



Embracing Complexity

New ways forward for identity scholarship
in International Relations

Rebecka Ambjörnsson

Malmö University, Department of Global Political Studies
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Supervisor: Inge Eriksson
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Abstract

Insufficient theorizations about identification result in flawed conclusions about how actors in the international arena construct themselves and the Other. With references to fallacies of previous identification studies, the thesis at hand therefore argues for the necessity to contemporize research approaches. It asks the question “how could identification research in International Relations be improved?”. Based on a micro-level survey and interviews, the thesis can show how discourse, as well as inadequate conceptualizations and operationalizations, produce limited understandings of identification. The thesis recognizes several pitfalls that identification research must seek to avoid, for example: the uncritical acceptance of, and contribution to, dominant discourses, the reduction of identification into dichotomous categories, as well as the aiming for clear-cut, essentialist operationalizations. Research shows that identifications are ambiguous, fluid and contextual. Hence, identification research must embrace and encompass these traits in theorizations about the international system.

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1. Introduction

The non-foundational scholarship of International Relations (IR) has for a long time acknowledged the importance of understanding identification (Bucher & Jasper 2017, Thomas 2017, Lebow 2016, Epstein 2011, Banchoff 1999). Concurrently, the prevailing state-centrism of the field has been rejected (Dunne et al. 2013, Kessler & Guillaume 2012, Smith 2004). Despite that, IR still lacks adequate operationalizations of identification because, firstly, all conceptualizations and operationalizations of identification emanate from an understanding of the nation state as a dominant identity (Lebow 2016, Subotic & Ayse 2012, Banchoff 1999). Secondly, IR scholars and international surveys like the Eurobarometer and the World Values Survey (WVS) operationalize identifications as essence-like and naturally conflicting. Thirdly, very few scholars have acknowledged the nexus between identification, discourse and power structures. With these fallacies in mind, the thesis at hand seeks to answer the research question “how could identification research in IR be improved?”. The aim is twofold. The thesis aims to provide a deeper understanding of identification by scrutinizing the link between identification, discourse and power. Further, it aims to accentuate the necessity of contemporizing methods and testing new ways forward. Those aspects will ensure IR’s relevance in times of non-state actors’ increasing power (Dunne et al. 2013) and interconnectedness between various levels of analysis (Lebow 2016, Ross 2014).

The research question will be answered by firstly examining how the fallacies of previous research approaches affect the legitimacy of identification research, and secondly by proposing how the fallacies could be countered. In what follows, a literature review will outline how previous research has been conducted, what results it provided and why these could be questioned. The debate on European identification is a useful starting point because it accentuates how identification has been approached and categorized by IR scholars and international surveys. Followingly, IR debates on identification, discourse and the micro-level are reviewed to outline this thesis’ research approach. Thereafter, the Data Collection and Research Method section explains how a survey and in-depth interviews were constructed and carried out to scrutinize identification processes. Lastly, the gathered data is subjected to a discourse analysis (Milliken 1999) which reveals how discourse and macro-level power structures affect identification and IR research. The findings underline the argument for why IR scholars must modify research approaches and provides examples of how that could be done.

2. The Fallacies of Previous IR Identification Research

Many scholars of International Relations (IR) have realized the importance of identification for understanding the construction of social reality (Bucher & Jasper 2017:397) and how the construction of the Other is vital for the making of the self (Epstein 2011:338). Despite this interest in identification, there are three main fallacies of identification scholarship in IR that will now be addressed.

Firstly, the majority of conceptualizations and operationalizations emanate from the nation state as the reference point for all kinds of identification (Banchoff 1999, Lebow 2016, Subotic & Ayse 2012). For example, it is claimed by most that European integration processes either lead to a hybridization of national and European “identities” (Ichijo & Spohn 2016, Moxon-Browne 2016, Risse et al. 1999, Taylor 1991, Yotova 2017) or even to a strengthening of nationalism and “national identities” (Hintz 2015, Polyakova & Fligstein 2016). Accordingly, regional and so called “hybrid identities” are often interpreted as threats towards the sovereignty of nation states. The state-centrism carries the risk that IR scholars overlook phenomena in the international system that circumvent references to national identification. All social fields entail more than one collective identity and analyses must therefore avoid singling out one type of human collective, for example nations, and neglect others (Neumann 1996). The discursive approach of this thesis accentuates that the national domination of identification is not natural (Subotic & Ayse 2012:919) nor axiomatic but socially constructed and intertwined with power structures. Further, most of the above-mentioned literature is based on data from the Eurobarometer, WVS or similar surveys that examine individual identification. However, no study legitimizes the assumed correlation between the nation state’s sovereignty and individuals’ identification. Thus, it is unclear if such a correlation exists. What individual identification means for the international system is still a question of interpretation and theoretical standpoint.

Secondly, IR scholars and respected surveys like the Eurobarometer or the World Values Survey (WVS) tend to operationalize identification as exclusive and essence-like categories. The Eurobarometer is carried out for various services of the European commission and other EU institutions to assess public opinions in Europe. Each survey consists of approximately 1000 face-to-face interviews per country (European Commission 2019a). The WVS is the “largest non-commercial, cross-national, time series investigation of human beliefs and values ever executed” (WVS 2019a). These two surveys are amongst the most referenced in IR identification scholarship and thus hypothetically have the power to influence not only

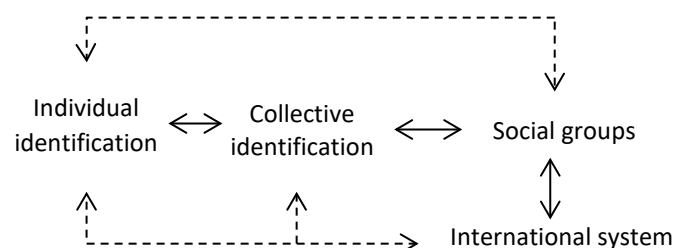
academics but also politics and policy decisions. In these surveys, identification is reduced to dichotomous and axiomatic categories. Typically, identification categories are limited to “national” or “European”, or possibly comprise a hybrid of identification with two nations. However, they do not account for the polymorphic, interactive and process-like sides of identification that Lapid accentuates (1996:8). The Eurobarometer for example, asked respondents if they identify with their nation and/or Europe. They concluded that most people only identify with their nation, or partly with Europe but foremost with their nation (Polyakova & Fligstein 2016:63). Accordingly, WVS questions do not provide an “it depends-answer” that often would be required. The thesis at hand claims that socially constructed categories cannot serve as static foundations for theorizing (Bucholtz & Hall 2004:382) because they produce an insufficient and uncomprehensive understanding of identification. These surveys, and IR studies based on their data, hence fail to capture the complexity of identification because they do not encompass indirect identification (Bucher and Jasper 2017:393) but only measure how individuals identify with specific categories.

