

COMPARING EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN NATIONALISMS: A RESPONSE TO ALBERTO MARTINELLI'S 'NATIONALISM IN THE 21th CENTURY' ⁽¹⁾

by **Daniele Conversi**

Nationalism studies have emerged as a new field of research since the 1980s. This field is inherently international and inter-disciplinary, although cases studies tend to prevail over comparative ones in the specialized journals. Therefore, attempts to compare broad regional areas should be warmly welcomed. Alberto Martinelli is advantaged by his previous research on transatlantic relations ⁽²⁾, so his incursion into the field of nationalism should also be greeted. His main argument is that, while nationalism in Europe is intrinsically divisive and ethnically based, a more 'civic' form of nationalism can foster cohesion in the United States, where a different, ideologically-based, polarization risks vitiating the political atmosphere without reaching the necessary consensus to govern ⁽³⁾.

My counter-argument is that nationalism cannot provide the stability the US deserves, while it can foment even more instability in Europe, where it represents a direct threat to the common European project. In

⁽¹⁾ In this article, I shall use the term US and America (or American/s) interchangeably. No imperialist arrogance is intended.

⁽²⁾ Alberto MARTINELLI (ed.), *Transatlantic Divide: Comparing American and European Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007; ID., *The Political Systems of the United States and the European Union*, in Helena FLAM and Marcus CARSON (eds.), *Rule Systems Theory: Applications and Explorations*, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 2008, pp. 243-62.

⁽³⁾ The argument may seem familiar to those who postulate the prevalence of a 'civic' form of nationalism in the US, either from a 'right' or 'left' perspective. Walker Connor seems to argue that patriotism as «loyalty to one's state or country» can be civic, while nationalism is necessarily ethnic (Walker CONNOR, *Ethnonationalism: the Quest for Understanding*, Princeton (N.J.), Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 196 and 207). I have found some inspiring parallels in Anatol Lieven's and John Hulsmann's vision of 'ethical realism' as stemming from a positive sense of 'responsible patriotism' and as set out by the examples of more cosmopolitan Americans like Reinhold Niebuhr, Hans Morgenthau and George Kennan (Anatol LIEVEN and John HULSMAN, *Ethical Realism: A Vision for America's Role in the World*, New York, Pantheon Books, 2006).

contrast with Martinelli, I will postulate that a further expansion of nationalism in the US represents a substantial threat to both American society and the rest of the world – largely because of the US' central position in the global arena. My response is articulated through two main arguments and divided along two dimensions, one internal (home politics) and the other external (international politics)⁽⁴⁾.

In one of the first systematic comparative studies of the United States and the European Union, Martinelli describes the two political systems as two successful variants of 'Western modernity'⁽⁵⁾. I have also argued that these two models can be, at least in part, complementary. Yet, at least until the demise of totalitarianism, the European nation-state model has been decisive in shaping contemporary politics worldwide by merging nationalism and 'modernism' into a single ideological block⁽⁶⁾.

I will add two more arguments against the beneficial role purportedly played by US nationalism: I argue that, before comparing US-EU nationalisms, we need first to understand the *longue durée* impact of nationalisms in European politics, its historical trajectory, its impact in shaping international relations and, in particular, the rise of the US as a superpower. I do this through a cultural lens emphasizing the relationship between cultural and military aspects of US foreign policy.

As a first step, it is necessary to focus on the linkage between European nationalism and the continuing spread of US cultural and military influence, which I describe as the 'cultural-military complex'. In the next section, I show that, given the deepening influence of US culture on EU attitudes and institutions, an upsurge of nationalism in the US is likely to have a damaging impact on inter-European relations.

European nationalisms defeated: the American century and its 'cultural-military complex'

The birth date of the 'American century' is usually set in 1898, when the US defeated the Spanish forces over Cuba, Puerto Rico, the

(4) For a change, I will frame this argument largely outside current 'theories of nationalism', as I have explored these in a host of other articles.

(5) Alberto MARTINELLI, *Transatlantic Divide*, Ch. 1.

(6) Daniele CONVERSI, *Modernism and Nationalism*, in «Journal of Political Ideologies», XVII, 2012, pp. 13-34.

Philippines and a few other colonial hotspots⁽⁷⁾. However, America's full effect in shaping the Twentieth century's culture and politics could only occur after Europe's self-destruction in the name of nationalism. Once the continent was doomed ensuing WW1, American ascendancy began to replace the more traditional French influence in various fields of culture, politics, militarism and economy⁽⁸⁾. While emulative Gallicization had been a prevalent pattern amongst 19th century European elites, the French century closed with WW1 and the *afrancesados* (Francophiles) classes began slowly to vanish from the map. It is important to stress here that France's international sphere of influence began to be eroded precisely at a time when peasants were being 'turned into Frenchmen', according to Eugen Weber's classic study on the Frenchification of the masses⁽⁹⁾. In other terms, WW1 represented the apogee of 'nation building' in most European countries⁽¹⁰⁾, which in turn coincided with the beginning of the Europe's (particularly France's and Britain's) decline and the parallel 'irresistible' ascent of US cultural industry and military power⁽¹¹⁾.

However, American power expanded not because of its nationalism, but quite the contrary because of its ability to take advantage of the conflicting nationalisms of other players. Indeed, during most of the century the US was not a nation-state in the European sense – and this advantage provided decisive at each moment of crisis⁽¹²⁾. And each crisis

(7) Cesar J. AYALA, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History since 1898*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2007; Ivan MUSICANT, *Empire by Default: the Spanish-American War and the Dawn of the American Century*, New York, H. Holt, 1998; David TRAXEL, *1898: the Birth of the American Century*, New York, Knopf, 1998.

