of states. With regard to the predicament of democracy in the European context, much debate has probed the problem of the «democratic deficit» of the EU by scrutinizing existing institutions and their (supposed) defects (e.g. Lord 2004; Lord and Harris 2005; Hix 2008; Rittberger 2012). Here, much of the attention is then on the nature of the EU itself, or on a rather one-way understanding of change, that is, adaptation to the European project.

Alternatively, scholars have engaged in the normative theorizing of European democracy in which specific normative ideas of (post-national) democracy are fleshed out (cf. Bohman 2007; Eriksen 2009). In this complex and often abstract debate, a wide range of viewpoints can be identified. From a more political-scientific and empirically informed perspective, some deny any democratic deficit on the EU level and endorse a continuous grounding of democratic sovereignty in nation-states (Moravcsik 2002; Scharpf 2003). Others are (over-)optimistic about new, «experimental» forms of governance, in particular the Open Method of Coordination (Sabel and Zeitlin 2008). From a normative, political-theoretical perspective, a variety of viewpoints can be detected, including Habermas' proposal for post-national democracy (Habermas 1998), innovative models of «demoicrac» (Bohman 2007), as well as ideas of cosmopolitan democracy (Beck and Grande 2007; Delanty 2009)⁵.

⁴ One way of understanding «anti-political politics» is by highlighting critical views on formal, instituted and instrumentalised politics, as for instance articulated in such movements as Occupy or the Indignados. One related and particularly interesting and rich tradition is that of East-Central European dissidence. In that tradition, Vaclav Havel, for instance, referred to the anti-political stance in this way: «I favor «anti-political politics», that is, politics not as the technology of power and manipulation, of cybernetic rule over humans or as the art of the utilitarian, but politics as one of the ways of seeking and achieving meaningful lives, of protecting them and serving them» (Havel 1992: 269). On this view, anti-political politics is not only about rejecting formal politics and elites, but involves a positive moment of self-organizing democracy, seeking individual and collective autonomy, and «living in truth» (cf. Pleyers 2012).

⁵ This debate was not least triggered by the constitutionalization project of the EU.

The debate on European democracy seems for a good part to center on, on the one hand, institutional tinkering with regard to the instituted EU order, and, on the other, theoretical invention with regard to a supranational order to be instituted. In this, however, little attention is paid to processes of democratic practice, contestation, claims-making, and imagination in wider European society.⁶ The latter is unfortunate, because the lack of democratic legitimacy of the European project is clearly not merely resulting from perceived problems of existing institutions and procedures (in terms of bureaucracy, lack of accountability, etc.), but evidently also has a significant sociological grounding, that is, in the gap between institutions and the wider citizenry, as well as in the difficulty citizens have in constructing relevant meaning with regard to the European project.

Also from this perspective, a sociological approach to European integration seems badly needed, and it is not surprising that sociologists, including political sociologists, are increasingly showing interest in European studies⁷. The thrust of a sociological approach is clearly a «bottom up» one, and in this it could importantly «correct» the existing «top down» bias in European studies (cf. Favell 2007). At the same time, it could be argued that much of the attention in a sociology of European integration in some ways reproduces or complements the institutional bias of existing European studies grounded in law and politics, in that much attention goes to instituted forms of society (for instance, in the form of «organized civil society»⁸), and forms of interaction and «partnership» between the EU's formal political society and different kinds of civil society representatives and stakeholders.

There seem in this few attempts to explore how citizens, as well as a variety of social actors and social groups throughout the EU, perceive a democratic deficit, endeavour to make sense of the European project, and, in some instances, propose alternative views of European integration⁹. Few focus on the question to what extent public debate, contestation and critique with regard to the existing European architecture might indicate a political mobilization or politicization of European society or societies (according to some desirable), and what the substantive orientations in existing forms of politicization are (cf. White 2010: 55-6). Such a focus might however provide interesting elements for a more complete understanding of the EU's current democratic predicament, as well as a starting point for the re-imagining of democratic practice and institutions. As Jonathan White has argued, while some attention is given to «views and practices beyond the Brussels institutions», such attention often remains confined to general and rather superficial accounts of public opinion based on aggregated data (White 2010: 57, 60-1; for a recent contribution, see Sanders et al. 2012).