The third fallacy is the unexplored nexus between identification, power and discourse. I argue that studying identification with a discourse approach as developed by Foucault (1991) accentuates identification categories’ fictitiousness and makes it possible not only to observe, but also to analyze, the connection between power and identification. There is extensive literature on discourse in IR, but it has not been concerned with identification. The prevailing state-centrism in IR has led to numerous analyses of how media, officials and politicians create discourses (Lebow 2016, Thomas 2017). Such studies provide understandings of how certain actors are seeking to construct discourses for political purposes. However, it disregards how identification categories are not natural but expressions of power. IR scholars have also not thoroughly enough accounted for how discourse and research methods affected research results. The following section continues the discussion on how identification has, and could be, studied in IR.

2.1 Studying Identification

It is rarely questioned *if* IR scholars should examine identification, but the discussion prevails around *which* identifications are relevant and *how* they should be examined. Any study concerned with identification should therefore position itself in relation to these questions.

So, which identifications matter in IR? The relevance of the macro-level and nation states' identification remains unquestioned. Though, many IR scholars agree that the micro-level, so individual identification, is not their concern. The thesis at hand, however, partly challenges this claim. This is because individual development is a process that interacts with collectives and is in itself reflexive (Domecka et al. 2012:33). This approach assumes that individual identification cannot be completely disconnected from macro-level identification. To explain why, it is important to understand how social groups are formed. Wendt suggested that the different levels of analysis are connected by arguing that recognition between individuals cause collective identification to form, which in turn are the same dynamics that enable interactions between entire social groups. In an attempt to demonstrate this; how individual and group identification is “part of a single systemic logic” (Wendt, 2003: 564), the figure found further down was constructed. So, individual identification enables collective identification, which enables social groups that constitute the international system. However crucially, this is a two-way process; individual identification does not only constitute collectives and social groups, it is also shaped by them. This means, that identification on all levels are co-dependent and co-constitutive, even though they are not all directly linked. Furthermore, it is well known that units and actors at the macro-level are also part of the international system and that the international system shapes actors' identifications and interests (Andersson 2010:47). However, as my figure attempts to demonstrate, social globalization, i.e. technology and interconnectedness, has created a stronger link between macro, meso and micro identification (Dunne et al. 2013:420, Sylvester 2013:613). The levels of analysis are interconnected, and it is hence hard to argue for an irrelevance of individual identification even in IR. If we want to understand the structure, we must acknowledge all its building blocks.



I will return to the relevance of the micro-level later and now turn to the question about *how* to study identification. Most often, identification scholars refer to a single “identity”, typically “the national identity” (see for example Lebow 2016, Subotic & Ayse 2012, Banchoff 1999). This thesis challenges the usage of fixed identification categories for theorizing about the international system. The fixed, essentialized understanding of identification has been criticized by reflectivist IR scholarship for a long time (Campbell 1998, Hansen 2006). Categories cannot

account for how both states and individuals identify with multiple units and groups. They also do not tell us when certain parts of an “identity” are activated; which is a matter of “situational relevance and commitment” (Andersson 2010:49). Further, categories are insufficient for studying the co-constitutiveness of identification and interests (Feklyunina 2016, Wendt 1999). Conceptualizing identification as single, fixed, brittle categories that are presented as axiomatic and self-explaining must thus be understood as an act of reductionism.

With previous statements in mind, this research will analyze identification as ongoing processes, something that actors *do*. “Identity” is therefore replaced with “identification” and a focus on “expressions of identification”. In contrast to identification as an essentialist notion of agency, expressions are empirically accessible (Bucher & Japer 2017:393, 397). Studying various expressions of identification is beneficial for a discourse analysis because it enables an examination of identifications that are not included in dominant discourses and their categories. The more traditional IR scholarship might reject this approach with references to concept stretching or vagueness. However, this thesis argues that the ambiguity and contextuality of identification is precisely what recalls the need of contemporizing research methods.

2.2 Identification, Discourse and Power

The international system is a struggle for power (Banchoff 1999:270, Epstein 2011:329), and an actor that can influence discourse is powerful because it is able to construct certain “regimes of truth” while excluding other possible modes of identification and action (Milliken 1999:229). This thesis examines what role discourse (Foucault 1991) plays for identification. Since discourses are productive and construct knowledge (Bucher 2017:411, Epstein 2013, Milliken 1999), they do not only decide how we talk about identification, but also influence identification in practice. It does not only provide certain ways of speaking about identification but also decides how actors are, and act, in the world. That is because discourses provide a “language for talking about- i.e. a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic”, it “makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way” and “limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed” (Hall 1992, 291). This means that discourses on for example European and national identification are vital for the actual identification with, and loyalty to, Europe and the nation state. Therefore, discourse is powerful (Hülse 2006, Feklyunina 2016, Persson 2017).

Further, Hülse claims that the way we imagine the future is always projected based on old patterns (2006:416). Discourse is thus benefiting the continuation of the current political

organization. That is because the Westphalian state system has been fixed in narratives on all analytical levels for so long that it is hard to imagine a future without it, therefore it also prevails and continues to dominate discourses. According to this claim, discourse does not only reflect the nation state's dominance of identification, it also reinforces it (Hülsse 2006). This accentuates that the nation state is a social construct (Subotic & Ayse 2012:919) whose identification hegemony is depending on its power to construct discourses.