(8) Liping BU, *Making the World like Us: Education, Cultural Expansion, and the American Century*, Westport (Conn.), Praeger, 2003; Victoria DE GRAZIA, *Irresistible Empire: America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*, Cambridge (Mass.), Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005.

(9) Eugen WEBER, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1976.

(10) Walker CONNOR, *Ethnonationalism*.

(11) Victoria DE GRAZIA, *Irresistible Empire*.

(12) Daniele CONVERSI, *Cultural Autonomy, core values and Europe's legacy: a response to Joshua A. Fishman*, in «International Journal of the Sociology of Language», 213, 2012, pp. 63-70. For instance, contrary to most European states, until recently mono-lingualism has never been pursued: the US do not have an official language and only states can adopt one. However, a still thriving "English-only" lobby (the Official English movement) has tried since a few decades to push for an English Language

proved to be a consequence of various waves of nationalism, in which the oxidized and tarnished European nation-state model was a major cause of defeat. In the mean time, the continuing strength of the nation-state hampered both the dominance of a single superpower over the continent or the emergence of a proper ‘balance of power’⁽¹³⁾. This vacuum was seized by the rise of Nazi-fascism and other authoritarian systems. In fact, totalitarianism, particularly fascism, has often been conceived as a continuation of the state of war and the emergency circumstances created by the all-pervasive censorship and control that most states had achieved during the war – and which elites were unwilling to abandon or give up⁽¹⁴⁾.

A further watershed was achieved through the Allies’ victory in WW2. During the Cold War, the process deepened beyond the military sphere with the deliberate expansion of a well documented ‘cultural mis-

Amendment to the US Constitution (Joshua A. FISHMAN, *Bias and Anti-intellectualism: the Frenzy Fiction of “English Only”*, in *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1989, pp. 638-54; David F. MARSHALL, *The Question of an Official Language: Language Rights and the English Language Amendment*, in «International Journal of the Sociology of Language», 60, 1986, pp. 7-76). In its wake, English has been adopted as the official language by over half of the USA’s 50 states, with Oklahoma being the latest one to join in 2010. This deep suspicion of multiculturalism, including language rights, has slowly grown and now pervades US media and political discourses. Huntington’s tirades against bilingualism could have been written two hundred years ago during the apogee of the homogenizing European nation-state (Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2004). No other country in the world is currently witnessing such an intellectually-driven upsurge of linguistic isolationism.

⁽¹³⁾ Elsewhere, I have argued that the confluence between neo-liberal globalization and the majoritarian, homogenizing nation-state model is not conducive to the respect of cultural and ethnic diversity (Daniele CONVERSI, *Majoritarian Democracy and Globalization versus Ethnic Diversity?*, in «Democratization», XIX, 2012, pp. 789-811). This critique largely draws on Michael Mann’s monumental work on the relationship between majoritarianism, ‘nation-statism’ and ethnic cleansing as the ‘dark side of democracy’ (Daniele CONVERSI, *Demo-skepticism and Genocide*, in «Political Studies Review», IV, 2006, pp. 247-62; Michael MANN, *The Dark Side of Democracy. Explaining Ethnic Cleansing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁽¹⁴⁾ Daniele CONVERSI, *Guerra y totalitarismo. Las orígenes bélicas del fascismo en “Il delitto Matteotti” de Florestano Vancini, 1973*, in Santiago DE PABLO (ed.), *La historia a través del cine*, Bilbao, Universidad del País Vasco, 2012, in press; Id. (ed.), *Nacionalismo y omogenización*, in «Historia contemporánea», Special Issue, n. 45 (in press); John KEEGAN, *The First World War*, New York, Knopf, 1999, p. 8; Marco MONDINI, *Between Subversion and Coup d’Etat: Military Power and Politics after the Great War (1919-1922)*, in «Journal of Modern Italian Studies», XI, 2006, pp. 445-64.

sion' abroad, occasionally dubbed as '*coca-colonization*'⁽¹⁵⁾. The US' cultural mission inspired various 'extracurricular' activities in a sort of 'cultural Cold War', which included draconian measures like covert spying, supervision of media production, preference for American cultural and political content in public spaces, touching nearly every aspect of art, literature and music, including scholarly pursuits and academic research⁽¹⁶⁾.

Finally, once the rival superpower had collapsed and an unrivalled power emerged as the unique 'hegemon', the stage was set for a more radical and deeper wave of global Americanization⁽¹⁷⁾. This included the rapid expansion of practices variously known as McDonaldization or Disneyization⁽¹⁸⁾. The process involved virtually every aspect of society both within the US and abroad: from the police, the courts and the prison system, to work practices, family life, law, morality and values, conceptions of knowledge, computers and the Internet, retailing and restoration, sex and pornography, religion and spirituality, agriculture and rural life, credit cards and bank transactions, universities and higher education, drug care and the pharmaceutical industry, sport and leisure, the use of DDT and pesticides⁽¹⁹⁾ and virtually every single

⁽¹⁵⁾ Reinhold WAGNLEITNER, *Coca-Colonization and the Cold War: the Cultural Mission of the United States in Austria after the Second World War*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

