

## Publications

### Towards a New Political Sociology

by Mabel Berezin

The following article reports the highlights of an intelligent and spirited debate that occurred at the 14th International Conference of Europeanists last March during an “Author Meets Critic” Session on Juan Diez Medrano’s *Framing Europe: Attitudes to European Integration in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom* (Princeton University Press, 2003). George Steinmetz, of Sociology and German Studies at Michigan and an expert in political and literary theory, and Michèle Lamont, of Sociology at Harvard and a prominent comparative cultural sociologist, served as critics. Juan Diez Medrano, formerly of University of California, San Diego and now at the University of Bremen, was animated as he engaged his critics point by point. We felt that *Framing Europe* is an exciting book that is likely to become a landmark study in the political and cultural sociology of European integration. As the Chair of the panel I began the discussion and my comments aimed to convey a sense of why the book is exciting.

**Chair, Mabel Berezin:** Diez Medrano studies European integration through the lens of public opinion—public opinion writ large to include interviews, content analysis of mass and elite media, as well as a concluding analytic chapter that assesses this array of qualitative data against standard Eurobarometer data. *Framing Europe* focuses upon three nation-states, Germany, England and Spain, whose geopolitical location within Europe has shaped their positions on European integration and the timing of their entries to the European Union. For each of these nation-states, Diez Medrano selected two representative cities. Traveling to the six cities, he drew a sample of ordinary citizens with whom he discussed their opinions of European integration; he also interviewed local elites. Diez-Medrano’s research instrument, the semi-structured interview permits us to hear the voices of ordinary Europeans clearly. From this set of remarkable interviews, Diez Medrano profiles popular attitudes towards European integration, “frames” as he puts it, in each of the six cities.

This book would have been compelling enough if Diez Medrano had simply written about his ethnographic research, but *Framing Europe* aims for much more. Diez Medrano situates his interview data in a comparative historical framework that meticulously details discourses of European integration in the mass and elite public sphere over a period of fifty years. For his three cases, he examines visions of Europe in op-ed pieces in elite newspapers, prize-winning novels and public school history textbooks. Weaving this textual data into his interview data, Diez Medrano uncovers a popular narrative of integration that describes surprising national continuities despite variation in political and social circumstances over the course of the post-War period. Particularly salient is the finding that historical legacies figure prominently in contemporary visions of Europe.

*Framing Europe’s* unique contribution to the study of European integration is as a first step towards a thick assessment, that is, an assessment that takes culture as well as structure into account, of the future of Europe as a socio-political entity. European Union studies tend to fall generally into two more or less diametrically opposing camps: a hard institutionalist mode that characterizes the majority of research in political science that views integration through the lens of rationality and a softer

constructivist approach that views Europe as a post-modern identity space. A concept of the social has been lacking in studies of European integration. In contrast to the abundant public opinion data of a quantitative variety, empirical data on the experiential dimensions of integration is sparse.

The distinctiveness of *Framing Europe* lies in its attempt to develop a new political sociology of Europe in the mode of Seymour Martin Lipset and Juan Linz as the book explores the perceptions that ordinary citizens have of their nation-state and of Europe. How ordinary citizens interpret and experience their respective places within these dual entities shapes how they “frame” and interact with the process of European integration.

**Critic, George Steinmetz:** Juan Diez Medrano’s *Framing Europe* is a very important book, both for the topic it covers and for its combination of ethnographic, interpretive, historical, and statistical methods. Diez Medrano argues that even a meticulous statistical analysis of survey data cannot explain why the British are so skeptical and the Germans and Spanish so supportive of European integration. The book concentrates on the ways journalists, novelists, politicians, and non-elite respondents have talked about European integration since 1945. Rather than seeking a single “model,” Diez Medrano offers quite specific accounts for each of the four countries (East Germany is treated as a distinct case, even after unification). This tension between divergent histories and a process of unification structures the book.

