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## THE ELUSIVE EUROPEAN IDENTITY: REFLECTIONS ON THE STRUCTURE OF THIS SUPRANATIONAL IDENTITY – AND THE LACK OF SALIENCE<sup>1</sup>

The police were called to investigate the flying of an allegedly Arabic flag at a house in Holywood, Northern Ireland.<sup>2</sup> As it turned out, the flag flying was actually the European flag, which had been hoisted to celebrate the European win of the Ryder Cup and local-born golfer Rory McIlroy. While this incident reflects a lack of knowledge (the police inspectors did not recognize the flag either), academic research on European Identity<sup>3</sup> has also found weak identification with this supranational entity in several European regions. As Grundy and Jamieson noted, “European identity is not a settled matter, however, and social scientists seem divided over its significance in everyday lives and its likely consequence for social cohesion”.<sup>4</sup> While the protagonists in the incident reported above did not recognize the European flag, the symbolic power of flags is recognized in Northern Ireland (see for example Belfast City Hall flag protests in 2012/2013<sup>5</sup>) and police is called on suspicion of flying of an “illicit” flag. For

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<sup>1</sup> Characters (inc. spaces), Main Text and References: 37818. This research is partially supported by a grant from the Fonds National de la Recherche, Luxembourg (C12/SC/4009630 – IRMA – Intergenerational Relations in the Light of Migration and Ageing).

<sup>2</sup> *Police Called as Rory McIlroy Flag Raises Holywood Hackles*, BBC News, Northern Ireland, September 29, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-northern-ireland-29413245> [December 15, 2014].

<sup>3</sup> L. Jamieson, *Orientations of Young Men and Women to Citizenship and European Identity* (Final Report), 2005, [http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/youth/final\\_report.pdf](http://www.sociology.ed.ac.uk/youth/final_report.pdf) [Mai 1, 2014]; S. Grundy, L. Jamieson, *Are We All Europeans Now? Local, National and Supranational Identities of Young Adults*, [in:] *British Sociological Association Annual Conference, Belonging and Isolation*, York, April 11-13, 2003; K. Hamer and J. Gutowski, *Social Identification and Pro-Social Activity in Poland*, [in:] *On Behalf of Others. The Psychology of Care in a Global World*, eds. S. Scuzzarello, C. Kinnvall, K. Renwick Monroe, New York 2009, pp. 163-183.

<sup>4</sup> S. Grundy and L. Jamieson, *European Identities. From Absent-Minded Citizens to Passionate Europeans*, “Sociology”, no. 41(4), 2007, p. 664.

<sup>5</sup> *Northern Ireland's Union Flag Row 'Could Undermine Ceasefires'*, “The Guardian”, December 6, 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2012/dec/06/northern-ireland-union-flag-row-ceasefires> [March 1, 2016].

a more detailed discussion on the context of the political conflict situation in Northern Ireland and its impact on moral reasoning see Ferguson.<sup>6</sup>

The experiential context is the focus of the empirical studies on European identity reported below. Within an EU – funded research project on *Orientations of young men and women to citizenship and European identity*, paired sites with contrasting cultural and socio-political histories in terms of European affiliations and support for the European Union were compared in terms of identification with locality, region, nation and Europe.<sup>7</sup> Overall, low identifications with Europe were found, although differences in terms of identification patterns exist within the geographic samples, reflecting their socio-political context. While low exposure to Europe typically coincides with low European identity, high exposure does not necessarily mean high European identity. In a follow up interview study in Manchester and Edinburgh with representative and target samples, that is those with vested interest in Europe, Grundy and Jamieson found again that those participants with direct experience of Europe expressed higher identification with Europe.<sup>8</sup> In particular, those participants with salient childhood memories (i.e. school exchange programmes, the experience of actually using a second language abroad) showed the highest level of identification with the supranational category. Building on this research, we wanted to explore identification with Europe among a group of adolescents who have ample experience of and exposure to Europe.

### Theories of Self and Identity

Eminent psychologist, William James, warned over a century ago that selfhood (including identity) is “the most puzzling puzzle with which psychology has to deal” (1890).<sup>9</sup> Theories of self and identity development will be presented next, which focus on how we select and process information in our environment.