⁽¹⁶⁾ Frances Stonor SAUNDERS, *Who Paid the Piper: the CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, London, Granta Books, 1999.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Daniele CONVERSI, *Globalization, Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism*, in Bryan S. TURNER (ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Globalization Studies*, London, Routledge, 2009, pp. 346-66; Id., *The Limits of Cultural Globalisation?*, in Manfred B. STEGER (ed.), *Globalization and Culture*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2012; Stephen MENNELL, *Globalization and Americanization*, in Bryan S. TURNER (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 554-67.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Benjamin R. BARBER, *Jihad vs. McWorld*, New York, Times Books/Ballantine Books, 1995; George RITZER, *Credit Cards, Fast-food Restaurants, and Rationalization*, in George RITZER (ed.), *McDonaldization. The Reader*, Thousand Oaks (Cal.), Pine Forge Press, 2006², 2009³; Barry SMART (ed.), *Resisting McDonaldization*, London, Sage, 1999; Alan BRYMAN, *Global Implications of McDonaldization and Disneyization*, in George RITZER (ed.), *McDonaldization*, 2009 edition; Peter SCHWEIZER, *Disney: the Mouse Betrayed: Greed, Corruption, and Children at Risk*, Washington (D.C.), Regnery Publ., 1998.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Mathew B. ROBINSON, *McDonaldization of America's Police, Courts, and Corrections*, Tony ROYLE, *McWork in Europe*, and Sarah RALEY, *McDonaldization and the Family*, all in George RITZER (ed.), *McDonaldization*, 2nd ed. (2006); R. Daniel KELEMEN and Eric C. SIBBITT, *The Globalization of American Law*, in «International Organization», LVIII, 2004, pp. 103-36; Suzanne S. HUDD, *McMorals Revisited: Creating*

aspect of our daily lives. These trends have not always been accepted passively and unconditionally. In fact, in a post-9/11 political scenario the issue began to be addressed systematically with a few preliminary studies showing the deep relationship between Americanism and anti-Americanism as it developed in various countries⁽²⁰⁾.

Most important, all of this seems to prove that Europeans, like most of the world, have become so deeply linked to the US that any change occurring within the US, let alone an expansion of its already impervious nationalism, will not fall to reverberate dramatically in Europe and elsewhere. For instance, a change in the direction of ultra-patriotism may have immediate effects of incrementing emulative or derivative forms of nationalism and populism elsewhere. It may drive many European states on the path of self-closure and exclusion that the European Union's founding fathers had wished to avoid forever. In other words, a further increase of American nationalism is incompatible with the European project and may well encourage retaliatory nationalizing measures in Europe and elsewhere – either at the state levels or, less likely, at the level of Brussels.

Irrational Characters?, in George RITZER (ed.), 2006; Claire FOX, *The Massification of Higher Education*, in Dennis HAYES and Robin WYNYARD (eds.), *The McDonalidization of Higher Education*, Westport (Conn.), Bergin & Garvey, 2002; Alan NEUSTADTL and Meyer KESTNBAUM, *The McDonalidization of the Internet*, Joel I. NELSON, *On Mass Distribution: a Case Study of Chain Stores in the Restaurant Industry*, Kathryn HAUSBECK and Barbara G. BRENTS, *McDonalidization of the Sex Industries? The Business of Sex*, John DRANE, *From Creeds to Burger: Religious Control, Spiritual Search, and the Future of the World*, Andrew J. KNIGHT, *Supersizing Farms: the McDonalidization of Agriculture*, George RITZER, *Credit Cards, Fast-food Restaurants, and Rationalization*, all in George RITZER (ed.), 2006; Frank FUREDI, *The Bureaucratization of the British University*, and Marin PARKER, *Total Quality Control: Universities, Language, and Politics*, both in Dennis HAYES and Robin WYNYARD (eds.), *The McDonalidization of Higher Education*; Uwe E. KEMMESIES, *What do hamburgers and drug care have in common? Some unorthodox remarks on the McDonalidization and rationality of drug care*, in George RITZER (ed.), 2006; David JARY, *McDonalidization of Sport and Leisure*, in Barry SMART (ed.), *Resisting McDonalidization*; David KINKELA, *DDT and the American Century: Global Health, Environmental Politics, and the Pesticide that Changed the World*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2011.

(20) Günther BISCHOF, *Two Sides of the Coin: the Americanization of Austria and Austrian Anti-Americanism*, in Alexander STEPHAN (ed.), *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism after 1945*, Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2006; Mary NOLAN, *Anti-Americanism and Americanization in Germany*, in «Politics & Society», XXXIII, 2005, pp. 88-122; Nils Arne SØRENSEN and Klaus PETERSEN, *Ameri-Danes and pro-American anti-Americans: Cultural Americanization and anti-Americanism in Denmark after 1945*, in Alexander STEPHAN (ed.), *The Americanization of Europe*.

In fact mono-cultural nationalism and cultural homogenization, like that which led to Europe's self-destruction in WW1, should in principle be alien to US politics, society and notions of citizenship. Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* describes the original nucleus of puritan settlers of New England's township system in terms of displaying collective ideological pressures towards high homogeneity and uniformity⁽²¹⁾. At the same time, he portrays a society which is also deeply plural and has thus developed indigenous institutions which are able to govern and represent this plurality. Such pluralism can better be presented as a peculiar form of secularism, which nevertheless advocates the legitimate presence of religious institutions at various levels of public life. Yet, America's *sui generis* secularism risks to be distorted, even destroyed, by the neo-nationalism emerged in the wake of 9/11. I address now this issue first from the viewpoint of home politics, then by looking at its international reverberations.

