The Citadel - a metaphor for the study of the European Union identity?

This paper suggests a metaphorical rather than a conceptual extension of the term citadel as a tool of investigation into an institutional identity. The study of the European Union through the metaphor of the citadel is justified by functional and structural similarities between the two objects of study, but most importantly by the similarity of processes involved in their construction: both human projects and human ideals of economic and social order. I attempt here to show that such a study reveals by comparison with other ‘citadels’ some of the underground assumptions in the construction of the European Union: the will to appear naturally risen, the implicit goal of self-sufficiency, the multiple ways of defining its identity. My use of the term ‘citadel’ is metaphorical, first because I consider the citadel as a model of perfect construction (where “perfect” does not carry value judgements) in practice never achieved, secondly because I make reference to ‘social citadels’, in which the boundaries of social organisation do not coincide with the boundaries of a city-fortress. I suggest that the construction of a citadel should be seen as a fight against disorder, against the lack of meaning.

To define the citadel I will follow Ricoeur’s distinction between identity as mèmeité (sameness) and identity as ipseité (self-identity). Thus I will first define the city negatively through its tracing of boundaries with the exterior world, as a distinct social and political entity (its assertion against sameness); then I will define it positively through its particular structure and attributes (its self-identity). Finally I will try to reveal the insights that the analysis of the concept of citadel and parallels with other citadels bring to the anthropology of European Union, which might open ways of exploring the European identity and the working of the European imagination.

I. The citadel facing the world

The citadel as civilisation is first defined as opposed to the wildness through the tracing
of boundaries. As a fortress it has a defensive function that is sometimes pushed further, to a negation of the exterior world by the idea of self-sufficiency.

Identity through tracing of boundaries

In *Primitive Classification*, Durkheim and Mauss (1963[1903]) state that primitive classifications of things are the result of the setting of boundaries between social groups. From a tribe’s point of view people and things are ‘in’ or ‘out’ a category because they are -or belong to- them or not.

This is not restricted to ‘primitive’ societies and contemporary traveller-Gypsies, a transnational group existing all over Europe define themselves mainly as against Gorgio, i.e. non-Gypsy. Not only people, but things and activities fall in either one or the other category, they are either Gypsy or Gorgio. This binary classification allows them to define their own tradition and identity as the negation of Gorgio majority’s practices: for instance a particular liking for hedgehogs comes from Gorgio’s rejection of them as food (Okely, 1983). Cultural practices in turn reinforce the demarcation line between “Us” (who follow them) and “Them” (who do not).

The constitution of the European Union, now including 15 states and 360 millions people, has never been explicitly designed as a political alliance against the rest of the world. But some phrases as “Fortress Europe” appear, because as the walls between the member-states fall, so the exterior walls seem to grow taller. It is also because by discoursing about ‘Europeanness’ without a proper definition, Europe actually defines itself mainly as against non-Europeanness. The designing of the frontier and the existence of a common ‘enemy’, the “iron curtain” (W. Churchill) that dropped over Europe in 1948, supported the constitution of the Western Europe. Today still, after the fall of the communist regimes in the East, the appropriation by the EU of the term ‘Europe’ adds bricks to the wall against the ‘other Europe’ whose identity is in question. Strangely enough this is also echoed on the ‘other side’ where the return to democratic values is discussed as a “return to Europe”. Is this definition-by-opposition a result of the consciousness that, as in the case of the Gypsies and of ‘citadels’ more generally, Europe-against-the-world is in a position of a minority? Fear of opposition with the other superpowers emerges in the titles of many articles in foreign policy journals: “Fortress Europe against Fortress America?” (by
reference to Orwell’s *1984*). The fear that the world will separate into distinct citadels is not new and is not unjustified. Indeed if some historical research can show that there had always been contacts and influences between people, even before the explosion of communications in the XXth century (Wolf, 1982:4), it is only from this moment that the idea of political openness and internationalisation has been emphasised in positive terms. Tribes and nations altogether have always dreamed of functioning on the model of the citadel before the new ideology came to prevail in the aftermaths of the two World Wars.

The setting of boundaries is imaginary and not geographical. For instance “Occidentalism” is an inversion of Said’s “Orientalism” (1978) and some anthropologists made the point that orientalising an object has occidentalising an object as its counterpart (Carrier, 1995 - quoted in Parman, 1998: 172). By defining the Orient/the Other as traditional, lacking history, irrational, the Occident emerges victorious as modern, having history, rational etc. The geographic limits have here little bearing, as the political-cultural discourse the Occident can cover an area as large as the Indo-European world or as small as the German nation. Parman’s study of the images of Europe in the *American Anthropologist* shows how the Us/Them dichotomy stand at the basis of their respective definition of attributes (1998).