### Cognitive-experiential theory

Seymour Epstein combines personality and the self in his *Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory of Personality* (CEST).<sup>10</sup> Epstein assumes that people process information

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<sup>6</sup> N. Ferguson, *Political Conflict and Moral Reasoning in Northern Ireland*, [in:] *On Behalf of Others. The Psychology of Care in a Global World*, eds. S. Scuzzarello, C. Kinnvall, K. Renwick Monroe, New York 2009, pp. 233-254.

<sup>7</sup> L. Jamieson, *Orientations*.

<sup>8</sup> S. Grundy, L. Jamieson, *European*.

<sup>9</sup> T. J. Owens, *Self and Identity*, [in:] *Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. J. Delamater, New York 2003, p. 230.

<sup>10</sup> S. Epstein, *Entwurf einer Integrativen Persönlichkeitstheorie*, [in:] *Selbstkonzept-Forschung: Probleme, Befunde, Perspektiven*, eds. S. H. Filipp, Stuttgart 1979, pp. 15-45; S. Epstein, *Integration of the Cognitive and the Psychodynamic Unconscious*, “The American Psychologist”, no. 49(8), 1994, pp. 709-724; idem, *Cognitive-Experiential Self Theory of Personality*, “Handbook of Psychology”, 2003.

by two independent, interactive conceptual systems, a pre-conscious “experiential” system and a conscious “rational” system. The experiential system is an adaptive, emotionally driven associative learning system. The rational system is a logical, inferential system that operates with the aid of language. CEST assumes that everybody automatically constructs an implicit theory of reality, which consists of a hierarchical organization of schemas. Towards the apex of the conceptual structure are highly general, abstract schemas, which are normally highly stable and not easily invalidated (higher order postulates). At the opposite end of the hierarchy are narrow, situation-specific schemas, which are readily susceptible to change. Their changes have little effect on the stability of the personality structure at the core. The hierarchic structure of the implicit theory allows it to be stable at the centre and flexible at the periphery. Schemas derived from childhood experiences are emphasized in CEST, because later experiences are assimilated by earlier schemas. With increasing maturity from childhood to adulthood, the balance of the influence between the two processing systems shifts in the direction of increased rational dominance.

### Self-Schemata

The influence of cognitive structures on the selection and organization of self-relevant information is also noted by Markus.<sup>11</sup> She states that people do not process information at random, but develop what she has termed self-schemata. These self-schemata are derived from experience and “Once established, these schemata function as selective mechanisms which determine whether information is attended to, how it is structured and how much importance is attached to it”.<sup>12</sup> She explained that self-schemata are derived from specific experiences, as well as general representations derived from repeated categorizations and the subsequent evaluation by the individual and others reacting to it. Information about the self, organised in self-schemata, is more easily accessed by the individual, and it is more salient to the individual. Markus further noted that the influence of cognitive schemata is most noticeable when processing information about ourselves.

### Relationship between the self and collective identities

Self-theories are construed in interaction with the environment. The importance of group membership is stressed in Tajfel and Turner’s Social Identity Theory (SIT).<sup>13</sup> Social identity is understood as that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from the knowledge of being a social group member together with the value and emo-

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<sup>11</sup> H. Markus, *Self-Schemata and Processing Information about the Self*, “Journal of Personality and Social Psychology”, no. 35(2), 1977, pp. 63-78.

<sup>12</sup> Ibidem, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> H. Tajfel and J. C. Turner, *An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict*, “The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations”, no. 33, 1979, p. 47.

tional significance attached to that membership. Ashmore et al. introduce the term collective identity rather than social identity, as they assert that all aspects of self are socially influenced.<sup>14</sup> The authors understand collective identity to be first and foremost about categorical membership, which itself can be ascribed or achieved. Importantly, collective identity is defined in terms of a subjective claim or acceptance by the person whose identity is at stake. The authors stress the need for a multi-dimensional analysis and note various elements of collective identity including, evaluation, that is the positive or negative attitude a person has to the category in question, the degree of importance to the individual's overall self-concept, the emotional attachment felt with the group, behavioural involvement and more.