The internal (US) consequences of an increased US nationalism

The first argument is that more patriotism can hardly work in the US, because there is already too much of it. The US' overindulgence with flag waving and displays of mass patriotic symbolism is abundantly discussed in some of key texts on nationalism, some of which will be considered here. These excesses might prove to be the cure that kills the patient, rather than manufacture the sense of cohesion eagerly awaited by US nationalists. Any further abuse of an already overcharged symbolic apparatus is more likely to lead to cultural and political atrophy than overcoming ideological polarization.

In their analyses of America patriotism, many political and social scientists seem to concur with this view. For instance, Marvin and Ingle demonstrate in their key text on American nationalism how the all pervasiveness of US flags and other nationalist symbols gravitated around a sacrificial tribute, a kind of 'levy' demanding that blood continually be shed in the name of American patriotism⁽²²⁾. In 'Writing Security'

(21) Alexis DE TOCQUEVILLE, *Democracy in America*, London, Saunders & Otley, 1838, 3rd edition, p. 39.

(22) Carolyn MARVIN and David W. INGLE, *Blood Sacrifice and the Nation: Totem Rituals and the American Flag*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

David Campbell has shown how American nationalism nurtures imperial adventures and wars which in turn serve to forge US identity at home⁽²³⁾, resulting in an heavy toll for US citizens. War making has thus been described as an essential aspect of the ‘American way of life’⁽²⁴⁾. Anatol Lieven’s lucid analysis revealed how American nationalism’s xenophobic facets and chauvinist components were being cultivated in an intolerant atmosphere which had degraded public debate since the 1990s, preparing the terrain for Bush’s advent⁽²⁵⁾. Finally, in his ground-breaking *Banal nationalism*, Michael Billig shows how American nationalism permeates social interactions so deeply as to become unconsciously carried at nearly every level of social action and culture⁽²⁶⁾, demanding blind obedience and conformism in a whole host of areas.

In line with this group of scholars, my first argument is that there is already an excess, or surplus, of nationalism in the US – as elsewhere. Moreover, given the US’ hegemonic position, its hyper-nationalism is beyond compare across the globe, with few patriots elsewhere so keen on displaying flags as sacred icons. ‘Flag burning’ is considered a form of abuse and a Constitutional amendment on flag-desecration has been repeatedly proposed to statutorily prohibit such expression of dissent.

The reaction to 9-11 has shown the world an impulsive, irrational and all-pervasive dimension of US nationalism, which might have remained concealed if the attacks had not taken place. Other countries have been targets of terrorist attacks and none of them has shown the same level of uncompromising, aggressive and ultimately self-defeating patriotism. As observed by the Indian writer Arundhati Roy, the display of ‘plastic’ patriotism through a «blizzard of made-in-China American flags»⁽²⁷⁾ poured a river of gall and rhetoric on a mesmerized world. Immediately

⁽²³⁾ David CAMPBELL, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998².

⁽²⁴⁾ Catherine LUTZ, *Warmaking as the American Way of Life*, in Hugh GUSTERSON and Catherine L. BESTEMAN (eds.), *The Insecure American: How We Got Here and What We Should Do about It*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2010.

⁽²⁵⁾ Anatol LIEVEN, *America Right or Wrong. An Anatomy of American Nationalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁽²⁶⁾ Michael BILLIG, *Banal Nationalism*, London, Sage, 1995.

⁽²⁷⁾ Arundhati ROY, *An Ordinary Person’s Guide to Empire*, London, Penguin, 2006, p. 15.

after 9-11, «80 percent of Americans said they were displaying the flag, 63 percent at home, 29 percent on clothes, 28 percent on cars. Wal-Mart reportedly sold 116,000 flags on September 11 and 250,000 the next day»⁽²⁸⁾. This was no innocent patriotism: a wake of xenophobically motivated attacks began simultaneously with flag-waving, targeting Hindus, Sikhs and several other groups, besides a great number of Muslim Americans, particularly those living in small communities or as individuals⁽²⁹⁾.

Given this bleak scenario, I maintain that American citizens of all races, ethnicities, creeds and ideologies are unlikely to extract substantial advantages, in particular gain more cohesion by applying extra doses of nationalism. Of course, there are those, including nationalist politicians and intellectuals a la-Huntington, who have been positively struck by such patriotism, some apparently arguing that only an external attack like, or worst than, 9-11 may bring Americans ‘bowling together’⁽³⁰⁾.

Pariah superpower: American nationalism and the decline of US international relations

My second argument focuses on the international aftershocks. Therefore, 9-11 revealed a revengeful America ‘united’ in the common task of inflicting pain on a few targets controversially related to the attacks. This had unprecedented repercussion in the relationship between the US and the rest of the world. It also paved the way for the relentless ascent of China as a superpower, with an unprecedented surrender of the ‘balance of power’, which in turn may prelude to a long-winded descent into international disorder⁽³¹⁾. Its defenders usually dismiss this definitive shift in power as the rise of a new set of partnerships. Others, like Minxin Pei, argue not only that «9/11 has changed everything’, but that

(28) Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, *Who Are We?*, p. 3.

(29) Lori PEEK, *Behind the Backlash: Muslim Americans after 9/11*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2010; Dawinder S. SIDHU and Neha Singh GOHIL, *Civil Rights in Wartime: the Post 9/11 Sikh Experience*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009.

(30) Robert D. PUTNAM, *Bowling Together: the United States of America*, in «The American Prospect», XIII, 2002, pp. 20-22.