A category preserves its purity by not mixing with another category, especially when their distinction is not based on a difference in essence but on the process of differentiation.

**The defensive function of the citadel**

The defensive function in such a definition of identity is implicit. The Other is the enemy or the intruder. Hobbes reconstitutes the origin of the city (its reason of coming into being, not its historical origin) as a fight against physical death. Men are weak and cannot survive in the state of nature unless they associate themselves with the other men. The City as material construction is a shelter against Nature, the wildness. The necessity of a social organisation, of ‘positive rights’ (artefacts) that regulate behaviour inside the city comes simultaneously. Modern citadels preserve only this need for social organisation as they are engaged in fights where the existence of walls does not provide anymore an efficient means of defence.

In ancient times citadels combined the physical construction of the city with the construction of the state. Greek cities delimited physically civilisation from barbarity and
protected the first with weapons and not simply with the power of discourse. In the light of new 
archaeological evidence, Francois de Polignac shows that the formation of Greek city-states was 
a result both of the development of urban centres, and of the fight against barbarity at the edges 
of the territory, which was under their influence (1995). The cults performed in non-urban 
(frontier) sanctuaries were as important for the confirmation of the power of the polis as those 
performed inside the walls of the city; these sanctuaries were places of conflict but also of 
positive contact with the neighbourhood. These outposts of civilisation were built from the 
wisdom of the saying that the best defence is the attack.

The defensive function of “Fortress Europe” appears equally from its origins. The 
European Union was born from Robert Schumann’s idea in 1950 to pool together the production 
of coal and steel, followed by the Common Market in 1957 and Maastricht in 1993. The 
Community is defined as open inside and closed to the outside (though the boundaries are 
negotiated from time to time and new countries are admitted). The economic protectionism 
against the cheap products from the Third World and the mass production of the US was thus 
cast in a body of common European legislation in the 50’s. It is the weakness of individual states 
that incited them for the first time in history to organise economically and jurally for better 
defence against the world-market. Cultural protectionism and even xenophobia is expressed from 
the 50’s (protest against American ‘coca-colonisation’ (Hobsbawn, 1992:7) up to the ‘90s (in 
France the protest against the franglais). The dangers of cultural levelling as a result of the 
internationalisation make European countries fear the negation of their right to difference. After 
having attempted to ‘Europeanise’ the whole world, Europe protects itself from the feedback of 
its own actions.

The specific problem of the modern citadel is indeed its location in a context of 
increasing communication and deterritorialisation of men and values. The physical boundaries of 
the community are permeable: immigrant-workers invited in the 50’s to work for the 
reconstruction brought their non-European cultural presence into the community and American 
mass media penetrated through the means of the waves. The Soviet-type states that tried to 
preserve themselves against the influence of ‘imperialism’ by closing their countries to the 
international circulation of men and ideas were famously disrupted by the radio waves of the 
BBC or of the Voice of America. Western European policy-makers had to adopt more subtle 
tactics to defend themselves: not misinformation but diffusion of astutely interpreted information
or legislation (an example is the policy of assimilation of foreigners in France). The experience of the trans-national citadel that is freemasonry shows that secrecy is one of the most efficient way of protection and even the only one in the new international context. The secret belongs only to the initiated and the power derives precisely from the will to protect the secret.

The European Union is mainly a creation from above often validated by the indifference of the citizens through referendum. The study of the policymaking in centres such as Brussels or Strasbourg is a relatively new anthropological field, which came about with the precipitation of measures toward the creation of the Union at the end of the 80’s. Anthropologists such as Shore, McDonald and Abelès gained access to the close sphere of high functionaries of Europe. Unfortunately the touch of ‘official line’ (Shore and Black, 1992) of their discourse - which goes towards hiding the defensive, fortress-like, function of the Union- does not allow more than speculations on the real reasons of some decisions. Like in the case of freemasons, people (and social scientists alike) tend to attribute to the ‘Eurocrats’ more coherence in their intentions and more manipulator power than they actually have. Abelès’ study leads him to remark that ‘Eurocrats’ experience the same confusion and loss of landmarks before ‘the interests of the Community’ as ordinary people (1996).