Brewer and Gardner examined to what extent individuals define themselves in terms of relationships with others and to social groups.<sup>15</sup> They argue that individual, relational and collective levels of self-definition represent distinct forms of self-representation with different origins, sources of self-worth and social motivations. Sedikides and Brewer assert that persons seek to achieve self-definition and self-interpretation in terms of unique traits, dyadic relationships and group membership.<sup>16</sup> The individual self is achieved by differentiating from others on the basis of interpersonal comparison processes. The core social motive is to establish uniqueness, and to protect or enhance the person psychologically. In contrast, the relational self is achieved by assimilating with significant others, and it relies on the process of reflected appraisal. The underlying core motive is the protection or enhancement of the significant other. The collective self is achieved by inclusion in large social groups and contrasting the group to which one belongs (in-group) with relevant out-groups. It is based on impersonal bonds to others derived from common (and often symbolic) identification with a group. These bonds do not require close personal relationships among group members. For the collective self the core motive is the protection or enhancement of the in-group. Disagreement exists among social scientists, concerning the primacy of the selves, but there is an agreement concerning the social nature of the selves, and the fact that the three self-representations coexist within the same individual. The context will also determine which of the selves is sampled. The influence of the cultural context on the sampling of experiences that constitutes the self is explained by Triandis.<sup>17</sup> Triandis also stresses that the self is an active agent, promoting differential sampling, processing and evaluating information from the environment.

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<sup>14</sup> R. D. Ashmore, K. Deaux and T. McLaughlin-Volpe, *An Organizing Framework for Collective Identity: Articulation and Significance of Multidimensionality*, "Psychological Bulletin", no. 130(1), 2004, pp. 80-114.

<sup>15</sup> M. B. Brewer and W. Gardner, *Who is this "We"? Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations*, "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology", no. 71(1), 1996, p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, eds. C. Sedikides, M. B. Brewer, Philadelphia 2001.

<sup>17</sup> H. C. Triandis, *The Self and Social Behavior in Differing Cultural Contexts*, "Psychological Review", no. 96(3), 1989, pp. 506-520.

One of the reasons for the continued interest in the concept of supranational identities is the question whether this collective medium of identification would provide a sense of integration with other social groups. As Grundy and Jamieson explain „Some emphasize European identity as a stepping stone in progress from divisive nationalism to an inclusive global citizenship”.<sup>18</sup> One of the starting points for the research on an even wider collective entity, namely humanity as an in-group (Identification with all Humanity, IWAH), was the question whether humans can truly transcend ethnocentrism and value all humanity.<sup>19</sup> As McFarland et al. assert, IWAH is more than the absence of ethnocentrism and IWAH has been shown to predict knowledge of global humanitarian concerns, willingness to learn about humanitarian issues and willingness to contribute to international humanitarian relief.

### Current research

The context for the current research is provided by Luxembourg, a small country in the heart of Europe, sharing borders with Belgium, France and Germany. The country is officially trilingual, and the percentage of foreigners reaches 44% – the majority of which comes from other European countries.<sup>20</sup> In the aftermath of WWII, Luxembourg was one of the founding members of the European Union and became host to several European Union Institutions. This in turn has led to the establishment of the very first European School in Luxembourg in 1953. The aim of the European School system is stated as follows:

„Educated side by side, untroubled from infancy by divisive prejudices, acquainted with all that is great and good in the different cultures, it will be borne in upon them as they mature that they belong together. Without ceasing to look to their own lands with love and pride, they will become in mind Europeans, schooled and ready to complete and consolidate the work of their fathers before them, to bring into being a united and thriving Europe”.<sup>21</sup>

Within multilingual, multicultural Luxembourg it is impossible to avoid exposure to other European nationals, and the European school system represents another European microcosm within the context of Luxembourg. “European” is an explicit part of the name and logo of the school, and the pupils attempt to attain the *European Baccalaureate*. At primary level, designated weekly “European hour” classes are held. The

<sup>18</sup> S. Grundy, L. Jamieson, *European*, p. 664.

<sup>19</sup> S. McFarland, M. Webb, D. Brown, *All Humanity Is My Ingroup. A Measure and Studies of „Identification with All Humanity”*, ”Journal of Personality and Social Psychology”, no. 103, 2012, pp. 830-853.