What is too often left out of the picture is a potentially significant part of the politicization process of the European project and one that might take on more importance in times of crisis, i.e., forms of (meta-)political critique and democratic dissent (cf. Blokker and Brighenti 2011). If one agrees with the observation that democracy in Europe is, if not in crisis, then at least going through a process of important transformation (cf. Ferrara 2011), then it becomes important to pay particular attention to the contours and premises of the existing, instituted democratic system(-s) and the latter's increasing distance from held beliefs on and ways of making sense of democratic politics.

In other words, it is probably true that processes of structural transformation of democracy tend to coincide with a weakening general belief in or adherence to the instituted political «reality», and an increasing visibility

6 Apart from research based on the ubiquitous but relatively superficial and generic opinion polls of, for instance, the Eurobarometer (cf. White 2010).

7 For recent overviews of sociology's importance and development in the context of European studies, see Favell 2007; Favell and Guiraudon 2009; Liebert and Trenz 2009; Zimmerman and Favell 2010; Parsons 2012.

8 In this respect, Eder has introduced the notion of Civil Society IV or CS4, which, according to him, is the specific form that is emerging in Europe: «Civil society is co-opted into these emerging institutions of political power [“non-national forms of political institutions”, pb] by providing special procedural rules for privileged access to political power. This is CS4, and Europe is the exemplary case where this type of CS emerges» (Eder 2009: 25).

9 A few exceptions should be noted. Interestingly, in a recent analysis of «subterranean politics» by Kaldor et al. (2012), Europe seems to be largely invisible in current claims by the movements studied. In contrast, some of the findings of Della Porta on the European Social Forum do indicate an important European dimension (Della Porta 2009a, b). Below, I will elaborate on a number of recent initiatives that have an explicit European dimension.

of an underlying, potentially to be instituted «worlds»¹⁰. In current times of uncertainty about the predicament of democratic politics, an understanding of forms of critique on the political status quo as well as of potentially innovative proposals for alternative political forms becomes one way of analyzing shifting beliefs and possible directions of transformation.

Political Sociology and Pragmatic Sociology

I suggest that one significant contribution that a political sociology of European democracy could make is a qualitatively informed exploration of existing structures of meaning-giving with regard to the European project, as being available, or being constructed, as cultural repertoires and sets of propositions and articulations throughout European society, and on which various actors draw. A further dimension is a focus on emerging forms of critique, innovative ways of “making sense” of a political Europe, and, possibly, proposals for alternative political arrangements. A pluralist approach which recognizes a variety of ways of understanding and legitimating the European project, based on different «higher common principles», seems all the more desirable, since not least in the media, but also in some of the research on, for instance, populism, discourses on the EU tend to be often portrayed in overly dichotomic pro-European versus Euro-sceptic views¹¹. What seems often lacking is a more nuanced, qualitatively-driven exploration of a plurality of narratives on European integration, not least with regard to its relation to the future of democracy, that taken together would provide a more rich and critical picture of cultural understandings of the European project.

One promising way of constructing such a political sociology of European democracy is by drawing on French pragmatic sociology or the sociology of critical capacity (see Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 1999; Blokker 2011). Some of the key tenets of this approach appear to be particularly useful for an explorative agenda of available and emerging public, democratic narratives in the European context (cf. Balli 2006; Eder 2009; White 2010). Firstly, pragmatic sociology understands social action as drawing on available cultural repertoires in individual attempts to make sense of the world. It explicitly values the critical competences of individuals themselves. The assumption is that individuals will draw on different cultural repertoires in distinct instances of social interaction, without being fully determined by these repertoires. In this, pragmatic sociology points to the constrained nature of making sense of the world, on the one hand, but on the other, also to the possibility of a creative reworking of existing repertoires of meaning-giving. In a related way, this entails a loosening of the relation between the individual’s social position and what Bourdieu called *habitus*. Instead, there is an assumption of a certain distance between people’s social background and position within society, and their capacity to interpret and criticize the world, an assumption that seems particularly relevant in the contemporary situation in which various identities, including political ones (electoral identities, class identities) seem in flux and new forms of collective identification in the making, in particular in an increasingly transnationalized and culturally diverse life world (White 2010: 60).