Negation of the world: the idea of self-sufficiency

The ideal of self-sufficiency is highly valued in all cultures - Parry and Bloch show how two transactional orders are distinguished in every culture: long-term transactions concerned with the reproduction of social and cosmic order, viewed negatively, and short-term transactions aimed at restoring the ideal of self-sufficiency, viewed positively (1989). For the preservation of the integrity of the citadel, its economic and cultural autonomy was essential.

The People Republic of China’s policy of organisation in economically self-sufficient units (the communes in the 50s) is present in all social Utopias, from Robert Owen’s literary accounts to the contemporary Jewish kibbutzim. But this ideal of self-sufficiency may stem not only from the will to be independent but also from a fear or a rejection of the others. Christian monasteries that aimed to isolate themselves from the world for prayer needed economic self-sufficiency. All transaction with the outside, i.e. the impure or the disorder, is dangerous, can contaminate the inside, and act subversively. The case of the young men from the kibbutzim that
after going to the Israel military service could not accept to live in the closed world of the kibbutz anymore, proves that fears are justified.

The idea of autarky appears sometimes in the policy-makers discussions about the construction of Europe. The sudden inclusion of Great Britain in the EU after several rejections was interpreted as the result of the fear of a new destabilising petrol crisis – Great Britain’s petrol reserves in the North Sea would bring economic self-sufficiency and keep Europe unaffected by world crisis. Cultural self-sufficiency is emphasised in an article of Le Monde by one of the contributors at the 1989 Conference on the educational and cultural aspects of the Community relations, in which the author names the most famous philosophers who contributed to the universal thought: not one of them was Oriental! Does that mean that European culture can stand by itself? Fortunately, says Jacques Berque who denounces such tendencies, the “European culture has not […] waited to be defined before existing and that is to say borrowing, assimilating and changing.” (1992: 27). The danger of ‘contamination’ with non-Western values is augmented in our globalised world by the existence of trans-national communities: businessmen, religious groups, refugees who bring with them different visions of the world (though often racism and not fear of cultural influences is the particular reason why the presence of immigrants is seen as a danger). The different images of life and expectations popularised by mass media provoke fantasy, extend the imaginary possibilities and meanings of life, create syncretic identities or simply trouble the existing ones (Appadurai, 1991). The impure result is a bricolage of identities and consciousnesses.

II. The citadel for the preservation of culture

“Ceux de la ville, il faut bien qu’ils désirent, cherchent, souhaitent, protègent, cultivent quelque chose. Sinon autour de quoi bâtiraient-ils des remparts?”1 (Saint-Exupery, 1948:374).

As complementary to Durkheim and Mauss’ classification of social events by their social boundaries, Mary Douglas emphasises the classification by their distinctive structure (1975:258). Thus the definition of an ‘object’ is given not only by its delimitation on the syntagmatic axis from other categories, but also by its definition on the paradigmatic axis by reference to the

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1 Those from the city- they are surely desiring, searching, wishing, protecting, cultivating something. Otherwise, around what are they rising their fences? (my translation- Unfortunately this important work of Saint-Exupery has not been translated in English))
common principle (or structure) at the basis of all elements of one category. Citadels are not only walls of defence, they also shelter content: a city, a culture. From this stands their second function: of preservation of culture.

**The construction of culture as collective identity**

The City (that we can also call the civilising force) is the Reason that takes pure facts from the disorder of life and orders them: gives them meaning.

Montesquieu explains the necessity of laws by the human need for stability, for permanence in a world of continuous change, where everything rushes towards death (1749). Every physical construction or spiritual creation, because it is a way of mastering Time and Space: of inscribing the trace of human passage in the eternity-, is thus a fight against death. Cities, being collective constructions to which each member participates and subsequently transforms, the moment of creation is not the only relevant moment, but just a part of a continuous fight for meaning.

The kibbutzim of Palestine (now in the state of Israel) are an explicit search for meaning through social organisation. These co-operative villages renew with the experiment of phalansteres in the XIXth century and aim to form a free and egalitarian society, where labour gives meaning to the existence and where everybody is happy. Eastern European Jews who had also the religious dream to reconstitute the Jewish people in its ancient homeland founded the kibbutzim in the 20-30’s. These are agricultural villages characterised by group living, communal ownership and co-operative enterprises (Spiro, 1956). The rejection of private ownership and the negation of private needs forge the members of the kibbutz as essentially different in nature from other people elsewhere: they are “new men” who escape to Hobbes’ characterisation that ‘man is a wolf for man’ (1651). More important, *they* build together by their own will the city; and *common values* maintain it together, not the monopoly of power by a minority.

