ABSTRACT

Europe is undergoing considerable demographic, economic, cultural and socio-political change. National citizenship identities have been challenged by the simultaneous processes of European integration and the migration of people into and across Europe. This paper explores how the current generation of youth relates to Europe and the European Union and the extent to which their political knowledge, interest and identities are affected by national government and school approaches. Although the article draws upon mainly qualitative data from a study into the political identities of white (English or German) and Turkish youth living in London and Stuttgart, the results are relevant for all EU member states. The research indicates that in countries which promote European agendas and where schools and curricula emphasise an inclusive concept of Europe (e.g. Goethe Gymnasium in Stuttgart), young people have high levels of knowledge about Europe and even make Europe part of their identities. However, in member states where governments marginalise European agendas and where schools and curricula show little acknowledgement of the processes of Europeanisation (e.g. Millroad School in London), young people struggle to relate to Europe, especially in working-class contexts where local and national agendas come to the fore. The article highlights the factors affecting young people’s knowledge of and interest in Europe, and raises important questions about the possibilities of promoting inclusive governmental and learning approaches.

INTRODUCTION

The need for pan-European youth studies is increasing in importance as a result of social, demographic, economic, political and cultural changes in contemporary Europe. National agendas and identities are increasingly being challenged by the processes of Europeanisation and the migration of people and, as a result, national governments as well as schools are facing the task of mediating the relationship between national, European and multicultural agendas. Western European countries in particular are undergoing a demographic shift towards an ageing population. The European Union (EU) has developed from an economic (1957 European Economic Community, 1986 Single European Act) to a political and monetary union (1992 Treaty on European Union, 2002 Introduction of the Euro). In addition, the EU has been transformed into a socio-cultural entity (Linsenmann, 2002; Hansen, 1998). For example, education on a European level is now expected to contribute to the development of European identity and citizenship. Arguably, these transformations in Europe will have far-reaching implications for the experience of youth and for the ways in which young people negotiate their identities and relate to Europe and the EU. As Chisholm (1990) argued, the new generation of European youth no longer grows up, goes to school, and becomes an adult and worker under the nationally-bounded conditions their parents experienced.
Notions of European identity and citizenship have been promoted by both the European Commission and the Council of Europe during the last two decades. For example, the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty foresaw the encouragement of a more active and participatory citizenship in the life of the Union based on the complementarity of Union citizenship and Member State citizenship (Council of the European Union, 1997)\(^1\). And after the 1992 establishment of the EU as a political entity, the Council of Europe reoriented its aims and established a legal and discursive framework for citizenship and minority rights through the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Council of Europe, 1994) and European Convention on Nationality. In response to these macro-level political initiatives, there have been a range of youth studies dealing with young people’s political or citizenship identities, their conceptualisations of Europe as well as their political interest and knowledge of Europe and the EU. Such studies include Weidenfeld and Piepenschneider (1990); Chisholm, du Bois-Reymond and Coffield (1995); Angvik and von Borries (1997); von Borries (1999); Spannring, Wallace and Haerpfer (2001); and, Ros and Grad (2004).

The model of European youth studies and research into young people’s relation to Europe and the EU was developed by a series of projects at the request of the European Commission (The Young Europeans). The latest of these surveys in 2001 showed, for instance, that being able to work, live and study in any of the fifteen member states were the three main advantages young people saw in European citizenship. The more political aspects of the EU (seeking durable peace, having a European government) were of second-level importance to young people in most member states. This indicated that young Europeans’ approach to European citizenship is \textit{pragmatic} rather than idealistic; in other words, economic and social aspects of life are more immediately relevant than political participation. Chisholm (1997: 7), who analysed the 1997 Eurobarometer data, concluded that ‘with the exception of Ireland, the northern Europeans are more distanced and sceptical of the EU, the southern Europeans more optimistic and the English are remarkable for the high proportion of respondents who do not know what to say [when asked what the EU means]’. Angvik and von Borries (1997) and von Borries (1999) found that with the exception of young people in Sweden, Finland and South Tyrol, fifteen-year-old youth were more interested in national history than in European history. The European Commission-funded project ‘Orientations of Young Men and Women to Citizenship and European Identity’ highlighted that both \textit{national location} and \textit{schooling} played an important role in shaping young people’s responses toward Europe and the EU. For example, the study found that European identity was most marked among the representative samples in Germany and the Czech Republic, where almost two-thirds of respondents felt strongly about being European; it was lowest in Spain and England (Ros & Grad, 2004).