<sup>20</sup> *Luxembourg in Figures. Luxembourg: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques*, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> *Schola Europaea (n.d.) School homepage*, <http://www.eursc.eu/index.php?id=132> [April 29, 2013].

school is divided into different language sections, representing the member states of the European Union. Basic instruction is given in the official languages of the EU. The study of a first foreign language (English, French or German), known as L2, is compulsory throughout the school, from the first primary class onwards. All students are required to learn a 3<sup>rd</sup> language at Secondary level and a 4<sup>th</sup> language is optional. As a result, language competence is high. These language classes are composed of students from different language sections. Students from different, albeit mainly European, countries attend the school, and the majority of the parents will be working for one of the European institutions. In summary, students attending the European school will have experienced direct exposure to Europe – they are surrounded by classmates attending different language sections, and they will speak at least 3 languages on average. For most students, Luxembourg will not be their passport country and they will have travelled around Europe. The European school can therefore be described as an ideal „natural laboratory” to test, whether high experiential exposure to Europe is associated with the salience of European in the spontaneous self-concept (Study 1). In Study 2), the students are required to self-label or categorize, with nationality given as an open categorical frame. Both studies address adolescents, as this period is special due to the fact that young people change and adapt their self-definition through cognitive abilities acquired for self-reflection.<sup>22</sup> In the following paragraphs, each of the studies including the findings will be presented separately, but the results will be discussed jointly.

### **Study 1 – European identity elicited in the spontaneous self-concept?**

The difficulties of adequately capturing an individual’s national or ethnic identity in quantitative surveys are specified by Billiet.<sup>23</sup> As he points out, it is a question of degree of identification and (simultaneous) multiple group membership. This is precisely why we opted for a non-directive qualitative measure, and did not present our student sample with pre-defined categories.

#### *Method*

*Participants and procedure.* A student sample of 106 pupils could be recruited, but two subjects had to be excluded, as the questionnaire was not completed properly. The students were recruited from the German (n = 25), French (n = 14), English (n = 45) Finnish (n = 10) and Danish (n = 10) language sections. The average age was  $M = 13.64$  ( $SD = 1.72$ ), and 52 participants were female, 50 male and 2 did not indicate gender. The project outline was presented to the school’s headmaster, and permission

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<sup>22</sup> M. Pinquart and R. K. Silbereisen, *Das Selbst im Jugendalter*, [in:] *Psychologie des Selbst*, eds. W. Greve, Weinheim 2000, pp. 75-95.

<sup>23</sup> J. Billiet, *Questions about national, subnational and ethnic identity. European Social Survey: Core Questionnaire Development*, 2002, [http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&gid=129&Itemid=80](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=129&Itemid=80) [April 22, 2013].

to conduct the study was obtained. Parent consent forms in the English, French and German were distributed well ahead of the study. No parent refused participation of their child. The test material was made available in English, French and German, and the students had the choice between any of the three. For the Danish and Finnish language sections, material was only available in the students' second language, but as we addressed students at secondary level in years 3 and 4, an excellent command in the second language could be expected. In fact, from year 3 onwards, the humanities are taught in the pupils' second language. The students completed the questionnaires in class, supervised by their principal class teacher.

### *Materials*

*Spontaneous self-concept.* The spontaneous self-concept was measured using an adapted version of the non-directive Twenty Statement Test (TST).<sup>24</sup> As the simple instruction "Who am I" proved too abstract in a pilot test among target students, some context was provided in the form of the following statement: "Who am I? Just imagine you have to describe yourself to someone. Could you please list five things which come to your mind?" The students were reminded not to give their name and were presented with a sheet listing 5 bullet points with empty spaces behind for completion. On a second page, the students were instructed to provide their negated self-concept, again listing five points that come spontaneously to mind, with a kind reminder to be serious.

*Demographic variables.* This measure was supplemented by a short demographic questionnaire, asking about the place of birth of the student and his/her parents, nationalities and languages spoken. Importantly, the demographic questionnaire was completed *after* the completion of the spontaneous self-concept.

### *Results*

Even though the children were recruited from 5 different language sections, they represented 20 different nationalities. However, not a single student mentioned "European" in their spontaneous self-concept. Some students, especially those belonging to a minority, mentioned their nationality, but the supranational category was not elicited. One can speculate, that this category may have been elicited in a longer list of self-descriptive statements – but as it stands, European was not triggered within the top 5 spontaneous self-descriptions.

Study 1) was conducted in 2012, when only one European School of Luxembourg existed. Since then, the school has been split into two schools and Study 2) was conducted at the European School II in 2013.