Power is in this case understood as “soft power”, which according to Nye's definition is “the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes” (Nye, 2011: 20–21). Most importantly, as Feklyunina points out, it is the strength of an actors' soft power that decides if the actor's “identity narrative” is accepted in major identification discourses or not. It is hence possible to evaluate one actor's soft power against another actor's by scrutinizing to what extent the “discursively constructed collective identity is accepted or rejected by different audiences” (Feklyunina 2016:780, 791). The “audience” in this thesis is the micro-level. By incorporating a micro-level of analysis, it is possible to demonstrate how actors at the macro-level are able to shape identification discourses and thereby both exercise and gain power. The micro-level highlights to what degree discourses constructed at the macro-level have been accepted in everyday narratives. Thus, by examining everyday perspectives, it is possible to thoroughly appreciate the range and power of discourses and their beneficiaries. This leads to the next question: Who are the beneficiaries? I.e., who constructs identifications? Previous research claims that the nation state is produced as a sovereign entity (see for example Campbell 1992) and does, as previously mentioned, exercise hegemony of identification (Milliken 1999). This leads to the assumption that the nation state is the main beneficiary of the current dominating discourse in IR. However, as Lebow points out, states cannot autonomously create their own identity. Rather, identifications “are imposed on states, not only by leaders and other officials, but also by the media, public intellectuals, interest and ethnic groups, and external actors” (Lebow 2016:7). So, this does once again accentuate the interconnectedness of various levels of analysis; states' identifications are depending on both individuals and collectives.

Of relevance for this research is also how a discourse approach seeks to understand “the ways in which actors -crucially, whether individuals or states - define themselves by stepping into a particular subject position carved out by discourse” (Epstein 2017:343-344). This stresses the importance of certain identification categories for actors' identification of themselves and others. Discourse produces certain categories as axiomatic and dominant, whereas other

categories are ignored or invisible. This is deciding for actors' possibility to express their identification. Accordingly, a problem occurs when IR scholars uncritically accept these categories and use them as fixed frameworks for understanding identification. We must always keep in mind that identifications are fluid, complex and contextual. How these characteristics could be regarded in research methods is explained in the Data Collection and Research Method section. One way forward is to incorporate the micro-level. However, the relevance of the micro-level is an ongoing debate in IR, a debate that will now be presented.

2.3 International Relations and the Micro-Level

One of structuralism's founding fathers, Ferdinand de Saussure, created a typology that concludes that discourse is to be studied where linguistic structures are attached to universals, and not where they are estimated in their singularity (Epstein 2013:514). This does, according to Epstein, mean that Saussure's typology, even though it admits that structures inhere in all levels, deems micro-perspectives as irrelevant. The thesis at hand will expand Saussure's typology and argue that because power structures inhere in all levels; all levels are relevant for studying discourse and power. It will demonstrate the situational relevance of micro- or everyday perspectives in IR (Solomon & Steele 2017:275, Domecka et al 2012) by examining how individual identification is interconnected with macro-level power structures and discourses.

Even though IR scholars often reject micro-perspectives due to their lack of generalizability, a few scholars, such as Domecka et al. (2012), Edkins (2013) and Ross (2014), have successfully shown how empirical insights at the individual level can be bridged to broader patterns. Accordingly, others argue for a turn to micro-perspectives by emphasizing how grand and systemic theories have failed to theorize about the political context of the 21st century and its decrease of interstate wars (Solomon & Steele 2017:268), or by claiming that state-centrism is insufficient for the new global risks, non-state actors and conceptualizations of spaces and temporalities (Kessler & Xavier 2012:111). Simply put, new historical contexts require new conceptual tools of analysis (Dunne et al. 2013:412).

To understand the relevance of micro-perspectives for IR, it is important to understand how the micro-level and the macro-level are interlinked (Edkins 2008). As already mentioned, my reasoning assumes that all levels are part of the same system (Wendt, 2003: 564), but it does not take stance in the debate whether findings on the individual level can be transferred to the macro-level or not (Epstein 2011, Thomas 2017). By recognizing that individual identification is socially generated and transmitted, it can easily be linked to other levels of identification.

Just like Ross argues about emotions (2014), identification thereby becomes "not private feelings but public expressions that circulate in and through a variety of social actors in global political events". Thus, a discourse analysis of identification at the individual level is helpful for examining macro-level discourses and power structures. The figure above was an attempt to explain how identification at all levels is part of the same system. Linking various IR literature leads to the same conclusion; The public, so individuals that constitute a collective, is vital for states' interests (Greenhill 2008) and states' domestic interests have social meaning in the international arena (Andersson 2012:47). By extension, this means, as claimed earlier, that the public, the state, states' interests and the international arena are all part of the same system. So, while it is not impossible to claim that individual identification is relevant in IR, it will here be acknowledged merely because of two reasons: it enables an examination of the strength of various discourses, and it is part of the same system as collective and group identification, and thus impacts the international system. Individual identification matters because individuals form a collective, in accordance to which actors construct arguments for certain political decisions and policies. This is demonstrated by the Eurobarometer and the WVS, in which individual identification is surveyed to examine the public's opinions and interests as a collective. Ultimately, these surveys are used to legitimize certain politics or actions that matter for the international system. Thus, it is not the individual per se, but how individual identification is intertwined with social groups' identifications and discourses, that is interesting. This thesis aims to create fluid and contestable accounts of how power at the macro-level is intertwined with individual identification and accordingly how both levels are necessary for upholding certain power structures and "knowledges" about the international system. Additionally, the discourse approach suggests that individual identification, and the survey answers accordingly, are depending on the bigger structure that the individual is part of; discourse has already excluded or made certain response options unthinkable. Hence, powerful actors are able to take decisions based on survey results that they influenced by shaping the discourse, consciously or not.