The aim of this paper is to show the extent to which young people’s European political interests, knowledge and identities are affected by government policies, school dynamics and social class positioning. In particular, I discuss how young people from different social and ethnic backgrounds relate to Europe and EU integration. Whilst the data I draw upon derives from a larger project that was designed to explore the formation of national identities in Germany and England by analysing how the national agenda is reshaped by European and multicultural agendas at government level and what consequences these triple agendas have for the political identities of youth, this article focuses on differently located groups of European youth in relation to the European agenda. I chose to focus on fifteen-year-old white young people’s European citizenship in the December 1991 Maastricht Treaty on European Union. Also, the Council of Europe’s understanding of supranational citizenship as being complementary to national citizenship is similar to what the EU proposed in its new Constitution (cf. Council of the European Union, 2004) which has so far been ratified in 15 member states.

\(^1\) Plans were made at the 1990 Rome summit to include European citizenship in the December 1991 Maastricht Treaty on European Union. Also, the Council of Europe’s understanding of supranational citizenship as being complementary to national citizenship is similar to what the EU proposed in its new Constitution (cf. Council of the European Union, 2004) which has so far been ratified in 15 member states.
and Turkish youth because these were the only ethnic groups common to both countries with sufficiently large numbers in both England and Germany. Germany’s 2.4 million Turks form the country’s largest minority ethnic community (Isoplan, 2003), and in England, the Turkish community comprises around 200,000 people (Consulate General for the Republic of Turkey, 2004). Little research has been conducted on the ways in which macro-level policies and school dynamics impact on young people’s political interests, knowledge and identities.

Germany was a founding member of the European integration project and, as a result, schools and the curriculum throughout the 1980s and 1990s were used to construct a ‘Europeanised national identity’ (cf. Risse and Engelmann-Martin, 2002; Soysal, Bertilotti and Mannitz, 2005). England, by contrast, experienced Europe very differently. There was little reason why the country should reconceptualise her national identity in European terms and the processes of Europeanisation have not seriously affected English schools. The politics of Europe, initiated by Germany and France, were undercut by the special relationship with the United States; the geographical detachedment from continental Europe; and England’s post-war role in the Commonwealth. These different historical engagements with Europe have had enormous implications for schools and young people. Whilst many of the sixteen German federal states (such as Baden-Württemberg in 1994) specifically overhauled their curricula to include a cross-curricular dimension, Europe received little attention in England and did not appear amongst the cross-curricular themes and dimensions of the 1988 National Curriculum. Arguably, as we shall see, such differences contribute to our understanding why some groups of young people are more interested in, and know more about, the EU than others.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper draws upon post-structuralist notions of a fragmented society, in which identities are multidimensional, hybrid and shifting (e.g. Hall, 1992; Caglar, 1997; Mac an Ghaill, 1999; Dolby, 2001; Tizard and Phoenix, 2002) to explore how different groups of young people relate to Europe and the EU. Although it can be argued that Europe is a modernist/essentialist category, and thus an attempt to construct a single identity, many contemporary writers (e.g. Wallace, 1990; Neave, 1984; Shennan, 1991) highlight the necessity to deconstruct the term ‘Europe’. Europe is a contested geographical and political concept with fluid boundaries that shift over time. Wallace (1990: 5), for instance, argued that Europe is not a geographical entity but an ‘imagined space’, created out of our mental maps. The corollary of this is a post-structuralist idea of Europe as a malleable entity with fluid boundaries that shift over time, the borders of which ‘are a matter of ideology and politics rather than cartography’. With this fluid conceptual framework in mind, young people negotiate and renegotiate their identities within the world and are not born into it with a fixed, static identity. The subject is positioned by the social context (e.g. governmental policies, school dynamics) and positions itself in relation to the available European political and educational discourses.

For the broader youth study, I distributed a questionnaire to about 100 students in each of the four secondary schools (two inner-city multi-ethnic secondary schools in Stuttgart and two comprehensives in an Inner London borough). Then, I conducted six focus group interviews of four to five students in each school (single-sex and mixed white and Turkish students). And