Secondly, pragmatic sociology does not depart from a fixed, institutionalized idea of civil society in which it is understood as located in an aprioristically defined social position nor from a predefined normative understanding of what publicness or civicness entails. Rather, the idea of a civic grammar¹² is that it is one grammar among others, which competes in making sense of the world, and which can emerge in a variety of settings. This assumption allows one to identify civic claims and forms of critique in different contexts (Eder 2009: 23-4; cf. Lichterman 2012). This means that also less institutionalized forms of social interaction enter into focus. In this, sociological

¹⁰ I am using Luc Boltanski’s language here (Boltanski 2009; 2011). I will come back to this distinction below.

¹¹ See, e.g., *Dutch pro-Europe parties win heated election*, 13/09/12, available at: <http://euobserver.com/political/117531>. For a more nuanced account, see Cas Mudde, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2012/09/13/dutch-elections/>.

¹² In pragmatic sociology, various «grammars of the political bond» are identified, in particular with regard to distinct «higher common principles». The six grammars or orders elaborated in what is the key publication of the approach - *On Justification* - are: the civic order, based on the principle of a collective good; the market order, based on the principle of price; the inspired order, based on the principle of grace; the domestic order, based on the principle of esteem; the industrial order, based on the principle of productivity, efficiency; and the order of opinion, based on the principle of renown (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006, 1999).

inquiry might take into account the views of significant, politically active but marginal social actors whose non-inclusion seems to be exactly one of the key ingredients of the democratic deficit.

Thirdly, although not at the forefront in the original approach of Boltanski and Thévenot, pragmatic sociology can be employed to study those forms of critique that not only criticize existing arrangements by means of the application of one of the available grammars to another one,¹³ which is one of the most prominent modes of critique described in the seminal *On Justification*, but also critique that takes the form of a meta-political critique, in which the foundations of the existing order (in which the available grammars themselves are grounded) become the object of scrutiny. Critique is thus not only of a reformist kind, but can also take a radical form in which a different way of achieving a just reality is indicated (cf. Boltanski 2011). Such a focus would bring into our sphere of attention forms of «anti-political politics» that attempt to redefine arrived understandings of politics altogether, and which take on a particularly pressing nature in moments of crisis in which the established forms of understanding reality become increasingly less salient (as is, for instance, evident in the increasing public skepticism towards political parties and the recent revival of political movements).

Political Sociology and Political Theory

A useful starting point for the identification of a plurality of regimes of justification or, in our case, ways of justifying the European integration project is by taking recourse to existing normative theories of the European project¹⁴. The idea is that actors in social reality will generally not engage in a systematic demonstration of the principles on the basis of which they make claims or criticize. A reference to the systematic elaboration of such principles in theoretical works can then serve as a basis so as to be able to identify such principles in social reality where they often remain under-articulated or implicit (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006: 13). In this way, it is possible to identify a number of general principles of legitimacy, all of which invoke some kind of common good to which the European order would need to respond¹⁵.

Eriksen, for instance, identifies three main modes of legitimation for the European project: first, an efficiency-based mode in which the EU is seen as a problem-solving project in which legitimacy is based on providing distinct public goods; second, a mode based on collective self-understanding in which the EU is seen as a politico-cultural entity in which legitimacy is grounded in a pre-political value-based community; and third, a mode based on justice in which the EU is seen as an entity grounded in universalistic rights, and in which legitimacy is based on the protection of such rights (Eriksen 2009: chapter 4; cf. Delanty 2009). These three modes of legitimation overlap to some extent with well-known views on Europe that range from an intergovernmental idea of the European polity, to a federal idea of Europe, to a multi-levelled governance idea of Europe.