In summary, the thesis at hand argues for the relevance of the micro-level partly because it is interconnected with the macro-level and partly because it is an audience in which discourses' strength can be examined. Micro-perspectives will provide insight into how certain identifications are constructed as hegemonic and natural through identification categories. As Solomon and Steele claim, micro-perspectives do not discard macro-politics, but it engages with what escapes, overflows or exceeds them (2017:270). This approach will not answer all

questions or provide the whole picture, but it will allow new theoretical and empirical insights that are vital for justifying the relevance of IR in the post-modern 21st century. The aim is consequently not to produce generalizable or parsimonious theories about identification, but to encourage more complex and all-encompassing conceptualizations and operationalizations.

2.4 Structure of the Thesis

Before continuing to the method section, the research question and aim will be reiterated. The research question is: how can identification research in IR be improved? The question is answered by firstly examining how the fallacies of previous research approaches affect the outcomes of identification research, and secondly by proposing how these could be countered. The aim is to argue for the necessity to adjust old methods and test new ways forward. That will ensure IR's relevance in times of influential non-state actors in the international arena and interconnectedness between various levels of analysis.

The thesis from now on has four main parts: presentation of the data collection and research method, discussion on data collection results, analysis and conclusion. Thus, in what follows, it will first be presented how a survey and interviews were conducted to scrutinize the construction of collective identifications and their expressions. The research embraced operationalizations that recognize the complexity and ambiguity of identification. This produced more accurate understandings of identification and of how different approaches lead to different conclusions about identifications' presence or strength. Secondly, commonalities in the collected data and general thoughts about these will be presented. Thirdly, the analysis process and research results are discussed. The analysis section provides valuable understandings of the complexity of identification and its empirical consequences. In the fourth part, the thesis presents a conclusion that summarizes its findings and suggests new ways forward for identity scholarship in IR.

3. Data Collection and Research Method

The research design of this thesis has a bottom-up structure. The aim is twofold; firstly, to provide a deeper understanding of identification by scrutinizing the link between identification, discourse and power. Secondly, it aims to expand previous IR horizons by presenting alternative research approaches, *inter alia* by including the micro-level in theorizations about the international system.

3.1 Collecting Data

Two sources of data were collected for the analysis. First, a survey was conducted and secondly, biographical narrative interviews were carried out. Biographical narratives have often been used in IR to portray the state as a meaningful entity (Ringmar 1996:452, Mattern 2005, Waever 2002). However, in this paper, individual biographical narratives (Domecka et al. 2012, Miller et al. 2012, Miller & Schütze 2011) served to examine how discourses affect identification processes and research.

The Eurobarometer and WVS served as reference points for emphasizing how discourse shapes identification by benefiting certain identity categories and constructing a dichotomy between them. Their survey methods and results were thus remarked in both the planning and execution of this research. Data from these surveys was collected through their interactive online tools. For the sake of transparency, I will now explain how the data can be reproduced. In the “Eurobarometer Interactive” (European Commission 2019b), I first chose the desired heading, for example “Immigration”, and thereafter what year. In what follows, references to the Eurobarometer will thus declare the heading of the survey question within quotation marks followed by the year of publication. For example, “(“Immigration”, 2018)”. For all references to the WVS, the time period 2010-2014 was chosen since it is the most recent. In the following step, all European countries were selected for comparison. Lastly, I chose to break down the answers in accordance to age and viewed the the table representing people up to the age of 29 (WVS 2019b) because it corresponds to this thesis’ target group. Additionally, all forthcoming references include the specific survey title.

3.1.1 Surveying Categories and Obscure Identification

The self-conducted survey examined which categories the respondents identified with when they were restricted to pre-made, fixed categories and answer options. With regards to the previously outlined criticism, the questions were constructed to test how discourse affects identification and how respondents react to categories and explicit references to “identification”

compared to more indirect framing of questions. In a sense, the answers verified previous surveys and studies by examining how respondents step into certain identification categories and avoid others. Also, where possible, the Eurobarometer and WVS served to confirm survey results about identification with nation states or Europe. Identification with categories were examined to enable an analysis of the connection between those categories, discourse and power. For this reason, the survey adopted the reducing categories of national and European identification used in the Eurobarometer and WVS, but they were presented as compatible rather than dichotomous. The respondents were also not limited to only national and European identification but were presented to various forms of identification that complement these categories. For example, in a list, the respondents were asked to mark all places that they identify with and were encouraged to add their own answer categories (Appendix 1, question 9). This also exposed feelings and expressions of identification that are neglected in discourse or circumvent traditional categories. Additionally, the survey sought alternative identifications by avoiding explicit references to “identity” or “identification” in many questions. This is because different identifications are activated in different contexts (Andersson 2010) and thus are expressed in different ways. Identification takes other forms than statements like “I am European/Swedish” (Appendix 1, question 7, 12-13). For example, it can be expressed by recognizing and identifying with a unit’s “values and norms” (Appendix 1, question 15-17) or by expressing abstract feelings of belongingness (Appendix 1, question 18).

Because of IR scholars’ macro-level preference, discourse scholarship usually targets media, officials or politicians (Lebow 2016, Thomas 2017). As this paper seeks to stake out new ways forward, it deviated from this path and targeted “everyday people” under the age of 31 that are born in Europe. IR’s typical target group accentuates how certain actors seek to influence discourses for political purposes, but it does not show how the discourse that they speak within is accepted in the broader population. This thesis’ target group enables a study of how discourses are received and converted in the audience’s discourses. Young people arguably best represent identification trends and contribute to the confirmation or renewal of society’s collective identifications (Stier 2003:37). Thereby, they do hypothetically not only speak within dominant discourses and give insights into these, but they also speak outside of discourses and propose alternative ones. Targeting people under the age of 31 was beneficial because they were born into the European integration process. Thus, they might have another view on the nation state’s sovereignty and hegemony than the older European population. The geographical limit was also set to make comparisons with the Eurobarometer intelligible.