(31) Minxin PEI, *La Cina ci compra grazie all'11/9*, in «L'Espresso», 8 September 2011: <http://espresso.repubblica.it/lista/senzafrontiere/minxinpei/1>

it has directly created ‘China’s golden decade»⁽³²⁾. Moreover, the broader securitization framework has also contributed to halt the democratization process in China⁽³³⁾, as elsewhere in Asia.

There are some general rules and thoughts to be taken into consideration while evaluating, or debating on, the deliberate arousal and stimulation of patriotism.

Economic and political elites attempting to gamble in patriotic war games necessarily use a double-edged sword, transforming their constituencies into high-risk societies. This is also because further disintegration always looms ahead, particularly if success is not promptly achieved.

Moreover, in a world dominated by the Internet, nation-states are no longer secluded islands and exclusive repositories of political legitimacy that can ignore pressures from the rest of the world. Being the Number One democratic superpower can shelter for a while a regime’s credibility from international critiques, but it cannot cover it from internal criticism, unless democracy itself is suspended (as partly occurred in the wake of 9/11).

I assume that Europeans are overwhelmingly supportive of maintaining a reasonable operational dose of US hegemonic power so as to be able to grant both a sufficient level of international stability and internal cohesion. Nationalism is unlikely to bring stability to either side of the ‘transatlantic divide’. Given the US’ unchallenged role as a cultural-military superpower, US stability should in principle be reflected in more stability across the world. In other terms, given the pyramidal structure of the neoliberal world order, more instability at the top should be reflected in more stability at the bottom.

However, as history has taught us it does not work the other way around: the US has thrived on European conflict and US power has always been alimented by crises and instability abroad, particularly in Europe. As we have seen in the previous section, most European conflicts since 1898 have resulted in an increase of US power. Each suc-

(32) Minxin PEI, *China’s golden decade*, in «The Indian Express», 7 September 2011: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/china-s-golden-decade/842863/>

(33) Minxin PEI, *China’s Trapped Transition: the Limits of Developmental Autocracy*, Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 2006.

(34) John Christopher BARRY, *Empire as a Gated Community: Politics of an American Strategic Metaphor*, in «Global Society», XXV, 2011, pp. 287-309.

cessive aftermath of a major European war, from 1898, WW1, WW2, and the Cold War to the latest Balkan war, represent stages of further American expansion and consolidation – at least until 9-11.

America's security-driven discourse has rarely sought to build good relations with neighbour countries, and in general react to its internal and international vulnerabilities by incessantly expanding its military arsenals and its 'security perimeter' and «by garrisoning the world with a global network of bases»⁽³⁴⁾.

The US remains the largest producer and exporter of arms and munitions the planet has ever seen, to the point that this activity has plunged the country into deeper and deeper debt, spending yearly more on armed forces than all other countries in the world combined⁽³⁵⁾. The perverse implications of the 'military-industrial complex' was adumbrated over half a century ago by the sociologist, C. Wright Mills, who nevertheless could not anticipate the full-scale capacity of anti-democratic subversion caused by the fusion between nationalism, militarism and corporate power⁽³⁶⁾.

Nationalism and instability

A further argument, perhaps less central to Martinelli's paper, but still deeply related to it, is how the national and the international are deeply and mutually related in our world, and how this is particularly the case for the USA. The consequence of an increase of US nationalism would not be just less human rights for Americans, but their impact could be devastating for the rest of the world.

The US recent experience with neo-conservatism has a few admirers amongst right-wingers in various countries. Assuming that in 2000-2008 neo-conservatism tried to merge conservative patriotism with the free market logic of neoliberal globalization, we are now in a position to judge where this has led America. The US was the dominant global power before 9-11, so dominant that the term 'superpower' was being supplanted and discarded by the more politically charged 'hyperpow-

⁽³⁵⁾ Chalmers JOHNSON, *Nemesis: the Last Days of the American Republic*, New York, Metropolitan Books, 2006.

⁽³⁶⁾ Charles WRIGHT MILLS, *The Power Elite*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000 (1st edition 1953).

er' (37). America's unprecedented global hegemony could be seen in a whole host of areas, from mass culture to economic policy and military adventures. For instance, the US was able, although there was some dissent, to create international consent over a host of controversial issues, like the war on Serbia, the fight on global terrorism (38), and the untrammelled global spread of the US model of *financialization* as the «dominant feature of neo-liberalism» (39) and «as a hegemonic regime of financial investors over entrepreneurs» (40).

After 9-11, most of this consent began to evaporate. First of all, the enormous amount of money spent to 'fight' terrorism benefited many private and publicly funded security firms, which undermined trust in government amongst many American citizens. Secondly, the 'war on terror' cover allowed China to slowly challenge US hegemony in a whole host of areas (see pp. 8-9 and 14 on this). Thirdly, the institution of the Guantánamo Bay detention camp, the extrajudicial rendition flights, the widespread use of torture and harsh interrogation techniques in violation of US law, including «torture by proxy», have led to a «degradation of the international legal order» (41).

To add insult to injury, these and other aspects of the 'war on terror' contributed to an unprecedented rise of anti-Americanism worldwide, even amongst previously highly pro-American sectors (42). For some scholars and commentators, the American century 'ended' with the invasion of Afghanistan (43).

(37) The political scientist Chalmers Johnson noted how in the process the US «becomes the greatest hyper-debtor of all times» (Chalmers JOHNSON, *Nemesis*).