In itself, these three modes already help identify a good part of existing justificatory repertoires regarding the European project. For instance, the minimalism of the problem-solving model is endorsed by distinct political elites (afraid of losing sovereignty) as well as parts of citizens and civil society in Europe from various political backgrounds (afraid of losing national control over, for instance, welfare and unemployment), but it is also clearly the object of critique from the part of those that imagine a more maximalist and politicised view of the European project, in which for instance an expansion of rights to a wide range of groups is endorsed. It seems fair to argue that these theoretical models also relate to diffused models justificatory practices regarding a European polity.

At the same time, at least in theoretical debates, these mainstream narratives are now complemented by novel, innovative ways of depicting a political Europe, thereby indicating alternative general principles that might underpin European political integration. These include a deliberative view, a cosmopolitan, and a civic, bottom up view. Deliberative democracy has become a much debated perception of the future of the European project,

13 For instance, as in the critique of the EU as a market project, i.e., as based on profit motives and individual interests, formulated from the point of view of a civic, solidarity based view, in which the common good is a priority.

14 This is inspired by Boltanski and Thévenot's approach in *On Justification* in which they turn to political philosophy in order to differentiate general principles that inform regimes of justification that invoke generality.

15 I do not intend to be exhaustive here. The assumption is, however, that there is a limited set of available grammars.

not least influenced by developments in the EU itself, that is, the Conventions on the European Charter of Human Rights as well as on a European constitution. A deliberative approach endorses wider inclusion of those affected by political integration, it suggests a deliberative method for important political processes (such as the constitution-making process), and it suggests that through such wider inclusion and possibility of deliberation forms of domination and tyranny of the majority can be avoided (cf. Bohman 2007). A major idea in deliberation is that in deliberative settings people need to «justify their stands and points of view, and, in the process of reaching agreement, [they] learn from one another and sometimes even change preferences so that collective decision-making is possible» (Eriksen et al. 2003: 2).

A second, cosmopolitan justification of European integration – in many ways overlapping with the concerns of the idea of deliberative democracy - emphasizes the importance of a «post-sovereign state» for achieving a cosmopolitanised order in which complex diversity can be dealt with (Delanty 2009). Such an order entails the relativization of national identities, the development of a politics of recognition, and the emergence of a public culture which recognizes various constituent groups (Delanty 2009: 200). An important difference between the deliberative view as briefly portrayed above and the cosmopolitan view is the latter's emphasis on society and the need for a social and cultural Europe. In contrast, some of the thrust in the deliberative model is towards political institutions and so-called stakeholders.

A third justification emphasizes bottom-up, civic participation. While, as we see below, grass-roots engagements with and critique of Europe do not necessarily take a radical view, it does seem useful to indicate more unconventional visions of the European project into an analytical framework in order to capture possibly marginal, unorthodox viewpoints. The latter, as observed above, could be seen as radical “tests” of European democracy. Such radical tests identify imperfections of the European regime more clearly than other articulations of critique. One source of theoretical grounding for such a view can be detected in some of the writings of James Tully. Tully makes a forceful claim for a bottom-up, civic and micro-democratic approach to «democratic integration» (Tully 2007). Tully sees the problem-solving model as ultimately «anti-democratic», whereas he also identifies a «restricted democratic approach» that is ultimately focused on the «official institutions of the public sphere», and is defined by pre-settled procedures and norms (Tully 2007: 73-4). The “open-ended” model Tully endorses is, in contrast, based on democratic negotiation both within and without formal institutions. In a related way, political actors are not merely constituted by public officials and “invited” civil society representatives but include in principle all members of society. What is more, both procedures of negotiation and norms of integration are open to debate. In this open-ended model, the emphasis is on democracy as an indeterminate and on-going project. Tully's open-ended model can be taken as the basis of a justificatory narrative that emphasizes “bottom-up” politics and is highly critical of representative, liberal forms of democracy.

Here, I draw on these political theories of European democratic legitimacy to «elucidate the grammar of political bonds». Boltanski and Thévenot ultimately formulated nine different «cité» or «polities», i.e., the aforementioned inspired, domestic, civic, industrial, market polities, and the polity of fame, as well as the project, green, and information polities¹⁶. I will draw on some of these in my (provisional) elaboration of polities or orders of worth that relate to justifications of European political integration¹⁷ (see table 1).