From work among European Commission functionaries, Shore extracts some ways in which ‘European consciousness’ is created and disseminated among the peoples of Europe and among the bureaucrats themselves (1995). The natural emergence of a common identity, ‘from below’, of a “popular psychological community” (Taylor 1983: 7 quoted in Shore, 1995), would be the preferred solution for EU, emphasise the functionalist theoreticians of the European
Community. As this is more difficult at the scale of such a large “community”, policy-makers had to take up the task, conforming to a neo-functionalist theory of the integration from above. Since 1985 there have been many attempts to popularise the Community, to inform the people about its provisions. However, still in October 1992 in France the referendum for Maastricht gathered 49% voters against the project, while the rate of participation was extremely low. There is an attempt to forge the Community by numbers (Shore, 1995), to convince people by statistics that others are convinced about the positive role of the EU. But maybe the most promising attempt is to create the new supra-state through symbols, as the nation-states were also created.

Theories of nationalism converge in their claim that nations are political-social artefacts and not natural entities. Gellner argues that nationalism preceded the nation: “Nations as a natural, God-given way of classifying men [...] are a myth; nationalism, which sometimes takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invent them, and often obliterate pre-existing cultures” (1983: 49, my emphasis). Hobsbawn points out that history is the raw material from which national (and maybe supranational) identity is waived (1992: 3). The example of the French Republic’s revival of Celtic ancestry shows how history and archaeology were appropriated by political discourse (Dietler, 1994). In 1789 the French Republic decided that from three historical recognised ancestries: Roman, Celtic and Franc, the one that will better serve to create a French nation, because emotionally defined and not ‘compromised’ with the Ancient Regime (as the Franc), was the Celtic (Gaul) ancestry. The claim of Celtic ancestry by the French state silences also Brittany’s claims to autonomy on the basis of its distinct Celtic origin. Would the Celts provide the same basis of unity for the European Union? Series of conferences and exhibitions like the 1991 Venice exhibition entitled “The Celts: the first Europe” aim explicitly to design a common past for Europe that will erase the subsequent 2000 years of continuous conflict between its states. This supports also Anderson’s thesis that all communities are ‘imagined’ and that symbols help the creation of ‘collective’ imagination (1983). In all these interpretations of nationalism, which show it as an artefact of human policy and not as a natural feeling, the creation of a supranational state appears possible. One cannot but expect that appeals to common history and symbols will foster a European identity and culture. But, for the time being, the Eurocrats themselves undergo a loss of landmarks and the European consciousness that gives sense to the EU project belongs only to the future (Abelès, 1996). The citadel of Europe needs an identity; but what identity?
The heterogeneity of culture and the resistance to change

Utopian writings emphasise the perfect egalitarian city of the future as inhabited by a homogenous population whose desires coincide. The *difference* seems to run counter the *unity*, as a potential troublemaker. The negotiation with the difference brings about change. And change means disorder in a world that has already attained perfection. In the metaphor of the citadel the walls represent the resistance to change from the outside; the perfect structure of the social organisation represents the resistance to change from inside. Thus ironically, in spite (and because) of its invincibility the citadel is subject to solidification and to death. “*Le cuir du caiman ne protège rien si la bête est morte*”\(^2\) (Saint-Exupery, 1948: 375).

I will consider the opposite of the Utopians’ citadel: a human citadel that is enduring and does overcome death by remaining internally different: the Jewish people. The survival of Jewish identity leans on an ancient concept: the idea of Jews ‘peoplehood’, people with a special destiny that needs to be fought for and with a dream: of finding the way back to the homeland (Webber, 1994). Their membership through mother-child inheritance (the Mosaic genealogy) sets strict biological boundaries. But the lack of self-sufficiency and their dispersion over the world always in numerical minority forged for this trans-national group identities and histories as different as the places and the people among whom they lived. Jews in the New Europe see themselves as citizens of the countries in which they live and loyal to their principles; but their apparent difference should not be read as a negation of their common ethnic identity - rather their multiple identities bring an additional richness for the Jewish community and implicate it in new projects (as the EU for instance).