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2 To get an idea of the socio-economic status of each of the four schools, I looked at the percentages of students eligible for free school meals, compared the achievement levels in terms of five or more A* to C in the GCSE examinations and, most importantly, asked students in the survey to classify their parents’ occupations. This socio-economic analysis suggested that the two higher-achieving schools (Goethe and Darwin) are middle-class dominated whereas the two lower-achieving schools (Tannberg and Millroad) are working-class dominated.
finally, I interviewed a total of 32 students (four white and four Turkish students) as well as the Head, Citizenship Education coordinator, Head of Geography and Religious Education in each school. In this article, I draw mainly on the qualitative data obtained from focus groups and semi-structured interviews with young people. The four schools matched in terms of the percentage of minority ethnic Turkish students, inner-city location and social intake. They had some similarities and differences in relating to Europe, as summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: A summary of the school profiles of the two German and English secondary schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>GERMANY</strong></th>
<th></th>
<th><strong>ENGLAND</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Tannberg Hauptschule</strong></td>
<td><strong>Goethe Gymnasium</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Millroad School</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School population</strong></td>
<td>320 students</td>
<td>564 students</td>
<td>1,204 students</td>
<td>1,507 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18% Turkish</td>
<td>5% Turkish</td>
<td>26% Turkish</td>
<td>2% Turkish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location</strong></td>
<td>Working-class inner-city</td>
<td>Middle-class inner-city</td>
<td>Working-class inner-city</td>
<td>Middle-class inner-city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>European issues</strong></td>
<td>(a) Languages</td>
<td>English only</td>
<td>English, French</td>
<td>French, Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Geography and History</td>
<td>Entire Year 7 Geography, half of Year 6 History</td>
<td>Entire Year 6 Geography, half of Year 7 History</td>
<td>One unit in Year 8 Geography and History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The young people therefore will have experienced quite contradictory and different messages about Europe in the four schools. Tannberg Hauptschule mediated national and citizenship agendas through a dominantly European and, arguably, at times a Eurocentric approach and the curriculum emphasised European agendas in subjects like Geography and History. For example, in Geography, the entire Year 7 (ages 12 to 13) was spent looking at Europe and students were given a geo-political overview of Europe before they studied either France or Great Britain, the physical and human geography of northern Europe, Mediterranean countries as well as the changing landscape of Europe. In Year 9 (ages 14 to 15), Europe was one of five cross-curricular themes of the Hauptschule curriculum with one further geographical teaching unit on the EU³. Goethe Gymnasium, whilst allowing young people to keep their cultural and ethnic identities, emphasised Europe as a common bond and thus interpreted the concept of Europe differently from Tannberg Hauptschule. The different school responses to mandatory curricula are thus another factor in the youth-Europe relationship.

In contrast, as a result of the policy approach of the English government, Table 1 shows that European issues were a relatively low priority in the two London schools. Millroad School, which reasserted the concept of cultural pluralism, offered only limited acknowledgement of the processes of Europeanisation. The present Geography curriculum, for instance, only has one European teaching unit in Year 8 (Italy: a European country) whilst highlighting the importance of an international perspective with units on Japan and Brazil in addition to local and national issues. Darwin School emphasised Britain as a common bond (identity) but, like

³ In Germany, the school system is more or less under direct control of the regional government and each type of secondary school had a mandatory curriculum for all ages and levels leaving little room for schools to design their own curricula. In England, by contrast, there is still room for individual schools to develop their own approaches to European agendas.
Millroad, made little efforts to integrate students on the basis of European membership. The supranational European context was largely absent from Darwin’s citizenship curriculum and other subjects suitable for promoting a European dimension, such as Geography and History, also offered only limited acknowledgement of the processes of Europeanisation. Since neither of the two London schools had high levels of promotion of Europe, young people struggled to a greater (Millroad) or lesser (Darwin School) extent to relate positively to Europe as a political identity and they were also less knowledgeable about the EU.

**GEO-POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND INTERESTS**

The different prioritisation of European agendas at government level and in school curricula is an important factor in explaining the differences regarding political knowledge of, and interest in, Europe and the EU amongst the new generation of youth. For example, young people in the two German schools had significantly higher scores when asked to locate ten European countries (Britain, Germany, Spain, Finland, Italy, Turkey, Portugal, Poland, France and Ukraine) correctly on a map of Europe than their counterparts in the two English schools:

Table 2: Students' correct location of countries on a map of Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Germany (%)</th>
<th>England (%)</th>
<th>Tannberg (%)</th>
<th>Goethe (%)</th>
<th>Millroad (%)</th>
<th>Darwin (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>85.1</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>93.5**</td>
<td>81.3</td>
<td>89.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>51.0**</td>
<td>85.3</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>65.3**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>52.4**</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>92.5*</td>
<td>38.3</td>
<td>67.3**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>8.7**</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>34.6**</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>12.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>64.4**</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>98.1*</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>75.2**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>33.2**</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>81.2</td>
<td>37.5**</td>
<td>74.7</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>47.5**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>14.4**</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>68.2*</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>17.8*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>56.7**</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>94.4**</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>71.3**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>10.6**</td>
<td>22.1</td>
<td>37.4*</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>8.9*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>41.4**</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>48.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that over eighty per cent of students in the German sample correctly identified the location of six western-central European countries. In contrast, only one country (Britain) was correctly identified by eight out of ten students in the English sample. Eastern European countries (Poland and Ukraine) and Turkey were the least correctly located countries. On average, 62.6% at Tannberg versus 77.3% at Goethe compared favourably to 34.4% and 48.9% from Millroad and Darwin School respectively. Students in the middle-class dominated schools (Goethe and Darwin) were also significantly better at locating European countries on a map than students in the working-class dominated schools (Tannberg and Millroad).