One prominent way of justifying the European project is by either relating to its capacity to produce what Scharpf has called «output-oriented legitimacy», which could be understood both in terms of increased material wealth (*market order*) as well as increased efficiency and productive/technological capacity (*industrial order*). The

16 One should note that a similar approach to repertoires and systems of meaning-giving is that found in Goffman-inspired *frame analysis*, although important differences between the two approaches remain (see Lilian 2008). One problem of frame analysis, according to Lilian, is that it largely treats frames in a utilitarian way, that is, as mobilizing instruments, while moral, ethical, or juridical dimensions of engagement are neglected (Lillian 2008: 58). A problem that both frame analysis and pragmatic sociology encounter is the risk to reduce repertoires or frames to static and intellectual structures ultimately disattached from practice, and thus an understanding of such repertoires as external to, rather than produced in, action (Lilian 2008: 63). Medrano (2003) uses frame analysis in the study of public attitudes towards the EU, but includes pragmatic sociology under this banner, in particular Lamont and Thévenot's comparative work (Lamont and Thévenot 2000).

17 There is also affinity here with Walters and Haahr's attempt to interrogate the political imaginaries behind «taken-for-granted meanings» regarding European democracy, that is, the «space of un/democratic Europe» (Walter and Haahr 2005: 66-7).

relation to (post-national) democracy is a fragile one, in that democracy is mostly seen as relevant on the national level, while the supranational is seen as a realm related to the executive rather than decisional dimension of politics. A different way of legitimizing the European project is viewing it as a way of safeguarding a European collectivity (for instance, European values), or, more frequently, as a way of safeguarding a variety of national collectivities (*unity in diversity*). This «order of commonality» is grounded in the idea that democracy can only be based on a shared sense of (often pre-political, cultural) commonality. The «civic order», following Boltanski and Thévenot, is grounded in collective or public interest, and based on the idea of equality, in strong contrast to the idea of private interests. The «deliberative order» stresses the importance of the inclusion of relevant «stakeholders», i.e., actors affected by particular political decisions, and the importance of engagement of various stakeholders in public debate in which they justify their points of view. This order is based on the «power of speech» (cf. Eriksen and Fossum 2002: 403). The «cosmopolitan order» is equally based on the idea of inclusion, but stresses the need for cultural inclusion and recognition, rather than the inclusion of different interests. It is important to note that this often entails a call for inclusion beyond formal members of the polity. The last polity I refer to here (again, I am not attempting to be exhaustive, although a broader set of polities will not be unlimited) is the «bottom-up order», in which the emphasis is on autonomy or self-governance, and the principle that democracy is to be based on the ruled being able to give themselves their own rules.

Table 1 Different justificatory orders of European political integration

The EU as a:	Market order	Industrial order	Order of commonality	Civic order	Deliberative order	Cosmopolitan order	Bottom up order
<i>Principles of legitimation</i>	Profit, wealth generation (through competition)	Efficiency; productivity	Cultural unity	Collective good	Inclusiveness	Recognition	Self-government
<i>Main democratic rationale</i>	Individual choice	Mastery, increased capacities	Construction of collectivity, demos	Equality	Standard of non-domination	Inclusiveness	Public autonomy
<i>Institutional imagination</i>	Common market	European area of progress (e.g. Europe 2020)	European or national community of belonging	European constitutional order; Charter of rights	Deliberative arenas; plural forms of authority	Differentiated integration	Plurality of channels of civic input; various forms of basic guarantees
<i>Scope of politics</i>	Limited, regulatory politics	Instrumentalist, regulatory politics	Elite politics; national politics	Political participation based on rights	Politics as discursive interaction	Inclusive, post-identity politics	Politics beyond formal institutions

Source: Own elaboration; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006.