(38) Brad K. BLITZ (ed.), *War and Change in the Balkans. Nationalism, Conflict and Cooperation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006; Richard JACKSON, *Constructing Enemies: 'Islamic Terrorism' in Political and Academic Discourse*, in «Government and Opposition», XLII, 2007, pp. 394-426; Richard JACKSON, Marie BREEN SMYTH and Jeroen GUNNING (eds.), *Critical Terrorism Studies: a New Research Agenda*, London, Routledge, 2009.

(39) Gerald A. EPSTEIN, *Financialization and the World Economy*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2005.

(40) Christoph DEUTSCHMANN, *Limits to Financialization*, in «European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie», LII, 2011, pp. 347-89.

(41) Bill BOWRING, *The Degradation of the International Legal Order? The Rehabilitation of Law and the Possibility of Politics*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2008.

(42) PEW RESEARCH CENTER, *Global Opinion: the Spread of anti-Americanism*, in *Trend 2005*, Washington (D.C.), 2005.

(43) Gabriel KOLKO, *World in Crisis: the End of the American Century*, London, Pluto

Furthermore, the self-destructive aspect of patriotism in a highly inter-dependent and inter-connected world means that whatever happens in the US is bound to reverberate elsewhere with deeper consequences. The old say ‘when the United States sneezes, the rest of the world catches a cold’ is still appropriate.

All these factors warrant that the American century can be followed by an ‘anti-American century’, rather than a ‘second American century’⁽⁴⁴⁾. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, global public opinion was still largely supportive of US policy and culture: in line with other papers, *Le Monde* heralded in its front page ‘We are all Americans’ (...“*Nous sommes tous Américains*”)⁽⁴⁵⁾. As international security industries expanded in tandem with nationalism and militarism, the US were unable to seize the opportunity and capitalize on the wave of solidarity precisely because its neo-conservative government was mired in self-defeating patriotism, alimanted by a sense of hurt pride and victimhood.

Samuel Huntington’s anti-multicultural pamphlet describes with unconcealed pleasure how «Since the Civil War, Americans have been a flag-oriented people. The *Stars and Stripes* has the status of a religious icon and is a more central symbol of national identity for Americans than their flags are for peoples of other nations»⁽⁴⁶⁾. However, the more Americanism and flag-waving expanded, the more anti-American sentiment grew throughout the world. The rapid rise of anti-Americanism at the popular (non-elite) level is testified by various opinion polls taken at various stages from the invasion of Afghanistan and the creation of Guantanamo, to the discovery of the Iraqi and Afghan torture camps⁽⁴⁷⁾. It is hard to contend that this anti-American sentiment was artificially fabricated or a result of a conspiracy of envy, as could have been argued

Press, 2009; David S. MASON, *The End of the American Century*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2009; Michael K. SMITH, *Portraits of Empire: Unmasking Imperial Illusions from ‘The American Century’ to ‘The War on Terror’*, Monroe, Common Courage Press, 2003; Nick TURSE (ed.), *The Case for Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, London, Verso, 2010.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Ivan KRASTEV and Alan L. MCPHERSON (eds.), *The anti-American Century*, Budapest, Central European University Press, 2007.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Jean-Marie COLOMBANI, *Tous Américains? Le monde après le 11 septembre 2001*, Paris, Fayard, 2002.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, *Who Are We?*, p. 3.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ PEW RESEARCH CENTER, *Global Opinion*.

during the Cold War. In the next section, I address the issue of American expansion in the cultural sphere and its intrusion into the myths of other countries through a forceful global policy of cultural consumption.

The cultural dimension: From Americanization to Americanism and back to anti-Americanism

Ten years after 9-11, the US have become increasingly perceived, incorrectly to my view, as a ‘declining’ power, so much that a host of shallow analyses have hurried to announce the advent of a ‘post-American’ world⁽⁴⁸⁾. Some truths can be discerned here. For instance, US political influence in Latin America during the Bush era has rapidly waned, with various Latin political leaders showing a novel determination to challenge US directives. The trend has been on display since at least October 2001, largely thanks to Venezuela’s President Hugo Chávez increasing assertiveness. More recently, a broad alliance to sustain Ecuador has taken shape throughout Latin America for its stance in defence of Julian Assange. In the meanwhile, Argentina’s new military liaisons with China have represented a gigantic setback for US influence in the southern cone and a direct threat to British sovereignty over the Falklands⁽⁴⁹⁾. Helped by a thriving economy, many Latin countries have begun to coalesce and resist US pressures in various fields, just when Europe is surrendering to US demands in other fields, like health, food and American biotech or genetically modified foods (GM).

A kind of ‘alarmism’ about waning US influence emerges like a run of the mill shibboleth in conservative thought and rhetoric, with a recurrent obsession about the fall of the Roman Empire⁽⁵⁰⁾. This is deeply

(48) Fareed ZAKARIA, *The Post-American World*, New York, W.W. Norton & Co., 2008.

(49) *China, Argentina pledge closer military cooperation*, Xinhua English.news.cn, July 3, 2012: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-07/03/c_131692962.htm; *Argentina signs deals with China’s military*, Reuters, July 6, 2012 / *UK warns Argentina over Falklands “aggression”*, Reuters, June 14, 2012, url: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/14/us-britain-argentina-falklands-idUSBRE85D1EF20120614> (all accessed: 11 September 2012).