Young people in the two German schools, particularly at Goethe Gymnasium, also had a wider range of opinions when talking about Europe. For example, Leo (a white boy at Goethe) argued that ‘I think about the expansion, and I also cast my mind back to Columbus. Europe used to be the centre of the world; many things started here’, thus alluding to the industrial revolution in 18th-century England as well as the ‘discovery’ of America by

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4 A single asterisk indicates significance below 0.05 and a double asterisk indicates significance below 0.01.
Christopher Columbus in 1492. Semra (a Turkish girl) alluded to the European Union’s official motto ‘United in Diversity’ and the girls also referred to the decade-long debate amongst policy-makers and politicians about the future structure of Europe:

DF: What comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘Europe’?
SEMRA: Well, Europe consists of countries that have got together, a community with the same currency. But you can’t say that that’s a giant country cos there are different languages and you can’t say that Europe is one culture. The people are kind of similar but there are nevertheless other cultures and France isn’t like Germany and it’s different in England. Europe just has the same currency but not the same language and culture.
NILGÜN: For me, Europe is more geographical. It’s also more simple that you can move from one country to another. There’s the Euro, but I don’t really like it. I mean, people think that all Europeans are the same but, in reality, there are quite different cultures. I’ve got relatives in France and when we crossed the border it looked quite different. It’s not one country.
SEVILIN: You can’t change the cultures, only the laws. I don’t think there’ll ever be something like a United States of Europe. That’s somehow not possible. Maybe it’s just a term cos in America each state has its own laws too but the language and culture is the same, and that’s not the case in Europe.
ZEYNEP: They all see themselves as Americans.

Unlike students at Goethe Gymnasium who were able to engage in discussions about Europe, Tannberg students only listed some concepts (e.g. the Euro) when they heard the word Europe and preferred to talk about local and national political issues instead. The predominantly working-class background of young people at Tannberg Hauptschule may have been a reason for this. For example, the group of four white German boys I interviewed were happy to talk about notions of tax reform, unemployment, apprenticeship places, and also mentioned the job competition they face with ‘foreigners’, as the following quotation demonstrates:

DF: What do you see as important political issues nowadays? What interests you?
JAN: Well, the war and stuff. There was a war in Iraq. If an Iraqi lives here, then there’ll be prejudices again although he can’t do anything that he’s Iraqi.
MICHAEL: I haven’t watched the news for half a year.
FLORIAN: I don’t know what’s going on in politics. I mean, the things that I need to know, apprenticeship places and stuff like that, I know. But other things don’t bother me. And even if it interested me I couldn’t do much about it anyway. So, I just can’t be bothered.
DOMINIK: Well, I haven’t watched any news either for the past week. I’m only interested in unemployment, that the foreigners get a job and take our jobs away. They work for less money, on the black market and stuff, and take the chances away from others.

These young people did not perceive European and global political topics to be particularly relevant to their lives (except for the war in Iraq). And although both white and Turkish youth I spoke to engaged in a discussion about the possibilities of a Turkish EU membership, their general knowledge about Europe and the EU seemed to be rather limited. The Turkish students at Tannberg listed some concepts including ‘the Euro’, ‘the EU’, ‘western world’ and ‘advanced rich countries’, but were unable to engage in a wider discussion about Europe and the EU. Tamer, for example, alluded to the ‘united in diversity’ motto of the EU (cf. Council of the European Union, 2004) and Ugur referred to the EU’s peace-keeping role:

DF: What do you know about Europe, about the European Union?
TAMER: It’s a community.
YELIZ: That’s what I think too.
UMAY: I don’t know. I’m not so sure.
TAMER: It’s a community of different countries.
CARI: EU, countries that belong together; they talk about politics of different countries; they have negotiations and debate what they can do. It’s a strong, political team.
YELIZ: If a country needs help then the other EU countries will help. They have treaties with each other.
UGUR: The European Union is a good thing; we don’t have war today.
White German students in the study also revealed some factual knowledge about Europe and the EU. For example, the group of boys and girls referred to notions of power as well as transatlantic and inner-European relationships. Not only was Sebastian aware of the strength of the common currency, but he and Tobias also alluded to the political and economic benefits of a united Europe. Drawing upon the dispute over the Iraq war in 2003, Jessica reminded the boys that Europe still does not speak with one voice:

DF: What do you know about Europe and the EU?
FRANZISKA: The Euro.
TOBIAS: I think it’s better now when it’s Europe than when the countries were alone. We are too weak. We would have no chance, for example, against America. The Euro strengthens everything, of course. And the English always say ‘travel to Europe’; they still think they are on their own. That’s a bit silly what they think, I just find that the wrong attitude.
SEBASTIAN: Well, I think the deutschmark used to be weaker than the dollar. Now the dollar’s become weaker than the Euro. And when you’re together, when you’re a community, you’re a lot stronger than on your own.
JESSICA: Lots of languages, lots of cultures, well, I think that Europe is really a comprehensive image although the countries don’t always stick together. You could see that with the Iraq war and America, some countries supported America. Germany didn’t. And that’s where you can see that the countries don’t really always stick together.