An Interpretative Analysis of European Dissent

In moments of crisis¹⁸ it seems particularly important – as sociological analysts of the crisis phenomenon – to pay specific attention to critical and radical languages and actions. These tend to articulate the crisis and are often stemming from the margins rather than from the center. And such languages and practices include in their more radical instances forms of dissent and civil disobedience. It could be argued that the imaginary dimension of the crisis is constituted by the exposed fragility of reality and the reopening of a «pathway to the world» (to use Boltanski's language)¹⁹, that is, to non-institutionalized social realities (Boltanski 2009: 163; cf. Blokker and Brighenti 2011).

In the context of our discussion of the relation between the European project and democracy, this in general terms means that attempts to hold onto the status quo of the instituted reality are often expressed in terms of the denial of an increased democratic deficit²⁰. Or, in an alternative reading, it is expressed in reference to existing democratic arrangements, that is, national political sovereignty²¹. But such attempts at maintaining the status quo are open to various types of critique, for instance, the radical critique that sustains that part of the origins of the crisis have to do with the way (European) reality is instituted in the first place. Such critical voices tend to suggest that new ways of imagining Europe have to be found (as in the slogan «another Europe is possible»). It is the latter perspective that is often part of the language of more marginal actors such as pro-democracy movements²². Such critical perspectives might be particularly important in its creative dimensions in that the crisis is at least in part about the growing gap between instituted reality and the capacity of wider society to give meaning to or make sense of that reality. In this way, the imperfectness and lack of legitimacy of existing arrangements is exposed (cf. Thomassen 2007).

Below I will refer – in a preliminary and non-exhaustive way - to some instances of critique and dissent with regard to the democratic nature of the European integration project²³. In this, I will try to relate some of the “orders” I elaborated above to the criticism raised. It is interesting to observe that many expressions of critique ultimately engage in a form of »test of reality« (Boltanski 2009), that is, existing democratic reality and practices in the EU are criticized for not living up to the justificatory regimes on which they themselves are supposedly based. For instance, the promoters of an *AlterSummit* argue for the restoration of democracy in Europe:

18 While it is true that “crisis” is a much invoked and perhaps abused label for the state of affairs in modern societies, it seems hard to deny that in the current context of global financial and economic crisis (sic) and the specific form the response to this crisis has taken in the EU (not least in terms of a top-down austerity strategy, apparently with no alternative), the state of democracy is problematic, both on the national and on the supranational levels.

19 Boltanski distinguishes between what he calls the *world* (*le monde*) and *reality* (*réalité*) to indicate the fundamental uncertainty and indeterminacy that plague human societies. He calls the world a *background*, which can be defined as – following Wittgenstein - being «everything that is the case» (Boltanski 2011: 57). The world is normally in the background but comes to the fore in instances of «radical uncertainty», that is, when our existing modes of giving meaning to the world seem inadequate. *Reality* is then exactly that which is «orientated towards permanence» or the «preservation of order» providing a closed set of meanings of the world, in an attempt to eradicate radical uncertainty (Boltanski 2009). In our focus on European democracy, reality would refer to a largely taken for granted institutional constellation and related set of justificatory ideas regarding the EU, while the world would include alternative, non-instituted ways of organizing and thinking about European democracy, a Europe *in potentia*.

20 It is exactly this denial that might be seen as problematic from a democratic point of view, if one excepts the idea that a vital democracy or «truly imaginative and democratic social and political life» needs some degree of openness that allows for (creative) dissent and critique on existing, instituted reality (Karagiannis & Wagner 2005: 254-5).

21 The ruling of the German BundesVerfassungsgericht on the European Stability Mechanism is particularly interesting here, as well as the reaction by Juergen Habermas. Habermas argued that the BVfG engaged in a «line of argumentation obsessed with sovereignty» („souveränitätsversessene Argumentationslinie“), see: <http://m.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/juristentag-lauter-souveraene-11898568.html>. He further argued that it was not clear «whether the court defended the nation-state in the name of democracy or democracy in the name of the nation-states», see *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, 220, 22/23 September 2012.