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<sup>24</sup> M. H. Kuhn, T. S. McPartland, *An Empirical Investigation of Self-Attitudes*, "American Sociological Review", no. 19(1), 1954, pp. 68-76.

## Study 2 – Self-labeling and (supra) national categories

In line with Ashmore et al.<sup>25</sup> the question in Study 2) was how participants would self-categorize within the general framework of nationality.

### *Method*

*Participants and procedure.* 204 students attending the European School II participated in Study 2). The students were recruited from six different language sections German (n = 27), French (n = 41), English (n = 48), Italian (n = 39), Danish (n = 30) and Greek (n = 18) (one student did not indicate the language section). The average age was  $M = 15.16$  ( $SD = 0.84$ ), and 110 students were male, 91 female, and 3 did not indicate their gender. The project outline was presented to the school's headmaster and permission to conduct the study was obtained. As in the previous study, parent consent forms in three languages were distributed, and one parent refused participation of their child. Test material was also made available in three languages, and the students had the choice between any of the three. As before, for some language sections (Danish, Greek and Italian) the questionnaire was only available in the students' second language, but an excellent command of the second language could be expected. The European school management organized and provided a timetable for the administration of the surveys during second language lessons. The surveys were administered in the students' classrooms by a student enrolled in the trilingual Bachelor en Psychologie (BAP) at the University of Luxembourg. The psychology student had developed a script in the three languages to ensure consistency in explaining the project in general and the procedure in filling in the questionnaire in particular. She was also able to answer any questions the students may have. On completion of the project, the main findings were presented to the students and teachers/ school administration.

### *Materials*

*Self-labeling measure.* In line with Ashmore et al. (2004) and Benet-Martínez' (2012), the definition of biculturalism as “those who self-label as bicultural”, a self-definition measure in the form of the following question was presented: “When people ask you ‘What is your nationality?’ How do you answer the question?”<sup>26</sup>

*Demographic variables.* An extensive demographic section covered language competence and use, the length of the stay in Luxembourg, place of birth of the student and his/her parents, nationality of the student and his/her parents, as well as questions relating to behavioral aspects, such as spending time with people from different language sections within the school and with people outside the school. The students also had the opportunity to add comments or observations in an open comments field.

<sup>25</sup> R. D. Ashmore, K. Deaux, T. McLaughlin-Volpe, *An Organizing*, pp. 80-114.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem; V. Benet-Martínez, *Multiculturalism: Cultural, Social, and Personality Processes*, [in:] *Handbook of Personality and Social Psychology*, eds. K. Deaux, M. Snyder, Oxford 2012, pp. 623-648.



### Results

The students, as well as their parents, represented a much wider range of nationalities than the language sections would suggest. Forty-four different countries of birth were given for mothers and 32 for fathers. Just under half of the students ( $n = 97$ ) were born in Luxembourg. In terms of numbers of nationalities, 51% of the students listed one, 38% listed two and 10% listed three and 2% even four or more nationalities. Just under half of the students ( $n = 98$ ) have parents of different nationalities. Only one student was born in Luxembourg with both parents being born in Luxembourg as well. All students speak a minimum of three languages – the mode was four.

All students answered the self-definition question. Just over half of the students ( $n = 105$ ) answered in a “mono-cultural” way, stating a single nationality, for example “I am Greek” or “I am Czech.” “Pluricultural” answers were given by 99 students. Of these, the majority ( $n = 70$ ) provided more than one nationality by *adding* nationalities (i.e. English and Danish), giving *percentages* i.e. 2/4 Luxembourger, 1/4 German, 1/4 Italian or Française 50%, Italienne 50%) or *hyphenated* identities (Portuguese-Korean; Franconéerlandaise). A smaller group ( $n = 19$ ) stated their country of origin, but also made a reference to their current country of residence (i.e. “From Malta, but I live in Luxembourg”) and an even smaller group ( $n = 8$ ) made references to their origin (i.e. Welsh, descendant from Scotland). Only two students defined themselves in terms of a supranational identity – one stating “European”, and the other student writing “An Afro-European who feels American”. Thus, only one European school student described herself as “European” in the self-labeling measure.