As indicated earlier, some of these glimpses of factual European knowledge amongst both white and Turkish interviewees might be the result of European teaching units in compulsory subjects such as geography and history in Baden-Württemberg secondary schools. In other discussions, Bülent maintained that ‘the EU was founded on the good relations between France and Germany’, thus alluding to the 1950 proposal of the French foreign minister Schuman to unite the German and French coal and steel industry.

In contrast, white and Turkish students’ knowledge of, and interest in, European issues was much more limited in the two English schools, particularly at Millroad School where the young people I interviewed struggled to talk about Europe in political terms. For example, the group of white girls did not appear to know much about the expansion of the EU on 1 May 2004 despite the fact that this discussion took place days before this event. Their discourse very much focused on the disagreement between France and England regarding the Iraq war:

DF: What do you know about Europe, about the European Union?
ELLIE: [laughing] Nothing!
KATIE: Nothing.
DF: What is happening at the moment in Europe?
ELLIE: Erm, there’s a lot of disagreement about the Iraq war, whether it should have happened and stuff. Because, um, England was very go for it, and I know France was very very against it and I think that’s I dunno which other countries, but I think there were quite a lot more that were saying we shouldn’t do it, and the English government, even though most of the people in England didn’t want it to happen, decided to go ahead with it anyway.
LUCY: I don’t watch the news.
DF: In the UK, they are now talking about this European Constitution; they want a referendum for that. Have you heard of that recently?
KATIE: Like, I read a lot of newspapers and I watch some news, but I’ve never heard of that. Well, they may not, you know, advertise it as much as they should do. None of us here heard that; so that must mean that they’re not doing as much as they can to make people know that it’s expanding.

The girls were not aware of the current debate about a European Constitution, and Katie pointed towards, what she perceived, as a low media representation of European issues in England. Other white students I interviewed, such as Robert, claimed that the marginalisation of European agendas in England led to his poor knowledge about Europe and its institutions. ‘The European parliament is never like televised, we don’t know what they actually, if
Parliament [Westminster] passes a bill we’ll know about it, I don’t know what goes on in the European parliament’. Similarly, Turkish respondents had difficulties to make sense of how Europe and the EU work in political terms, as the following quotation from the discussion with four boys and girls underlines:

DF: What do you know about the European Union or Europe?
BARIS: European Union, what’s that?
SARILA: Well, nobody knows nothing about it basically.
BARIS: What’s the European Union?
SARILA: You think I know?
BARIS: I heard about it, but I don’t know what it is.
SARILA: Me neither.
HALIL: Is it the power?
BARIS: I’m asking you.
SARILA: I don’t really know, no.
HALIL: Cos the Union-
BARIS: The Union’s a bunch of people that decides something, but I don’t know.
HALIL: It’s the only power.

Other students in the sample, such as Olcay, referred to the Turkish EU membership bid when asked what they know about Europe in political terms. Europe was seen through a Turkish national (i.e. familiar) lens. Those who argued against membership typically said that Turkey’s laws and morals do not meet European standards and that the country is very poor with a great deal of people being homeless. Similarly, in their discussions about Europe and the EU, many young people I interviewed at Darwin School struggled to talk about the EU, as can be seen in the following quotation from the discussion with a group of five white girls:

DF: What sorts of things do you know about Europe and the European Union?
ANNE: Not much!
VICTORIA: It’s really difficult,-
ANNE: I don’t know anything.
VICTORIA: -totally out of my depth.
ELIZABETH: It’s quite confusing cos it changes so much, that people-
ANNE: The Euro.
SOPHIE: There’s places part of it [indistinct]
ELIZABETH: Oh, isn’t there a referendum or coming up for something or other?
VICTORIA: A what? What’s that?
ELIZABETH: I dunno. I just heard it, walking through my house and the news was on somewhere, this whole thing about-
VICTORIA: What’s a referendum?
ELIZABETH: I don’t know.
ANNE: I know about the euro because I was in Ireland when it was going through.
VICTORIA: They don’t have it in Ireland.