22 A full picture of critique on existing arrangements should include forms of «uncivil society». Unfortunately, there is no room for discussing narratives invoked by such movements here (see Ruzza 2009). Elsewhere, I have explored the complex relations between populism and democracy, see Blokker 2005.

23 Rich and in-depth studies of bottom up democratic critique can be found in Kaldor et al. 2012 and Della Porta 2009 a and b.

We say “Enough”! We no longer accept these policies. They flout democracy; they have already plunged Europe in a particularly severe economic crisis. They awaken xenophobic demons that the creation of Europe *was in principle intended to eradicate*. We want to *improve* the European social model and defend the people, not banks, corporations, and their main shareholders.

This requires other policies, which means also to *review* the institutions and treaties; not in the sense of a hardening of punitive neoliberalism, but rather for *reclaiming democracy*. Alternatives exist. What is lacking today is a balance of power to implement these alternatives and devise political processes in order to *bring back the European project on the track of democracy, social and ecological progress*. The alternative summit we call for will be a first step towards achieving these goals (Alter Summit 2012a; emphasis added).

What becomes clear from this statement is that an important part of the claims consist of a «reformist critique», with (implicit) references to what I have called above a «civic order» as a justificatory regime, based on equality, social solidarity, and rights, while the neoliberal logic of market capitalism as well as that of the «order of commonality» (xenophobic demons) are denounced. This becomes also clear in the appeal for *Another road for Europe*:

Europe is in crisis because it has been hijacked by neoliberalism and finance. In the last twenty years - with a persistent democratic deficit - the meaning of the European Union has increasingly been reduced to a narrow view of the single market and the single currency, leading to liberalisations and speculative bubbles, loss of rights and the explosion of inequalities.

This is not the Europe that was imagined decades ago as a space of economic and political integration free from war. This is not the Europe that was built through economic and social progress, the extension of democracy and welfare rights. This European project is now in danger (Another Road for Europe 2012; emphasis added).

The reformist language is evident here, that is, an appeal to the status quo ex ante of a democratic and welfarist state (*civic order*). But further on in the appeal the language changes in that a «radical critique» becomes visible that does not accept a return to the past, and wants a radical institutional response regarding civic voice (*the bottom up order*) as well as to a more inclusionary order that displays solidarity beyond Europe (*the cosmopolitan order*).

The forms of representative democracy through parties and governments – and the social dialogue among organisations representing capital and labour – are less and less able to provide answers to current problems. At European level the common decision-making process is increasingly replaced by the rule of the strongest. *The crisis takes legitimacy away from EU institutions*; the Commission increasingly acts as a bureaucratic support of the strongest member states, the Central Bank is unaccountable and the European Parliament does not fully use its powers and anyway is still excluded from crucial decisions on economic governance.

In past decades, Europe’s *citizens* have taken centre stage in social mobilisations and in practices of participatory and deliberative democracy – from European Social Forums to the protests of indignados.

These experiences need an institutional response. There is the need to overcome the mismatch between social change and *political and institutional arrangements that are a remnant of the past*.

European societies need not be inward-looking. *The social and political inclusion of migrants is a key test for Europe’s democracy*. Closer ties can be built with the movements for democracy on the Southern shores of the Mediterranean after the downfall of authoritarian regimes (Another Road for Europe 2012; emphasis added).

An equally «radical test» of existing institutions is provided by Commons Sense, in particular through its European Charter of the Commons, in which it is argued that «[i]t is impossible to address the increasing European democratic deficit through an intergovernmental cession of State sovereignty, because the current power ratio, the collusion between the private and public sectors, between state and market actors, *precludes national elected officials to represent the common interests of the people*» (European Charter 2012). The initiative is interesting not least because of a combination of a civic and constitutionalist language of rights, invoking a *civic order*, and a participatory language that invokes the *bottom-up order* of direct civic influence and voice. The Charter contains *inter alia* the

following statements:

2. A true commonwealth of Europe is possible only by means of *constitutional safeguards* of the commons through a *direct participatory process*.

...

9. It is necessary that the commons are understood not only as living resources, such as forests, biodiversity, water, glaciers, seabeds, shores, energy, knowledge and cultural goods, but also as organized public services, such as schools, healthcare facilities, and transportation.