Within this context it is interesting to note that children of mixed parentage are more likely to self-label in a pluricultural way. The  $\chi^2$  test (with Yates Continuity Correction) examining this relationship is highly significant  $\chi^2(1, 203) = 40.71, p < .001, phi = .46$ . The effect size is just short of a large effect using Cohen’s criteria.<sup>27</sup> The students expressing their nationality in the form of a “but” statement are coming the closest to acknowledging that culture contact exposure can lead to a dual nationality. For the majority of students, the dual nationality is acquired by being born to mixed national parents.

### Discussion

Even within this explicitly European school context, the salience of the supranational category “European” is very low. “European” was not elicited in the open spontaneous self-concept, and was only used by one student as a self-labeling category. Possible reasons for this finding will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The European School’s credo “Without ceasing to look to their own lands with love and pride, they will become in mind Europeans” was quoted above. The wording of this credo is interesting – as the founding fathers postulate that the students should not cease to look at their own lands with *love and pride* – referring to affection, but they

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<sup>27</sup> J. W. Cohen, *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences*, Hillsdale 1988.

should become *in mind* European – a cognitive reference. Social identity theory differentiates three components, namely cognitive, affective and evaluative structures of identification. Different domains may be evoked when evaluating group membership regarding nationality and supranational entities. The home country is couched in terms which evoke affective and evaluative connotations, and emotions are important in inferring postulates, as was noted above. On the other hand, one should become “in mind” European – a cognitive aspect. An attribute mainly anchored in the cognitive sphere may not be triggered in the spontaneous self-concept. As Grundy and Jamieson observed, those young adults who identified more strongly with Europe had salient childhood experiences which made Europe meaningful to them.<sup>28</sup> In line with Epstein,<sup>29</sup> these childhood experiences will be processed in an experiential way and will be more lasting. If Europe has become a salient category, experiences relating to Europe are more readily sampled.<sup>30</sup> For the European school students, it could also be argued that speaking different languages and meeting students from different European countries is just a part of their daily routine, and in that sense it may not become a salient experience. However, within the diverse European context, national identification is salient, and within the English section, most students were quite specific regarding their country of origin – England, Scotland, Wales and N.-Ireland were mentioned – very few students said British, and no student mentioned “UK”. This matches Condor’s finding that self-identification “UK” was never used.<sup>31</sup> It could be argued that UK is also a supranational category, to which citizens belong *in mind*, but this political entity lacks emotive attachment.

Nationality construal can be based on a primordial understanding (i.e. ancestry) or a socially constructed understanding.<sup>32</sup> As Helmchen explains, the criteria for creating a nation are fairly loose – people need to have “a lot” in common, such as language, symbols, traditions and experiences, and there has to be a will to form a nation.<sup>33</sup> Collective experiences reinforce the process of nation building through common narratives.<sup>34</sup> In terms of the creation of a supranational entity such as Europe, there is the (political) will to form a union, and common symbols, such as the financial currency, flag or hymn have been adopted. But in parallel, diversity within the union is also strongly emphasized, underlined also by the principle of subsidiarity. In that sense,

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<sup>28</sup> S. Grundy, L. Jamieson, *European*.

<sup>29</sup> S. Epstein, *Cognitive Experiential*.

<sup>30</sup> H. Markus, *Self-Schemata*, pp. 63-78.

<sup>31</sup> S. Condor, *Unimagined Community? Changing European Identities*, Oxford 1996; idem, *Pride and Prejudice: Identity Management in English People's Talk about this Country*, “Discourse and Society”, no. 11(2), pp. 175-205.

<sup>32</sup> P. Weinreich, *Identity Structure Analysis*, [in:] *Analysing Identity: Cross-Cultural, Societal and Clinical Contexts*, eds. P. Weinreich, P. W. Saunderson, Hove 2003, pp. 7-76.

<sup>33</sup> A. Helmchen, *Die Entstehung der Nationen im Europa der Frühen Neuzeit: ein integrierender Ansatz aus humanistischer Sicht*, Bern 2005.

<sup>34</sup> P. Péporté, *Constructing the Middle Ages: Historiography, Collective Memory and Nation-building in Luxembourg*, Leiden 2011.