(50) For a constructive critique of this Roman obsession, see Cullen MURPHY, *Are We*

entrenched within the neo-conservative ranks, where ‘declinist’ talks have become common⁽⁵¹⁾. However, many ‘liberals’ also share this vision. Writing on ‘the last days of the American republic’, Chalmers Johnson describes the decline of republican Rome as one of the most instructive “imperial pathologies” apt to be compared with the US⁽⁵²⁾. Moreover, comparative research on the collapse of ancient civilizations has become all the rage, beginning with Jared Diamond’s best-seller, *Collapse*, with its broad theorizing about the fall of economic-ecological systems and collapse as a consequence of failure of perception⁽⁵³⁾. Can such an unprecedented superpower decline as quickly as the Aztec or Inca Empires collapsed even under no external military pressures, let alone being invaded by a foreign army or by aliens? Although the term ‘collapse’ may seem exaggerated if referred to contemporary US, it may well be an adequate metaphor to portray the precipitous fall of the entire socio-economic system based on financial capitalism. On the other hand, the term ‘decline’ is more specifically appropriate to describe the US’ waning experience during the Bush era.

In the next section, I argue that one reason for this apparent decline has been the US elites’ and public’s lack of touch with international developments as these are filtered through the distorted lenses of exceptionalist nationalism, religion and patriotism.

Is US religious nationalism more dangerous than EU secular nationalism?

The religious component of America’s founding myths of ‘divine election’ is undeniable and transcends class, ethnicity and even denominational affiliation. As recognized by Robert Bellah, religion in America

Rome? The Fall of an Empire and the Fate of America, Boston-London, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2007. On the highly abused figure of Julius Caesar as a resource of power, commercial profit and entertainment, particularly in periods of political crisis, see Maria WYKE, *Caesar in the U.S.A.*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012.

(51) William Henry CHAFE, *The Rise and Fall of the American Century: the United States from 1890 to 2009*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

(52) Chalmers JOHNSON, *Nemesis*.

(53) Jared M. DIAMOND, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, New York, Viking, 2005.

can have strong civic virtues and be mobilized in the defence of civil rights: thus, in his “*I Have a Dream*” speech, Martin Luther King used the language of the Bible and republican virtue⁽⁵⁴⁾. But Bellah himself recognized that religion can become ‘uncivil’ as when mobilized against other religions in inter-faith animosities, typically exemplified by the sustained persecution of Catholics⁽⁵⁵⁾. Moreover, the strong individualist vision associated with religion in Bellah’s writings has been criticized from various standpoints. For instance, the ‘myth of American individualism’ can be related to the original Wasp ethnic and religious makeup and political philosophy of America’s founding fathers. In their discourses over the defense of the American public good, localism and communalism, ‘spiritual liberty’ was championed as the quintessential form of liberty. However, «what early Americans meant when they used such basic political concepts as the public good, liberty, and slavery» was still largely understood in individualistic terms of personal choice, despite their collective dimension⁽⁵⁶⁾. These, I argue, are incompatible with the contemporary form of nationalism proposed by neo-conservative and even democrats: According to several authors, the emphasis on individualism has long been replaced by an opposite emphasis on communalism. A society of secluded communities has replaced the celebrated freedom of the individual, while trust has been traded with fear: the ‘insecure American’ has self-retreated into gated neighborhoods, terrified about Spanish-speakers and terrorists, suspicious of any foreign accent and resentful of multiculturalism⁽⁵⁷⁾. Long ago, historians had identified the

(54) Robert N. BELLAH *et al.*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1985.

(55) Robert N. BELLAH and Frederick E. GREENSPAHN (eds.), *Uncivil Religion: Interreligious Hostility in America*, New York, Crossroad, 1987. On Protestant anti-Catholicism, see the essay by Barbara Welter, *From Maria Monk to Paul Blanshard: a Century of Protestant anti-Catholicism*, in Robert N. BELLAH and Frederick E. GREENSPAHN (eds.), *Uncivil Religion*. With the formation of the KKK (Ku Klux Klan) and similar movements, Americanism was being redefined as White Supremacy and America as a homogeneous nation through anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism (Thomas R. PEGRAM, *One Hundred Percent American: the Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2011, pp. 47-88). Partly from this may derive the ongoing ideological stress on uniformity and mono-thought which was however more characteristic of pre-war Europe than pre-war America.

(56) Barry Alan SHAIN, *The Myth of American Individualism: the Protestant Origins of American Political Thought*, Princeton (N.J.), Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 396.

(57) Setha M. LOW, *A Nation of Gated Communities*, and Janine R. WEDEL, *Compoun-*

historical roots of this Puritan inclination as the «paranoid style in American politics»⁽⁵⁸⁾ – the same trend irreverently described in Michael Moore’s satirical *‘A Brief History of the USA’*. Although the ideological precedent constituted by McCarthyism is paradigmatic⁽⁵⁹⁾, all these negative dimensions have exponentially increased since the ‘war on terror’ began and are given an acceptable face in Huntington’s latest work⁽⁶⁰⁾.