...

13. Such catalogue must be integral part of a *Constitutional process*, based on the irreversibility of ecological legal protection, eventually to be granted *constitutional status* as heritage of Europe in trust for future generations.

...

20. We hereby require the Commission to *transform* this popular citizen's initiative *into a new form of legitimate and democratic European Constitutional Law*. The Commission must take all the necessary steps in order for the European Parliament, to be elected in 2014, to be granted *Constitutional Assembly Status* in order to adopt a *Constitution of the Commons* (Commons Sense 2012; emphasis added).

A recent initiative, launched at the 10th anniversary of the European Social Forum in Florence in November 2012, has a similar thrust in its call for a Democratic Assembly. Here, a foundationalist/constitutionalist language equally appears in a reaction to what is seen as an ongoing «quasi constitutional process happening on the European level in which the citizens are barely having any say». It is interesting to see that the top-down, elite-driven initiative of constituent politics, as also attempted in the European Convention on the Future of Europe, is explicitly criticized: «We need to move beyond the unsatisfactory experience of the European Convention» (European Alternatives 2012: 1). The promoters of the initiative:

believe there is an alternative – the demand for a Europe where *citizens, social forces, movements and associations have a say over their collective future*. The construction of a Europe based on real democratic and political processes, able to interrupt the hegemony of austerity and reformulate a response to the crisis and open another road to Europe. We don't need a Fiscal Pact, *we need a Citizen Pact*. A real pact of European citizens and residents leading to substantial reforms of the decision-making processes and institutions of the European Union (European Alternatives 2012: 1; emphasis added).

There is a clear allusion here to what I have labeled a *bottom-up order* with its emphasis on self-government as the higher common principle. The promoters go on by stating:

Such a Pact can only be drafted by the *activation of a real participatory and democratic process*. We need to imagine – and begin constructing – the tools of transnational democracy in Europe. That is why we imagine a process that builds a real public debate, that engages citizens in local assemblies and that mobilises local authorities and institutions of proximity. There is no Citizen Pact with European Citizens. (European Alternatives 2012: 1; emphasis added).

This cursory exploration here is only meant to suggest the potential richness of some of the forms of radical critique on the European project, which, while most likely not being amenable to direct translation into institutional forms, do indicate some significant dimensions of imperfection of the current order, not least with regard to the incapacity for action of existing political institutions and actors, the problematic and shifting distinctions between the public and the private, and the deeply problematic nature of the relations between formal political society and wider civil society.

Conclusions

The argument has been that a sociology of European integration might fruitfully include a political, interpretative sociology of discourses of justification of European democracy. I have tried to delineate how such an approach might take inspiration from Boltanski and Thévenot's pragmatic sociology as well as from European political theory. It seems to me that an approach dually grounded in a political theoretical elaboration of «higher common principles» and the empirical exploration of the usage of such principles by critical actors offers some room for an interesting, partially novel analytical perspective. The exploration of critical languages used with regard to the European project and its (non-)democratic nature seems particularly timely in the context of the current economic as well as political crisis in Europe. In this, the endeavour sheds light on a crucial dimension of the democratic deficit, that is, the relation and tensions between European formal politics and political imagination, on the one hand, and political claims and (radical) imaginary stemming from wider European society, on the other. In terms of comparative, empirical analysis, I have only made some preliminary steps here, but it emerges from the brief analysis of some of the contributions to a European public debate that critical views tie into not least a strong notion of civic participation, which I have related to a «bottom-up order» of justification. What is particularly interesting, from my point of view, is the recourse to legal and constitutionalist language that explicitly criticizes prior experiences with top-down constituent politics. In sum, a sociology that explores substantive arguments and critical narratives seems particularly useful in times when the existing European order and its legitimacy narratives seem evermore distanced from European citizens' and residents' lives.

Acknowledgement: The author acknowledges an *Unità di Ricerca 2011* grant (project: Constitutional Politics in post-Westphalian Europe (CoPolis)) from the *Provincia Autonoma di Trento*.

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