European is a hybrid category and does not offer the “perceived distinctiveness, and possibility to distinguish oneself or a group from others” which national identity offers.<sup>35</sup> We may become European when confronted with Americans,<sup>36</sup> but nationality may better serve the core human motive of self-enhancement.<sup>37</sup> We notice in our self-concept what makes us different from others in our social environment.<sup>38</sup> Schmidt-Denter (2011) observed that, at least within the European context, individuals are becoming increasingly similar in terms of self-descriptions.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, in terms of personal identities, people are becoming more homogeneous, and national identification offers an opportunity for differentiation satisfying the need for uniqueness. As he further noted, patriotism, the expression of an emotional attachment to a country, has a stabilizing effect for an individual. Not acceptable is nationalism, which implies the devaluation of others.

Increasingly complex societies pose a challenge to human identity development. Within multicultural societies, the boundaries between in- and out-groups become increasingly blurred, and categorization processes are becoming more difficult. Yet, belongingness shapes cognition, and people classify in terms of social relationships.<sup>40</sup> Information about in- and out-group members is cognitively processed differently, with information about in-group members being processed in more complex ways (attribute-based) and out-group information more simplistically (category-based). In the context of proliferation of groups within complex societies, it was also noted, that if complexity reaches a certain degree, a move towards simplification as a counter-reaction emerges. Alibhai-Brown observed that the reaction to this bewildering opening up of our lives has been a greater (and more idealized) identification with old histories and smaller, neater identities.<sup>41</sup> Thus, at a time of proliferation of choice of in-groups, a counter-reaction may be observed in the form of (over-) simplification.

The identity theories presented above were selected, as they take the experiential context explicitly into consideration. Ferguson demonstrated the way in which the years of political conflict have contributed to a retarded moral reasoning in Northern

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<sup>35</sup> W. Arts and L. Halman, *National Identity in Europe Today: What the People Feel and Think*, „International Journal of Sociology”, no. 35(4), 2006, p. 73.

<sup>36</sup> S. Grundy and L. Jamieson, *European*.

<sup>37</sup> S. T. Fiske, *Social Beings: Core Motives in Social Psychology*, Hoboken 2010.

<sup>38</sup> W. J. McGuire, C. W. McGuire, P. Child and T. Fujioka, *Saliency of Ethnicity in the Spontaneous Self-Concept as a Function of One’s Ethnic Distinctiveness in the Social Environment*, „Journal of Personality and Social Psychology”, no. 36(5), 1978, pp. 511-520.

<sup>39</sup> U. Schmidt-Denter, *Die Deutschen und ihre Migranten: Ergebnisse der europäischen Identitätsstudie*, Weinheim 2011.

<sup>40</sup> R. F. Baumeister and M. R. Leary, *The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation*, „Psychological Bulletin”, no. 117(3), 1995, p. 497.

<sup>41</sup> Y. Alibhai-Brown, *After Multiculturalism*, “The Political Quarterly Publishing Co.”, 2001, pp. 47-56.

Ireland.<sup>42</sup> This finding is also mirrored by research on the Stereotype Content Model (SCM).<sup>43</sup> It could be shown that in regions with persistent conflict, resident groups are perceived in less complex ways – the ambivalent clusters, usually identified within the SCM, are missing.

Within conflict-ridden environments, information about the groups tends to be processed in a simplified matter – against this background the Flag incident reported in the introduction comes as no surprise. The European flag simply has not been registered.

### The final conclusion and outlook

Even among the group of students with ample experience of and exposure to Europe, the European identity proved to be elusive. For a category to become salient, it has to be self-relevant. European is a largely cognitive category, lacking the emotional depth, and within the European context, also lacking the opportunity to express distinctiveness. National identification and pluricultural identifications (see Study 2) may serve this function in a better way. However, this sense of uniqueness may be at the cost of the need to belong. The phenomenon of “stroke-identities” has been critically commented on by Bissoondath (1993).<sup>44</sup> He noted that the “exoticism” and unique identity provided by these stroke identities may be at the cost of a sense of belonging. With reference to national identification, the question also arises whether this categorization is inclusive or not. In this context, the terminology used to refer to collective identities is also noteworthy – supranational identity is perceived as a stepping stone to *go beyond* the “confines” of national identification. When identifying with all humanity, we *transcend* national identification. However, as pointed out by Schmidt-Denter, national identification has also salutogenic benefits and serves a human core motivation.<sup>45</sup>

The European school students may not have mentioned “European” in their self-concept, but they did mention “I am not racist” in their negated self-concept (Study 1). A self-label may remain an empty category. In recent research on IWAH the authors

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<sup>42</sup> N. Ferguson, *Political*, pp. 233-254.