My criticisms, or questions, concern the author’s treatment of subjectivity and culture and his homogenizing vision of national cultures. His finding that emotional anti-Europeanism trumps rational calculation of the economic costs and benefits of European integration in Britain is compelling. But Diez Medrano insists that “psychology” cannot explain this lack of support for the EU, and he suggests that British worries about the loss of national identity are not a psychic phenomenon. This is unconvincing. Surely emotions like fear (of loss of nation) and love (for country) are at least partly psychological, as are identifications with one’s own position as a subject of the British Crown or a member of the German Volk. On a related point, Diez Medrano claims (p. 250) that attitudes to the EU are not unconscious. But is this self-evident? How could one actually determine the non-existence of unconscious motives or processes inductively, given that theories of the unconscious require a distinction between empirical appearances and underlying generative structures? This is an a priori assumption rather than a research finding, pace Diez Medrano. The dozens of prize-winning novels that he read for his research on this book would seem to offer more access to psychic processes. Many leading postwar (west) German writers have expressed a strong identification with the non-German Other. For example, one thinks of Uwe Johnson’s *Jahrestage* (1970), Peter Schneider’s *Lenz* (1974), or the novels of W.G. Sebald.

Social scientists have been rethinking cultural processes after an earlier rejection of culture in the 1960s and ‘70s, but there has not yet been a serious confrontation with the disavowal of the psychic during the same period. Diez Medrano’s book underscores some of the unresolved issues in cultural analysis. When discussing the role of religion in support for EI, he observes that one would need to discover the causal mechanism through which this association operates, and he then goes on to suggest that this would “require moving away from the focus on social representations.” Yet one could read *Framing Europe* as an argument about representations resulting from other representations. There is nothing wrong with

this in my view, but Diez Medrano seems to shy away from the culturalist implications of his own analysis.

A final set of questions concerns the book's implicit model of society. Diez Medrano does not ignore institutions located between individuals and elites, but he suggests that all fields operate according to a uniform logic, that elites ultimately participate in the same "non-instrumental preoccupations" as the rest of the population (p. 256). It is unclear whether this is a general claim about modern societies, an argument about a deeper level of culture that binds together disparate social fields, or an assertion only about the limited topic of European integration. But even with respect to the latter, events of the past year showed a tremendous divergence between the ruling elites and the population in Spain, with respect to the war in Iraq. *Framing Europe* is rich enough to spark these sorts of considerations and is a wonderful and thought-provoking example of meticulous comparative social science.

**Critic, Michèle Lamont:** *Framing Europe* represents a quantum leap in the study of attitudes toward the EU. It is a quantum leap in Diez-Medrano's framing of the question, in the sophistication of the research design, and in the range of data on which he draws:

The author analyzes the most important constructs that ordinary citizens and local elites use to understand the role and importance of the EU by locating them within a broad framework that concerns their conceptions of national identity, the economic and political trajectory of their country, its relationship with the modernization project, its voice in the European public sphere, and the relative development of the welfare state within the national context. Diez-Medrano taps alternative cultural frameworks inductively instead of relying on much narrower and less appropriate survey items that are best suited to detail changes of over time. He also examines the connections between attitudes toward the EU and political orientations, showing for instance that many of the "integrationists" are progressive politically, because they are aware that the EU can provide many benefits beyond the economic development that it purports to generate. His approach provides a fine-grained analysis of attitudes towards the EU, while drawing on survey data to discuss potential for generalization.

My main criticism concerns Diez-Medrano's occasional use of reflection theory. On p. 106 he writes that "the views of European integrations articulated by ordinary citizens and local elites differ from country to country because they reflect preoccupations that are rooted in the countries' history and culture." The reflection approach to culture has been so thoroughly criticized in the literature that one is surprised to see it referred to by as sophisticated an analyst as Diez-Medrano. Other passages reveal different conceptions of the origins of social representations, which suggest that the author has not fully or adequately unpacked the causal processes at work. He should have discussed more explicitly the interactions between institutional contexts, path dependent social transformation, intermediary factors, as well as individual agency, to explain why actors are more likely to draw on some representations of national identity rather than others across the six cases under consideration.

Diez-Medrano starts with the premise that ordinary citizens do not experience the EU directly, but through representations of journalists. How do we know that this is a particularly significant source of information, as opposed to entertainment television, religious organizations, or face-to-face contacts?