The European project is precisely based on the assumption that homogeneity *is not* a condition of unity and that we can establish “Unity in Diversity”. Meanwhile it aims to forge a European consciousness and makes reference to a common European culture to support it, because as some Euro functionaries put it: “Who would die for the Common Market?” How can the EU policy-makers reconcile these two projects? The EU remains largely an economic and juridical body whose policies are not fully understood and people do not seem to be aware about the bearing of their vote upon them. Some protests of the peasants towards policies however

\(^2\) The skin of the caiman protects nothing if the beast is dead. (my translation)
emerged (LiPuma and Meltzoff for instance have studied how local associations of Iberian fishermen have carried their fight for European right to national capitals and to Brussels (1994) in Wilson, 1998) and more emerge as the peasants see their way of life threatened by the economic-efficiency that rules the European Union. The economic-motivated protests take rapidly the form of a culture of resistance expressed in nationalist and regionalist terms. We witness the growing importance of nationalist parties across Western Europe. The continuous employment of stereotypes about the Other shows that Difference is still acknowledged on a negative mode (McDonald, 1993). Across Europe the politicisation of ethnicity (at the basis of the definition of Otherness) is manifest under two forms: national separatism (build our own state) and national xenophobia (exclude foreigners from our state). Hobsbawn rejects both the instrumentalist and the primordialist explanations of ethnic politicisation and suggests that the responsible is the context of social disorientation that allowed the revival of historical conflicts (in Belgium, Ireland, Corsica). He finds no explanation to the growing national xenophobia, except the simple answer that what is being defended is ‚... jobs. From this perspective, the EU policy should aim to re-establish the social order if it wishes to silence particularistic identities.

The European Union does not define itself by its boundaries: they are permeable and adjustable; it does not define by its internal structure, because these are still under work; moreover the heterogeneity of interests and values in a democratic frame makes the negotiation of a common identity difficult. From these differences between the European Union and the model of a citadel emerges however a direction: If the question of ‚what identity?’ for Europe has to be answered, it is not a definite answer that should be sought, but a continuously changing one. Unlike a perfect citadel and a dead citadel, the citadel of Europe has not reached its ‚final’ identity but should look for it continuously in the future. If the strength of Europe has always been in its assimilation and blending of various traditions (Berque, 1992: 27), its identity - as perhaps any identity - has to remain open, in continuous construction. This is the lesson that comparison with other ‚cathedral’ brings.

III. Citadel: the metaphor

When we have analysed the concept of ‚citadel’, we have noticed that the definition by its functions: defence and preservation of a core of values, coincided with its structural definition:
through tracing of boundaries and through distinct internal structure. This would mean that the definition of a category is very much constructed on the model of the citadel. Also that by defining citadels as bounded meaningful entities, we obtain that almost everything is a citadel! We referred then to the metaphorical extension of the term and defined it also as collective creation, as search for perfection and affirmation of difference. Strangely enough the only citadels were then restricted to Utopian models: kibbutzim, phalansters, 1984. The only existing citadels (that overpass death by solidification and prove enduring) are citadels which are permeable to exchange, malleable to transformation, but which succeed in maintaining a distinct core of tradition. “Si tu bâtis [les remparts] autour d’un secret et que mes soldats, autour des remparts, te crient ton secret à tue-tête, tes remparts tombent aussi car ils n’ont plus d’objet.” (1948:374). From this perspective the internationalisation is not a new danger, but traditions, as citadels, have to turn the openness in their favour. The balance of power in the world still gives to these exchanges a unilateral direction: Western to non-western culture in always-binary relations.

The use of the concept of ‘citadel’ as a talon against which social organisations are measured does not enrich the tools of the social scientists: social reality is not better described had we to settle if something is more or less of a citadel or of a fortress. By contrast, the metaphor of the citadel, by emphasising the aspiration for perfection and the claim for difference, opens new directions of interrogation. The Citadel is not the Culture, but the Creation of culture. It is by continuously creating meaning that citadels overcome death. Maybe this potential to transform explains why human citadels have proved more resistant than material citadels. There are several implications: culture and identity are open, in construction and always should be; there is no range of attributes describing an enduring culture, but only a principle: selective openness; people find their identity more through creation than through belonging to a social structure (the comparison between the generation of kibbutz founders and subsequent generations is revealing).

So far I have defined social organisations as ‘citadels’ by identification of their boundaries and by some of their features on the basis of a metaphor derived from literature, press and social sciences articles. But a systematic exploration of the impact of the concept/metaphor

3 If you built your walls around a secret and my soldiers, from outside the wall, scream out your secret, your walls fall, because they have no more object (my translation)
‘citadel’ on people’s imagination would maybe provide further insights on their attitude to culture, identity, and the preservation of tradition.

Metaphorically the citadel as collective project is a search for social meaning. The successes and failures of historical and imaginary citadels can show the project of the European Union in a different light. But it is not the image of the cultural ‘fortress’ that should be retained – Europe has never been such a fortress even if it wished to be – but the human will for a better world and its claim for difference. This paper suggests that the power of the ‘European identity’ is its being under continuous construction.

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