Arguably, the limited coverage of European issues in the British mass media and the failure of schools to promote a European dimension in the National Curriculum (cf. Tulasiewicz, 1993; Convey and Merritt, 2000) were all responsible for this low level of knowledge of, and interest in, European issues. Similar reasons can be deployed to justify the difficulties the sample of Turkish students had to engage in European political discourses. Some Darwin students referred to ‘power’, ‘opposition to America’ and ‘community of countries’. Typically, however, Turkish interviewees neither knew the purpose of the EU nor how European institutions work. This can be seen in the following quotation from the discussion with a group of male and female students:

DF: What do you know about the European Union or Europe actually?
ADEM: It happened after World War Two; France and Germany, they like made an agreement, and then loads of other countries joined or something.
NEYLAN: What happens when you’re in the EU anyway?
AFET: Nothing, you’re just
ADEM: No, you get to, the United Nations.
NEYLAN: What do you get?
NEYLAN: So what, who cares? Why can’t the whole world be in it? That’s not fair.
ADEM: Cos they’re not.
[one of them speaks indecipherably]
NEYLAN: It’s just stupid!

Although political knowledge and interest is not necessarily the basis of political identities, the evidence in my research suggests that it nevertheless affected the identity formation processes of the current generation of European youth. I shall now move on to show that young people with high levels of knowledge about Europe and the EU, such as the sample at Goethe Gymnasium in Stuttgart, made Europe part of their hybrid political identities whereas those who struggled to engage in European political discourses, such as the sample at Millroad School in London, privileged national or even nationalistic identities.

**YOUTH AND EUROPEAN POLITICAL IDENTITIES**

As a result of Goethe Gymnasium’s liberal approach of emphasising Europe as a common bond for all students and the European curricular dimension, both white and Turkish youth engaged in a discussion and felt positive about Europe although there is still room for students to enhance their European political knowledge. Most Turkish and white Goethe students made European identification dependent on *stays abroad* (e.g. ‘I only know Germany; if I was living in Spain for a few years, then I’d more say that I’m European cos I’d be familiar with different countries’), *parental influence* (e.g. ‘my parents experienced a lot and tell me a lot about other countries and cultures), and the *school curriculum* (e.g. ‘we learn a lot of European languages here in school and talking in Italian, English and French to other people makes me feel partly European’). The following excerpts indicate that the young people I talked to felt positive about Europe:

**DF:** To what extent do you see yourself as European?
**ALI:** Erm, of course I’m European. Europe is very big and is getting bigger and bigger. And when Turkey joins the EU it’ll be even bigger. Europe is getting more and more important to me cos of Turkey. […]
**SAMUEL:** Europe, the EU, plays an important role in my life. When I go abroad it’s just so simple. There are hardly any border controls and it’s just getting easier and easier. The countries are not on their own anymore and are together; and there are no borders anymore, very open. […]
**MARIAM:** I feel European because of the Euro. The Euro impacts on your life. I mean, in the newspaper they always talk about the Euro, Eurozone, Europe and so and I’ve noticed that the countries are getting closer and closer and not every country has its own policy. And the economy has grown together too. And you can travel to other countries without any problems at the borders.

Ali linked European identification with Turkey’s role in Europe and the EU whereas the two white students focused upon European elements in their lives, including the Euro and free movement within several European countries. The above statements were suggestive of the fact that the processes of European integration, be it the expansion to include countries like Turkey (e.g. Ali) or deeper political and economic co-operation (e.g. Mariam), also seemed to contribute to students’ identification with Europe.

Paradoxically, despite having some knowledge about Europe, neither the white nor the Turkish students at Tannberg Hauptschule saw themselves as ‘European’. Perhaps the at times Eurocentric approach made it difficult for young people to relate positively to Europe as a political identity. Europe, for these Turkish youth, was not separate from the concept of being
German – ‘being German’ in other words equals ‘being European’. Hence, most of the Turkish students I interviewed argued that they felt European only ‘because I live here in Germany (…) we are Germans and Germany is part of the EU’. In contrast, each of the four Turkish boys in one focus group claimed that ‘I don’t think I feel part of Europe (…) I feel more Turkish’. These findings suggest that Turkish students who privileged their Turkishness over German national identity had no connection to Europe whereas those who prioritised the German part of their hybrid political identities were able to feel European. Some (white) Tannberg youth employed the image of a chain of identities arguing that Stuttgart, Germany and Europe were all interlinked and thus sites for identity formation:

DF: Where do you feel you belong to?
DOMINIK: Stuttgart, or Germany.
JAN: Stuttgart, Germany and Europe.
DF: Why?
DOMINIK: Don’t know.
JAN: Stuttgart belongs to Germany and Germany is part of Europe.
MICHAEL: Well, I mean, I was born in Stuttgart, grew up in Germany and Germany belongs to Europe.
FLORIAN: I live here and when somebody lives in a country, then he’s a citizen of that country and that’s why we also belong to Europe, Stuttgart and Germany.
JAN: If someone asks me, then I say, I am now living in Stuttgart but I was born in Berlin. I’ve hardly said European really. Maybe that’s just a habit that you don’t really say that yet, but when you are more used to it (Europe), then you would say that.