The survey was posted on social media accounts where the target group was easily accessed. Thereafter, a sufficient amount of responses depended on the snowball effect, that is, how frequently the post was shared by other people than the me (i.e. the researcher). Several proactive measures were taken to make the survey attractive (see Appendix 1 for the complete final version). First of all, people are impatient, so the survey was kept as short as possible, in the end consisting of 21 questions including the respondents' personal information. Because the target group was young non-academics, the language was informal, and questions were formulated in a simple and concise manner. It was also accounted for that this target group has not experienced a Europe without the EU and it is unclear if they would automatically distinguish them. It was therefore explained that "Europe" in all questions referred to the geographical area and not the European Union (EU). Respondents identification with Europe and the EU was also examined in separate questions. Without this clarification, it would have been impossible to know if the answers referred to the one or other, or both. Lastly, the survey was provided in Swedish, English and German. Even though translation brought a risk that questions were constructed and, accordingly, interpreted slightly differently in the different languages, it made the survey more accessible and increased respondents' ability to express themselves freely. This is vital for a discourse analysis in which words, phrasing and expressions are fundamental.

The survey was part of the selection process of interviewees by asking if the respondent was willing to be interviewed (Appendix 1, question 21). Among the people who answered yes, eight people were chosen for an in-depth biographical narrative interview.

3.1.2 Biographical Narrative Interviews

The second step of the data collection was in-depth, biographical narrative interviews. The interviews were constructed in accordance with Domecka et al (2012), Miller et al. (2012) and Miller and Schütze (2011). Biographical interviews are beneficial for scrutinizing discourses because they cultivate the interviewees' own categories, expressions and elaborations. Further, they do not only demonstrate explicit verbal expressions, but also indirect expressions of identification. The purpose was to provide more complex, all-encompassing answers to how individuals collectively construct themselves and the Others than the survey provided. In contrast to the survey, interviewees were now able to express themselves without regard to any pre-scribed categories or limitations. The interviews thereby sought not only to map out how discourse shapes and limits expressions and acts of identification, but also to reveal which identifications are neglected and dissolved by discourse. Recognizing these neglected

identifications gave insights into what types of international phenomena or events IR scholars fail to capture if research conforms and contribute to dominating discourses.

The interview started with a small presentation of the research topic. Interviewees were told that they are part of a research process that examines identification, more specifically; how young Europeans use different categories to identify themselves and others. I, as the interviewer, explained that the person had been chosen for an interview because he or she was born in Europe and therefore has what can be called European experiences (Domecka et al. 2012:25). Thereafter the interviewees were asked to tell their life story, in any way and for as long as they wish. The introduction stimulated the biographical narrative and was thus important both for how the interview proceeded and its results. For each interview, I had a draft of a “stimulus formulation” (Domecka et al. 2012:26), but this was slightly adapted to the different situations and questions that the interviewees had. The following stimulus formulation was developed:

I am writing a bachelor thesis and the topic is identification. I want to know more about how and when people identify with different places and groups. I have decided to interview people under the age of 31 that are born in Europe to get a deeper insight into how they identify with places and social groups. I am interested in how we combine for example European, national and local identification. You have not been chosen because you are an expert on the topic but because you are a young person that is born in Europe. So, the first thing I would like you to do is tell me your life story. You can tell it in any way and for as long as you like to. I will not interrupt or ask you any questions until you say you are done. So please tell me about your life and tell me about what has made you the person that you are today.

Importantly, as the interviews were carried out in English, German or Swedish depending on the interviewees' native language, the introduction was translated accordingly. It was thus important, after given consent, that also the introduction was recorded so that its effects on the narrative could be appreciated. For three reasons, the introduction did not mention the aim of connecting the interviews to macro-level power structures. Firstly, since the interviewees were not well informed about the academic field of IR, those words could have been more confusing than informative. Secondly, it would not have provided the interviewee with any additional information to guide the narrative formulation. Thirdly, the micro and macro-level were not bridged during the interviews but in the following analysis.

Even though the interviewer's presence unavoidably influences the interview, this approach restricts it to a minimum. Biographical narrative interviews are rooted in a grounded theory approach that promotes person-centered, bottom-up results (Miller et al. 2012:3). The entire interview centered around the interviewee's response to the introduction. After the narrative, interviewees were asked more specific questions about their narrative. They were encouraged to elaborate on identification with various places and collectives. The aim was to capture contexts and situations where the interviewees felt or expressed any kind of identification that could be relevant for IR scholars. This second, more structured part, ensured that the interviews accumulated enough relevant data to recognize how individuals construct and express collective identifications. The audio of the interviews were recorded, notes were taken and they were transcribed in detail to enable a thorough discourse analysis

The interviews took place in the spring of 2019 in Berlin and Malmö. If time and budget would have allowed, all interviews would have been conducted in different countries to produce greater generalizability. Though, due to its private character, biographical interviews are best conducted in person and they were thus carried out in two diverse cities that were accessible to me. The group was diverse, but there were limited possibilities with just eight interviewees. However, the aim was not to produce great generalizable claims. The reason to include the micro-level was, as previously mentioned, that it provided insights of how collective identifications are constructed and dictated by macro-level actors. It is not claimed that knowledge about the individual level is true at the macro-level. However, the analysis will show that all levels are part of the same system, and that the micro-level can capture certain things that escapes, overflows or exceeds the macro-level. For example, the narratives captured identifications that are not comprehended by state-centric or essentialist identification categories but still relevant for theorizations about the international system. Indeed, identification that does, or could, constitute a collective that matters in the international system is relevant for IR scholars, even if it is not dominant in identification discourses. Examples of this are identification with regions, religious groups, ethnicities or multiple nations. It also includes identifications that are contextual and situational and thus circumvent static, pre-made frameworks.

3.2 Processing the Data

The survey and the interviews were analyzed with the same purpose; to scrutinize the fallacies of previous research and suggest how these can be countered. It was examined how the results from the Eurobarometer, WVS and previous IR studies align with the self-conducted data that

employed a different research approach. The survey and the interviews provided different parts of the puzzle. The survey was analyzed with a focus on how discourse and categories shape identification, as well as on how these are dictated by the power of macro-level actors. Firstly, the results from the three language versions were compiled and I observed which categories the respondents most frequently identified with, for example any nation, region or Europe. This resulted in statistics that present how frequently certain identification categories are used by the respondents. Secondly, I observed alternative expressions of identification, i.e. identifications that circumvent categories or explicit expressions. This also entailed looking for contradicting answers that announce alternative discourses.