The US are envisioned as a divinely elected, ‘chosen people’⁽⁶¹⁾ with a Manifest Destiny to lead the world by example or by force⁽⁶²⁾. Millions of Americans tacitly or openly advocate the political use of biblical values. Mainstream evangelical leaders’ routinely view the US as the ‘kingdom of God’ and as a Christian chosen nation⁽⁶³⁾, whose salvational ideology can have potentially harmful implications in all areas of life, culture, and politics. Internationally, this implies dividing the world between the ‘chosen’ and the ‘unchosen’ (broadly, the rest of the world)⁽⁶⁴⁾. Such divinely ordained uniqueness may only occasionally find solace in irrational alliances with other ‘chosen peoples’⁽⁶⁵⁾. For one author, the ‘special relationship’ between the US and Israel is not determined by strategic or economic interests, but simply by a common mystical perception or theological belief that both peoples have been

ding Insecurity: What the Neocon Core Reveals about America Today, both in Hugh GUSTERSON and Catherine L. BESTEMAN (eds.), *The Insecure American*; Anatol LIEVEN, *America Right or Wrong*.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ Richard HOFSTADTER, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics, and Other Essays*, New York, Knopf, 1965.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Robert S. ROBINS and Jerrold M. POST, *Political Paranoia. The Psychopolitics of Hatred*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, *Who Are We?*.

⁽⁶¹⁾ Anthony D. SMITH, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁽⁶²⁾ John Christopher BARRY, *Empire as a Gated Community*.

⁽⁶³⁾ Richard T. HUGHES, *Christian America and the Kingdom of God*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2009.

⁽⁶⁴⁾ Tom NAIRN, *Globalization and the Unchosen*, in Paul JAMES and Tom NAIRN (eds.), *Globalization and Violence*, vol. I: *Globalizing Empires: Old and New*, London, Sage, 2006; Tom NAIRN and Paul JAMES, *Global Matrix: Nationalism, Globalism, and State-Terrorism*, London, Pluto Press, 2005, ch. 3.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ Daniel LAZARE, *The Chosen: Ideological Roots of the US-Israeli Special Relationship*, in Tony KUSHNER and Alisa SOLOMON (eds.), *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, New York, Grove Press, 2003.

‘chosen by God’ and should therefore enjoy a leading position in the world, which does not admit challenges⁽⁶⁶⁾. Moreover, the overwhelming influence of powerful nationalist diasporas united through civilizational alliances promotes a sort of ‘irresponsible radicalization’ squarely at odd with the interests of most American citizens⁽⁶⁷⁾.

Conclusions: Universalism vs. particularism, the challenges ahead

I have argued that the defense of US nationalism is unsustainable from various possible perspectives, particularly in view of its exceptionalist nature. Nationalism *per se* is a solipsistic and particularistic ideology, antithetical to, and nearly incompatible with, universalism. In political terms, the consequent lack of global leadership may provide a vacuum in which populists, fundamentalists, jihadists, and ultranationalists can further thrive.

Can American identity be redefined as exempt from the usual war-mongering to which the world has been accustomed? According to a recent fascinating study, in the 18th and 19th centuries ‘missing home’ was praised as a form of deep sensitiveness and virtuosity; it was with the advent of mass industrial society that homesickness began to be relegated to the dustbin of emotions, as a sign of weakness and as an antithesis to masculinity⁽⁶⁸⁾. But such an introspective attitude share little with the self-boasting facet of contemporary patriotic pride, so centered on achievement and actual forgetting, rather than thoughtful remembrance and reminiscence.

All states in the world are susceptible of nationalism. Typically, nationalism has expanded through successive waves in a ‘contagion’ mode: starting from the French revolution trough the French revolu-

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Todd GITLIN, *The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel, and the Ordeals of Divine Election*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2010.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Daniele CONVERSI, *Irresponsible Radicalisation: Diasporas, Globalisation and Long-Distance Nationalism in the Digital Age*, in «Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies», XXXVIII, 2012, pp. 1357-79.

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Susan J. MATT, *Homesickness: an American History*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 266. In particular, Social Darwinists proclaimed that nostalgia should only be expected from blacks, slaves, Jews, Italians and savages, while the dominant, ‘civilized’ white race should be exempt from it (see *ivi*, pp. 122-23 and 126-29). This ‘anti-nostalgia’ recalls coeval aspects of Italian futurism and nationalism.

tionary wars and the Napoleonic invasions, nationalism has proliferated like wildfire in places in which it was not even conceivable a generation before⁽⁶⁹⁾. As an example, before the Napoleonic invasion, most German intellectuals were cosmopolitan and Francophiles, but, after the defeat at Jena-Auerstedt in 1806, and nearly overnight, most turned into anti-French militant nationalists (a few lessons to be earned for American militarism and unilateralism here?)⁽⁷⁰⁾. Therefore nationalism can as easily spread from the US to the rest of the world, more rapidly than it did in the long century that preluded to WW1.

Moreover, an expanding US nationalism is destined to contaminate other countries, including Russia and China, feeding indirectly into European nationalisms. It also may rush the world into a truly post-American era, clearly not in the way some may hope it to be: the coming era is characterized by a series of alarming, drastic, interlocked challenges, with climate change as the common denominator, for which all forms of nationalism are ill-suited, as they can obliterate the need for common solutions. The economic and financial crisis may be only a trivial irritant in comparison to *more vital* issues that require the concerted action and effort of all of the world's governments. The impending environmental catastrophe, our main legacy to future generations, needs impeccable coordination and no concessions to unilateralism. Only via universalism and multilateralism can such vital challenges be tackled. I remain convinced that US nationalism is incompatible with all of these challenges – and if I am right, it can devastate America, Europe, the world and their mutual relationships.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Daniele CONVERSI, *Modernism and Nationalism*; ID., *Nación, estado y cultura. Para una historia política y social de la homogeneización cultural (1789-1945)*, in «Historia Contemporánea», XLV, 2012, pp. 429-73.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ While writing his 'Phenomenology of Spirit' at the University of Jena during those years, Hegel significantly defined the battle of Jena as marking «the end of the history».