In contrast, in England where governments have marginalised European agendas to a greater or lesser extent and where schools and curricula have shown little acknowledgement of the processes of Europeanisation (despite the 1991 policy statement5 to promote a sense of European identity; DES, 1991), young people struggled to relate positively to Europe as a political identity. For example, at Millroad School in London, the group of Turkish boys construed the notion of Europe in monocultural terms:

YILDIRAN: Let’s say I go to India or something, or I don’t know. I’m just giving Egypt or America or any other Canada, Canada or something then I would say “ah, I’m coming from Europe”, basically that’s about “I’m coming from Europe” but I’m not like, you know European or anything.
MUHAMMAD: I wouldn’t even say Europe, you can’t say I’m European.
DF: Why not?
MUHAMMAD: Unless your races country is a European country as well … like where your from, whether your first country is in Europe cos basically we’re used to seeing white people, white people as European, so basically-
YILDIRAN: English people.
MUHAMMAD: I would say I live in Europe but I’m not European.
ONAN: Yeah same, because you’re not living all around Europe, you’re just living in one place, one country.
KHAN: Erm, the thing is that if you was Europe, yeah, you’d like understand that, you know, I come from Europe, cos you know yeah, but I can’t say I’m European cos I’m not Christian.
MUHAMMAD: I don’t say I’m Christian, I say I believe in Christianity but I don’t say I’m Christian, that’s the same as saying I’m from Europe but I’m not European.

The notion of ‘being European’ did not sit comfortably with any of the Turkish boys in this group, most notably Muhammad, for whom identification is based upon the concept of ‘race’ rather than residence. Like the Turkish students, the white students I spoke to positioned themselves outside the notion of Europe by drawing upon a modified version of the theme of us (English) and them (continental Europeans), as shown in the following excerpt:

____________________
5 The 1991 policy statement was a response to the 1988 Resolution of the Council of Ministers of Education to ‘strengthen in young people a sense of European identity’ (Council of Ministers of Education, 1988).
JOEY: Don’t really see ourselves as part of Europe. It’s more like all the countries that are joined together and we’re just sort of the odd one out that drives on the left and has the pound.

EDDIE: Yeah, because we’re sort of separated, we’re an island off Europe. We’re not, yet, because I don’t see myself as part of Europe really. We’re off Europe, just off Europe.

KELLY: Yeah, it’s like they always say British and then they say European. Like, when you say European, for me I think of places like, erm, erm, countries like … like I can’t think of, like- EDDIE: Switzerland and France. And like places further down.

JOEY: Probably Germany actually.

KELLY: Yeah. And it’s like, cos its right [indistinct] island, but in a way, and we are different in similar in ways, like you know.

JOEY: Especially now because we’re sort of less tied to Europe and more tied to America, we’re sort of very westernised.

Similarly, at Darwin School, Europe played a less important role in the lives of young people compared to local and national identities. Despite being interested in the EU and aware of England’s position within Europe including the referenda on the single currency and the proposed Constitution, Mustafa (a Turkish boy) did not see himself as European:

DF: To what extent would you see yourself as European?

MUSTAFA: I don’t really see myself as European, because, erm, I don’t know, I just, erm, I’m not sure because I’d sort of be like failing my argument now if I said that I don’t see myself as European because if I was born in Europe I’d see myself as European, but I’m not born there so I guess I call myself British, cos I was born here and, like growing up here, since day 1. That’s it.

DF: That’s interesting that you are saying that, because you were born in England, and England has been part of the EU for decades, and now you were just saying “I’m not born in Europe”?

MUSTAFA: But the thing is, I don’t see as England being a strong … I know they’re quite strong in Europe, but I guess like I think like Europe’s sort of latching onto England, and I think England’s more distant from Europe, even though they’re quite strong contenders in the European Union. Now if you’ve seen the news, they’re actually thinking to vote not to be key contenders in the European Union, so they’ll be more of the people that’s on the marginal lines of Europe, instead of the core players of the, like Germany or France.

White students at Darwin also referred to Britain’s separateness and struggled to position themselves within a European discourse. In the following discussion, the white students who took part in the mixed-sex focus group agreed that Europe is a rather irrelevant, distant community with which they have nothing much to do. The discussion thus shows how Europe is defined as a geographical zone and too broad a category to identify with:

DF: What role would you say Europe plays in your life?

ADAM: Nothing.

CHARLES: Nothing, whatsoever.

CLARA & OLIVIA: [murmur agreement]

ADAM: Wouldn’t really like it to play much of a role either.