The processing of the interview data followed several steps. First, the transcriptions were searched for commonalities and reoccurring themes or topics that gave insights into identification with social groups or collectives. Thereafter, a structural analysis approach guided the analysis (Domecka et al. 2012). The interviews were coded to search for analytically case-relevant categories and social mechanisms that highlighted the mechanisms of identification and how identification at the micro-level reflects macro-level power structures. However, instead of coding specific words and pre-defined expressions of identification, the following social mechanisms were coded 1) the creation of Us and the Other 2) contextual identification 3) hybrid identification 4) locational classification of the social world 5) attitudes towards Europe. A working question was allocated to each mechanism to make it operationalizable. For example, “the creation of Us and the Other” was operationalized by asking: “what categories do the interviewees use to construct the other?”. This emphasized how the Other, and categories to identify them, changed in different contexts. Thereby, it accentuated the flexibility of identification and identification categories. The coding did thus not target specific words, but rather sought the words or phrases that answered the working questions formulated to operationalize each social mechanism. This coding method avoided pre-defined, fixed categories to enable a flexible, all-encompassing operationalization of identification, which corresponds to the previously outlined criticism of earlier research. It also enabled an analysis that solely emanated from the content of the survey and interviews, thus realizing the grounded theory approach. The social mechanisms and working questions were defined in advance, but no specific words were coded as indicators for specific identifications. Thereby, the operationalization incorporated identifications that were both fluid and ambiguous. This was also consistent with the reconstructive method of structural analyses, which demands that formal markers of the narrations and the narrations’ content should be “the only empirical basis for generating relevant process categories” (Domecka et al. 2012:28).

3.2.1 Analyzing Discourses and Identification

After the coding process, the data was subjected to a discourse analysis. The discourse approach of this research has many similarities with the narrative ethnographical method outlined by Domecka et al.; it is concerned with understanding the context in which narratives have been produced and requires that we ask who produces particular stories and what their consequences are (Domecka et al. 2012:36). The analysis started already with the data compilation and coding, but the discourse analysis tested how these results can provide new insights of identification research and the nexus between power, discourse and identification.

The analysis was based on Milliken's "juxtapositional method" and "subjugated knowledges" (1999:242). What is considered "true" about antagonistic identification categories in IR research and surveys was juxtaposed to phenomena and issues brought up in the gathered data that this "truth" failed to acknowledge or address. Thereby, it was appreciated how state-centric, dichotomous and reductionist operationalizations of identification obstruct all-encompassing theorizations about the international system, inter alia by ignoring the inherently political nature of discourse. Further, I explored how alternative accounts were enabled by a discourse that does not completely overlap with the dominating discourse and how the antagonistic view on national identification created conditions for resistance to other discourses. This highlighted how discourse constructs certain "regimes of truth" while excluding other possible modes of identification and action. By shifting focus from pre-defined categories and explicitly expressed "identities" to multifaceted expressions of identification, indirect forms of identification and loyalties were observed.

3.3 Limitations and Justification

All research methods have limitations. This study may provoke arguments about limited generalizability, or against the relevance of the micro-level. Such arguments, however, would not be enough to condemn the results of the research analysis. Indeed, the scope of this research only allowed for a limited number of participants and even though the aim was to have a group as diverse as possible, their answers are not universally true. Nevertheless, this does not affect the study's legitimacy since its aim is not to produce great generalizable claims. Rather, the aim is to examine how identification research could improve and to accentuate why this is necessary. Thus, I encourage the reader of this thesis to pay more attention to the research method and data analysis than the data results' generalizability. Indeed, the answers and responses in the collected data do not represent universally true opinions, but they do accentuate the complexity of researching identification, and that is their purpose. They show how

discourses and macro-level power structures affect identification. This being said, many of the answers are in fact generalizable because the study is anchored to previous studies. The Eurobarometers' and the WVS' databases did, as already mentioned, serve to confirm or invalidate results of this study.

For the micro-level critic, I emphasize that the micro-level is necessary to demonstrate fallacies of previous IR identification research. Without incorporating the micro-level, or everyday perspectives, we cannot appreciate the strength of identification discourses. It contributes to answering the research question by giving examples of how identification could be approached in a more comprehensive and adaptive manner. I trust that the following analysis will convince the skeptical reader about this.

4. Analysis: Discourses and Identification

The analysis section is structured as follows: first, the survey questions and subsequent answers will be presented. Thereafter, the results from the structural analysis and coding of the interviews are presented. Lastly, these results will be analyzed and discussed under the three headings: Soft Power and Categories, International Relation's Identification Blinders, and The Nation State: An (un?)Threatened Hegemon. It will be elaborated upon how the collected data can contribute to a deeper understanding identification processes and thus suggest new ways forward for IR scholarship.

4.1 Survey Results

Once the survey was published in mid-February 2019, there was no overview over who, or how many, that saw it. Therefore, it is not applicable to speak about any response frequency. When the survey was taken offline four weeks later, however, it had been answered by 196 people. Even though the answers cannot be generalized to every person between the age of 18 and 31, it does give a snapshot of how the target group both indirectly and explicitly identified and placed themselves in relation to various collective identification categories. Table 1 presents the main part of the survey in its final version. The reader that already reviewed Appendix 1 will notice that questions about the respondents' personal information were excluded from Table 1 (see Appendix 1 for the complete version). Instead, a short summary of respondents' personal information will be presented.

