

Foreword: Europe's Past and Future as a Global Cultural Actor

The subtle shift in European Community's discourse in the late 1980s from cultural exception to cultural diversity in the practice of its international cultural relations is important for understanding the contours of European identity. Chiefly a cultural object and process, identity changes and evolves through time and is intricately involved with security, politics, economics and everyday manners and rituals. This book's authors make a clear and cogent case that whereas culture as an expressive artefact such as art, or as everyday way of life may be underfunded or underappreciated in Brussels, it sits at the core of Europe's ideas about itself and its international image. The book's argument is simple but important: the European Union is a cultural actor.

The book delves through several layers to make its points about European Union as a cultural actor. These layers encompass security, economics, historical, and sociological issues. They traverse regions through EU's international cultural relations around the world. The security politics of the term 'cultural exception' arose from the so-called Blum-Byrnes agreement. The accord was signed on May 26, 1946 between U.S. secretary of state James F. Byrnes and the former head of the French Popular Front government Leon Blum. Devastated from war, European countries sought trade exceptions to revitalise important industries including the film industry, which already had a tradition of quotas favouring domestic films since Hollywood rose to prominence in the 1920s. Two pages of the Blum-Byrnes agreement pertained to the film industry and eventually informed the so-called cultural exception clause of Article IV (technically "screen quotas") of the post-war trade organisation – the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. The security, trade and cultural dimensions of the Blum-Byrnes accord are interwoven.

Another 40 years later, the Blum-Byrnes accord became the subject of heated debate in international trade negotiations at GATT's Uruguay Round (1986–1994) just as the European Community's ties deepened through the passage of the Single European Act in 1986. At issue was a measure supporting European programming through the Television Without Frontiers directive. Taxes on box office receipts would finance local and national television receipts. At that time, American films dominated European cinemas from a low of 55 percent of receipts in France to a high of 87 percent in Luxembourg. Therefore, support for European television was a direct tax on Hollywood films. Europe made its rationale in cultural exception terms to preserve the various cultural identities within its borders. The Americans understood it chiefly as trade protectionism. The Uruguay Round ended in 1993 without EU making a trade commitment on 'audio-visual' content

at the Uruguay Round. The issue flared up again through UNESCO and led eventually in 2005 to its Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. By then the European story had evolved from cultural exceptions within its borders to promoting cultural diversity within its borders and multilaterally through its international cultural relations.

Europe's cultural story points at both strengths and fissures. Even with EU being *sui generis*, the case for cultural exception came off as somewhat stand-offish. To stand up for cultural diversity is a nobler sentiment even if it poses domestic problems. For example, many European states do not collect demographic data on languages, religion, or ethnicity. This may be a secular state-building project, albeit mixed in with fears of the misuse of such data during World War II. However, it undercounts and, according to some, marginalises European minorities. At the EU level, as this book points out, culture remains a limited competency mostly to be exercised in Europe's external affairs. In fact, the mixing of culture with trade during the Uruguay Round also posed a problem for EU's DG-Trade and a debate on whether it had the competency for culture. In the end interest-based politics prevailed. A common European front for culture externally was good for preserving the diversity of interests within its borders.¹

European identity and the present-day state of Europe as a cultural actor has always co-evolved with the interest-based politics and security of Europe. As Edward Said writes, the presence of Ottoman Turks on the borders of Vienna in 1529 helped to shape European identity especially with respect to the 'other'.² Edward Said overlooks the Christian crusades that had begun the same battle over four centuries earlier. Now in the twenty-first century, as the European Union forwards its norms of cultural diversity and multilateralism, it must both confront its past full of cultural tensions while looking to the future with more progressive ideals such as diversity and multilateralism. Therefore, the European Union's international cultural relations sit astride its domestic cultural relations. The latter vary from celebrated EU-wide programmes for culture to widely held fears about immigration and even explicit racism and xenophobia in parts of Europe.

Can the EU as a cultural actor handle the domestic and international tensions and challenges in its cultural policies? This book celebrates the cause of multilateralism and diversity that underlies European Union external action in culture. But it is careful to trace both the limits and the possibilities of cultural action. The limits vary from the mundane to the grand. The mundane includes lack of resour-

1 J.P. Singh, *Globalized Arts: The Entertainment Economy and Cultural Identity* (Columbia University Press, 2011).

2 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Columbia University Press, 1978).

ces within EU, bureaucratic inertia, and resistances from member states. The grand historical is explored through EU's colonial past and implications of those matters in the Americas, Africa, and Asia. Interestingly, here the essays range from Mexican cinema's engagement with European and North American cultures, to Africa's fraught history with decolonisation and post-colonialism in its engagements with the EU, and through cultural co-production measures such as ACP Cultures+ programme to fund films.

Most importantly, the book shows that Europe's cultural initiatives are not a carve out or a marginal concern. They are imbricated by the continent's cultural pasts and their security, trade, political and anthropological stories. They pose challenges to cultural futures including the digital flows of cultural ideas and products over online platforms, global cultural co-productions, and sustainable development practices. Taken together, the cultural pasts and possible futures perform the identity work for Europe. They are, in the words of the book's editor Mafalda Dâmaso, about understanding Europe as a global cultural power.

J.P. Singh

*Distinguished University Professor, George Mason University
Richard von Weizsäcker Fellow, Robert Bosch Academy*

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