There is a missing link here. The model of cultural diffusion needs to be more fully spelled out. Moreover, perhaps the author has too elitist a view of the cultural consumption of the average citizen. After all, what portion of the British population reads *The Economist* and *The New Statesman*?

The author acknowledges that people get their information from a range of sources, because they stress some themes more than journalists do (e.g., border control and competition from low-paid foreigners in the German case). But again, this topic is not fully expanded. We need a more detailed discussion of the impact of other cultural producers (e.g., the church, political parties), and the interaction between available cultural toolkits, experience, and impact of networks. For instance, what would explain that the East Germans draw more on their experience than the West Germans when discussing the contributions of the EU? Despite these lacunae, the book makes an important contribution in demonstrating continuity in the key themes around which journalists from the three countries have framed their analysis of the EU, notably around criticizing governance and praising economic and politico-military contributions. The author concludes that we need to look at national cultures to better understand where toolkits come from. Hence the last three chapters consider differences in national cultures. These should be of great interest to all Europeanists, independent of their relevance to our understanding of attitudes toward the EU. They remind us of the importance of cultural structures as explanatory variables, beyond the problems with culturalism that have been often noted in the literature on political culture in particular. Diez-Medrano provides us a beautiful illustration that considering cultural repertoires offers a mid-way between structural determinism and cultural essentialism.

**Author's Response, Juan Diez Medrano:** Berezin, Steinmetz, and Lamont raise questions that feature prominently in discussions about the role of culture in sociological explanations. My book addresses some of these issues but generally not in the way my critics have read it (here's a rationale for cultural reception studies!).

The analytical framework of *Framing Europe* consists of three assumptions. The first assumption is that attitudes to European integration are cognitive and emotional responses to how one conceives of the European integration process. I show that some fragments of these social representations vary across individuals, social, and nations while others do not. Then, I demonstrate that unlike most other European Union members Britons perceive European integration as a threat to their national identity and are thus less supportive of European integration. The second assumption in *Framing Europe* is that social representations of European integration resonate with broader cultural features. Through systematic comparative analysis of the British, German, and Spanish 20th century political cultures I demonstrate that the British citizens' greater propensity to conceive of European integration as a threat to their national identity resonates with a long-lasting obsession with British cultural singularity. Finally, the third assumption in *Framing Europe* is that culture, society, and history are strongly intertwined. Through comparisons with Spain and Germany, I argue that the British obsession with cultural singularity is an indirect consequence of the simultaneity of the United Kingdom's success in building and retaining an extra-European Empire and the development of its national identity.

My replies to the critics follow from the outline just sketched. Contrary to what Steinmetz says, I do not characterize national cultures as homogeneous. For analytical purposes, however, I focus on cultural features that one often finds in one country but rarely in others. Also, I do not reject collective psychology as a potential explanation of national contrasts in support of European integration. What I reject are poorly grounded collective psychology explanations often found in the literature on European integration. Finally, I do not shy away, as Steinmetz suggests, from the cultural implications of my own analysis. My book stresses how cultural processes are embedded in other cultural processes. But I will not go as far as to throw the social overboard. What matters is locating the right cultural and social dimensions of a problem, which is what I try to do.

Lamont sees me “occasionally” using reflection theory and picks a confusing sentence on page 106 to prove it. I think that even a superficial reading of the introductory chapter makes it clear that I am far from using reflection theory. Cultures are heterogeneous and individuals draw from cultural repertoires through complex processes. My book is unconcerned with these complex processes. Rather, I want to demonstrate that the specific dimensions (only those!) of British, German, and Spanish frames about European integration that serve to differentiate these frames from one another are also distinctive features of their respective national cultures.

Lamont also misunderstands my analysis of quality newspapers. In this book I am not interested in how elites construct and spread social representations, and I am far from believing that citizens draw their views on European integration from *The Economist* or *El País*. I examine quality newspapers strategically, to contrast journalistic frames with those prevalent in the population and, in the absence of better sources of information, to determine how long popular social representations of European integration have been around. Since the specific framing dimensions that distinguish British, German, and Spanish ordinary citizens are abstract ones, unrelated to actual experience, it made sense to think that one would also find them in editorials published by quality newspapers.