The survey was answered by people born in 18 different countries. Among these countries, Sweden and Germany were the most represented. 54 different cities and villages were mentioned as "city of residence", the most common were Kalmar (22 respondents), Malmö (23 respondents) and Berlin (52 respondents). Most respondents (38.46%) originated from a city with 0-50.000 inhabitants. The most common occupation among respondents was studying or working within the social sector (for example teachers, nurses, police officers, social workers). Thereafter, IT-related job positions were common. These results might have influenced the survey's findings. For example, the Eurobarometer showed that Swedish and German citizens feel more attached to Europe than for instance citizens from Montenegro or Estonia ("Attachment to", 2018). As none of the latter countries were represented in the survey, identification with Europe might be overrepresented in my survey results. Further, students are part of Miller et al.'s "sensitized groups" because they often live abroad or have educational international experiences (Miller et al. 2012). Such experiences influence the understanding of

Us and the Other. However, this assumable international group is counterbalanced by the relatively high number of respondents from small cities and villages, who are not as often exposed to situations that provoke reflections about self-identification (Miller et al. 2012:3-7).

With this information in mind, the survey answers will be presented. In the following Table, the questions are paraphrased to the left and the answers are presented in amount of answers and percentage to the right.

Table 1.

<p>1. Do you see yourself as European?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Other answer</p>	<p><i>Yes =189 (96,43%)</i></p> <p><i>No =6 (3,06%)</i></p> <p><i>Other answers:</i></p> <p><i>Depends where I am =1 (0,51%)</i></p> <p><i>Depends on the context =1 (0,51%)</i></p> <p><i>First Scandinavian then European =1 (0,51%)</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes =1 (0,51%)</i></p>
<p>2. Do you feel like you have benefited from being born in Europe?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Other answer</p>	<p><i>Yes =187 (95,41%)</i></p> <p><i>No =8 (4,08%)</i></p> <p><i>Other answers:</i></p> <p><i>No idea =1 (0,51%)</i></p>
<p>3. In the following list, mark all places that you identify with. More than one answer is possible. Feel free to add more options.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Your home (apartment, house)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Your country of origin</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A place of worship (mosque, church, synagogue etc.)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Your region of residence</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Your hometown</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Europe</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Your region of origin</p> <p><input type="radio"/> The EU</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A sports club</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Your country of residence</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Your workplace</p> <p><input type="radio"/> A holiday resort</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Other answer</p>	<p><i>Your home (apartment, house) =150 (76,53%)</i></p> <p><i>Your country of origin =157 (80,1%)</i></p> <p><i>A place of worship (mosque, church, synagogue etc.) =17 (8,67%)</i></p> <p><i>Your region of residence =103 (52,55%)</i></p> <p><i>Your hometown =149 (76,02%)</i></p> <p><i>Europe =122 (62,24%)</i></p> <p><i>Your region of origin =96 (48,98%)</i></p> <p><i>The EU =78 (39,8%)</i></p> <p><i>A sports club =46 (23,47%)</i></p> <p><i>Your country of residence =99 (50,51%)</i></p> <p><i>Your workplace =81 (41,33%)</i></p> <p><i>A holiday resort =29 (14,8%)</i></p> <p><i>Other answers:</i></p> <p><i>The world= 2 (1,02%)</i></p> <p><i>Berlin= 1 (0,51%)</i></p> <p><i>Other country because I'm a minority in Sweden= 1 (0,51%)</i></p> <p><i>Swim hall =1 (0,51%)</i></p> <p><i>Summer cottage =1 (0,51%)</i></p> <p><i>City of residence =1 (0,51%)</i></p>

	<p>My county = 1 (0,51%)</p> <p>Previous places of residence =1 (0,51%)</p> <p>Previous study country = 1 (0,51%)</p> <p>The stable =1 (0,51%)</p> <p>Ireland = 1 (0,51%)</p> <p>I rarely think of myself as any of this...=1 (0,51%)</p> <p>My mothers and grandparents' home =1 (0,51%)</p> <p>Friends flats =1 (0,51%)</p>
<p>4. Have you ever traveled within Europe?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p>	<p>Yes =196 (100%)</p> <p>No =0</p>
<p>5. Have you ever traveled outside of Europe?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p>	<p>Yes= 165 (84,18%)</p> <p>No= 31 (15,82%)</p>
<p>6. Have you ever explicitly said "I am European" or "I am from Europe"?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, I do it often</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, occasionally</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, once or twice</p> <p><input type="radio"/> I don't think so</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No, never</p>	<p>Yes, I do it often= 13 (6,63%)</p> <p>Yes, occasionally= 42 (21,43%)</p> <p>Yes, once or twice= 39 (19,9%)</p> <p>I don't think so= 49 (25%)</p> <p>No, never= 56 (27,04%)</p>
<p>7. Have you ever said "I am from [country of origin]" or "I am [nationality]"? For example, Ireland/Irish etc.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, I do it often</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, occasionally</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, once or twice</p> <p><input type="radio"/> I don't think so</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No, never</p>	<p>Yes, I do it often= 102 (52,04%)</p> <p>Yes, occasionally= 80 (40,82%)</p> <p>Yes, once or twice= 9 (4,59%)</p> <p>I don't think so= 2 (1,02%)</p> <p>No, never= 3 (1,53%)</p>
<p>8. Have you ever said something equivalent to "I am from [domicile]" or "I am [domicile]"? For example, Helsinki/Helsinkiian etc.</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, I do it often</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, occasionally</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, once or twice</p> <p><input type="radio"/> I don't think so</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No, never</p>	<p>Yes, I do it often= 74 (37,76%)</p> <p>Yes, occasionally= 88 (44,9%)</p> <p>Yes, once or twice= 20 (10,2%)</p> <p>I don't think so= 8 (4,08%)</p> <p>No, never= 4 (2,04%)</p>
<p>9 A. According to you, is there something like "European values and norms"?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Don't know</p>	<p>Yes= 97 (49,49%)</p> <p>No= 51 (26,02%)</p> <p>Don't know= 48 (24,49%)</p>
<p>9 B. If you answered YES above: Do you feel like these European values and norms correspond with your personal values and norms?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, mostly</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No, mostly not</p>	<p>Yes, mostly= 90 (84,91%)</p> <p>No, mostly not= 16 (15,09%)</p>