CHARLES: It’s got nothing to do with me, it’s a bit irrelevant.

CHARLOTTE: You wouldn’t say you were French cos that’s in Europe.

ADAM: It’s just a zone.

CHARLES: You wouldn’t say “hello, I’m European”

DF: Why wouldn’t you say that?

ADAM: Cos you’re an individual from many different places, in Europe.

CHARLES: European is too broad a generalisation to class anyone as, whereas British obviously is much smaller, has less minorities, less groups to put yourself in, so its easier to say “Yes I am British”, but even in England, even in London, few people would say “yes I’m British”, they’d say “I’m from London”, “I’m from Essex”, “I’m from Kent”, or, “I’m from Oaks”, cos people like to give themselves the smallest community to put themselves within, so they can feel more special.

The tension between Englishness (or Britishness) and Europeanness is played out in the above passage. The girls felt that by saying you are from England it is ‘kind of more personal, a
more detailed answer of where you actually come from’ whereas saying you are European could mean many different things.

While young people’s European knowledge and identities are clearly affected by the national political context and school policy (including curriculum) approaches, social class positioning also made a difference. Youth in the middle-class dominated Goethe Gymnasium in Stuttgart had the best opportunities of relating to Europe as a political identity. Their privileged socio-economic background allowed them to take part in European school exchanges and to travel across Europe and thus benefit from the opportunities associate with Europe. Young people in the middle-class dominated Darwin School in London also benefited from their socio-economically advantaged background and the school’s promotion of an inclusive British identity. However, as a result of England’s lukewarm approach to Europe, the middle-class students I interviewed had much more limited opportunities than their German counterparts. In contrast, as a result of their predominantly working-class backgrounds, young people at Tannberg Hauptschule and Millroad School did not seem to gain the same access to the opportunities associated with Europe (e.g. travelling) than their peers at Goethe Gymnasium and Darwin School. As a result, young people in these contexts privileged their national (Turkish, English, German) identities and did not consider Europe part of their identities. As Table 3 shows, different EU countries set different political and educational parameters and, as a result of these, young people’s European knowledge, interests and identities diverge:

Table 3: The political knowledge and identities of the current generation of youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GERMANY</th>
<th>ENGLAND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government level</td>
<td>Very strong European dimension</td>
<td>Weak European dimension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Location</td>
<td>Tannberg Hauptschule</td>
<td>Goethe Gymnasium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Working-class inner-city</td>
<td>Middle-class inner-city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) European topics</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) European knowledge</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) European identities</td>
<td>Weak ethno-national</td>
<td>Partial national-European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Weak national</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weak ethno-national</td>
<td>Weak ethno-national</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This article, in addition to highlighting the range of factors that need to be taken into account to understand young people’s European political knowledge, interest and identities, raised important questions about the appropriateness of both the National Curriculum guidelines in England and the school curricula of subjects like citizenship, geography and history, where European topics are currently only marginally included. Unlike in Germany where each type of secondary school has a mandatory curriculum for all ages and levels with very limited student choice below Year 11 (age 16-17), the English system promotes subject specialisation at an early age and allows for young people to drop history, geography and foreign languages (i.e. subjects which are particularly suitable for promoting ‘Europe’) at Key Stage 4 (ages 14-16). This paper not only suggested that it might help the new generation of European youth
forge a loyalty to Europe if schools transformed nation-centred curricula into more inclusive learning approaches, but also highlighted the educational discrepancies within the EU. In order to avoid such gaps between European countries, it might be worth considering the potential of European educational standards (i.e. a European core curriculum with specified knowledge standards that all students in the EU must attain within a certain period).

In more general terms, we have learnt that in countries with strong European agendas (e.g. Germany) and where Europe is conceptualised as an inclusive multi-ethnic concept, young people from diverse ethno-religious backgrounds relate positively to Europe. In contexts of strong European agendas and where Europe is constructed in ethno-centric/Eurocentric terms, minority ethnic youth like the Turkish Muslims have little access to Europe. In contrast, in countries with weak European agendas (e.g. England) and where Europe is marginalised in school curricula, young people struggle to relate to Europe. While some countries see Europe as a common bond which may hold the different racial and ethno-religious communities together at a time of increasing globalisation, others like England promote national agendas for example through citizenship education. What becomes evident, therefore, is that if we want to increase young people’s European political knowledge, interests and identities, then we need to promote both diversity and solidarity. ‘Multiculturalism versus Britishness [or Europeanness, Germanness] is a phony war because the two things have to go together’ (Modood, 2005: 68). However, in order better to connect young people with the EU project, European institutions also need to become more transparent and relevant. For example, young people’s ‘information gap’ (Chisholm, 1997) needs to be addressed by promoting sources such as the European Youth Portal and the European Youth Foundation.

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