<sup>43</sup> S. T. Fiske, A. J. C. Cuddy, P. Glick and J. Xu, *A Model of (Often Mixed) Stereotype Content: Competence and Warmth Respectively Follow from Perceived Status and Competition*, ”Journal of Personality and Social Psychology”, no. 82(6), 2002, pp. 878-902; S. T. Fiske, *Keynote: Dimensions of Inequality: Divided by Status and Competition*. 11<sup>th</sup> International ETMUdays, In/Equalities in Diverse Societies. Identifying Problems, Remedies, Alternatives. Helsinki, 23-24 October 2014.

<sup>44</sup> N. Bissoondath, *A Question of Belonging: Multiculturalism and Citizenship*, [in:] *Belonging. Essays on the Meaning and Future of Canadian Citizenship*, eds. W. I. Kaplan, Montreal 1993, pp. 368-387.

<sup>45</sup> U. Schmidt-Denter, *Die Deutschen*.

demonstrated that self-investment,<sup>46</sup> rather than mere global self-definition was a better predictor for behavioural intentions. For those participants for whom global orientation towards humanity has become self-relevant, behavioural outcomes followed. As noted above, self-schemata become self-selective in terms of filters for information. In Grundy and Jamieson's study, those participants with salient childhood experiences showed stronger identifications with Europe as young adults.<sup>47</sup> Conversely, those young people growing up within persistent conflict,<sup>48</sup> may be deprived of the experience of analysing out-groups in a more complex way.

Going forward, especially within a more complex globalized world, which is for many a world devoid of certainty, more research into the function of collective identities, as experienced by the individual, will be helpful.<sup>49</sup> It is probably not a question of either – or. Maybe the founding fathers of Europe were visionaries in more senses than one, as they recognized that *both* collective identities are necessary, but for different reasons.

### Summary

#### THE ELUSIVE EUROPEAN IDENTITY: REFLECTIONS ON THE STRUCTURE OF THIS SUPRANATIONAL IDENTITY – AND THE LACK OF SALIENCE<sup>50</sup>

Research on European identity has consistently found low identification with this supranational category. One of the reasons for the continued interest in the concept of supranational identities is the question whether this collective medium of identification would provide a sense of integration with other social groups. Theories of self and identity construal are presented, which also highlight how we process information about ourselves and others. Past research has pointed to the role of experience levels with a supranational entity such as Europe for identification with that entity to occur. Whereas persons with low experience levels of Europe have shown consistently low identification with it, in some instances, higher experience levels of Europe (i.e. through language competence, exchange programs, work experience) have also produced higher identification with Europe. Within the present series of studies we as-

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<sup>46</sup> G. Reese, J. Proch and C. Finn, *Identification with all Humanity: The Role of Self-Definition and Self-Investment. Manuscript Submitted for Publication*, "European Journal of Social Psychology", no. 45, 2015, 426-440.

<sup>47</sup> S. Grundy, L. Jamieson, *European*.

<sup>48</sup> N. Ferguson, *Political*, pp. 233-254.

<sup>49</sup> C. Kinnvall, K. Renwick Monroe, S. Scuzzarello, *Introduction*, [in:] *On Behalf of Others. The Psychology of Care in a Global World*, eds. S. Scuzzarello, C. Kinnvall, K. Renwick Monroe, New York 2009, pp. 233- 254.

<sup>50</sup> Characters (inc. spaces), Main Text and References: 37818. This research is partially supported by a grant from the Fonds National de la Recherche, Luxembourg (C12/SC/4009630 – IRMA – Intergenerational Relations in the Light of Migration and Ageing).

essed levels of identification with Europe amongst a group of students who have high exposure to Europe. The objective was to assess, whether high exposure translates into high spontaneous identification with Europe. In Study 1) we looked at the salience of European identification in the spontaneous self-concept. In Study 2) students were asked to self-categorize in terms of nationality. European identification was neither elicited in the spontaneous self-concept nor used as a self-description in terms of nationality. These findings are discussed against the background of identity theories, including national identity and wider collective identities. European identity is likely to remain elusive, and alternative research approaches are suggested within a globalizing world.

**Keywords:** European identity, supranational identification, collective identities, national identity, adolescents, globalization.

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