<p>10 A. According to you, is there something like "values and norms of the EU"?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Don't know</p>	<p><i>Yes= 100 (51,02%)</i></p> <p><i>No= 33 (16,84%)</i></p> <p><i>Don't know= 63 (32,14%)</i></p>
<p>10 B. If you answered YES above: Do you feel like the EU's values and norms correspond with your personal values and norms?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, mostly</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No, mostly not</p>	<p><i>Yes, mostly= 87 (82,08%)</i></p> <p><i>No, mostly not= 19 (17,92%)</i></p>
<p>11 A. According to you, is there something like "national values and norms" in your country of origin?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Don't know</p>	<p><i>Yes= 171 (87,24%)</i></p> <p><i>No= 3 (9,4%)</i></p> <p><i>Don't know= 9 (28,1%)</i></p>
<p>11 B. If you answered YES above: Do you feel like these national values and norms correspond with your personal values and norms?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes, mostly</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No, mostly not</p>	<p><i>Yes, mostly= 135 (78,49%)</i></p> <p><i>No, mostly not= 37 (21,5%)</i></p>
<p>12. Could you imagine living and working in another European country than your country of origin for 20 years?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p>	<p><i>Yes= 153 (78,06%)</i></p> <p><i>No= 43 (21,94%)</i></p>
<p>13. Could you imagine living and working in a country outside of Europe for 20 years?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p>	<p><i>Yes= 105 (53,57%)</i></p> <p><i>No= 91 (46,43%)</i></p>
<p>14. In your opinion, is it possible to "be European" without a European citizenship?</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p>	<p><i>Yes= 153 (78,06%)</i></p> <p><i>No= 43 (21,94%)</i></p>
<p>15. Would you be willing to do an interview? If yes, write your name and how you would like to be contacted. This is not binding nor an assurance that I will ask you for an interview.</p>	<p><i>Yes= 42 (21,43%)</i></p>

Before continuing to the interview results and comparative analysis, it is important to notice how visible the influence of discourse and phrasing is in the survey answers. Questions that asked for identification with categories (for example question 3, 6) provoked different answers than questions that examined identification in more obscure ways (for example question 1, 2, 12). Identification with Europe was weak in the former but highly evident in the latter. Further, in those questions where identification with the nation state and Europe can be compared (question 3, 6/7, 9/10/11), Europe is disfavored by respondents. This shows that respondents

were unwilling to step out of discourses that portray the nation state as dominant. Only when they could circumvent dominant discourses and express identifications in more obscure ways was identification with Europe evident.

The observant reader will notice that the amount of respondents in questions 9B, 10B and 11B are not corresponding to the amount of respondents that answered “Yes” in the preceding question even though this was a stated prerequisite for answering the B-question. Rather than presenting a problem, this shows why surveys are insufficient for examining identification and thus helps answering how identification research in IR could be improved. We cannot know what this deficit depends on since there is no room for explanation. In this case, it is unknown if these respondents did not read the question properly or if they, despite their answer in the A-question, felt like there are certain values and norms of the EU/nation/Europe that they could position their own in relation to. If the latter is true, this shows how the answer categories were not enough to represent respondents’ identification. Even though the survey was designed to recognize obscure expressions of identification, the respondents had limited answer possibilities. This accentuates how surveys are only able to produce limited understandings of identification processes. There is no room for “it depends” answers or expressions of identifications that the researcher did not foresee.

4.2 Interview Results

The biographical narrative method presented several challenges. The most obvious arose from what I interpret as interviewees’ fear of including sequences in their narratives that could be prolix, unnecessary or irrelevant. Despite an introduction that encouraged interviewees to speak for as long as they like and to mention anything that shaped them as persons, most were reluctant to longer expositions. Interviewees did mostly, in a short and direct manner, check off certain events and circumstances. This resulted in relatively brief narratives ranging from 3 to 10 minutes. This accentuated the necessity of including a second interview part, as pointed out in previous studies (Domecka et al. 2012, Miller et al. 2012, Miller & Schütze 2011). In this second part, I first asked questions to clarify or get more information about topics brought up in the narratives. Thereafter, I asked open questions about topics that the narrator did not bring up, but that could lead to relevant insights for the study. The interviews prospered during this second part. All interviewees became more outspoken and eager to elaborate on thoughts, feelings and experiences. Questions about different contexts, groups and situations that interviewees had been in led to valuable elaborations on identification of themselves and Others. References to these varying groups informs not only how identification at the micro-

level is constructed, but also how it is shaped by the macro-level. The second part of the interview lasted around 30-45 minutes.

Several commonalities were detected in the interviews. First off, all interviewees started their biographical narrative by saying in what city or region they were born or grew up. Thereafter, most spoke (in the following order) about their family, education and career paths. In both narratives and during the rest of the interview, many references were drawn to locational units and places. The most frequent was cities, thereafter nations and then regions (multinational and national). These units played a big role in the interviews. Often, however, references to other regions or nations were not drawn to emphasize a physical distance but a cultural, religious or value-based distance. Here are a few examples from different interviews:

“[Mexico] is really different in comparison to Germany especially considering life style like mentalities”

“[In Tanzania] you don’t understand how other people think or why they do different things and if they do those things with good intentions or not”

“maybe it would’ve been harder to build up the enemy picture [if migrants came from Europe] because I think Islam is a pretty good attack surface”

In the first quote, the interviewee did not point out Mexicans as different because of their nationality but because of their life style and mentality. In the second quote, the interviewee expressed a distance to people in Tanzania by explaining how cultural differences made it hard to understand their actions and intentions. The third quote distinguishes Europe from other parts of the world by referring to Islam as something that makes Them different from Us. This means, that even though location categories were the most common reference to create ingroups and outgroups, they only explained where or who the groups are, but further clarifications were needed to explain why they are in or outgroups. Most often, otherness was connected to nations, but nations were not the source of otherness. People are not described as different because they are from another nation but because they have another culture, religion or lifestyle etc.

What has been mentioned so far in this section are commonalities and reoccurring themes and topics in the interviews. The interviews were further, through a structural analysis (Domecka et al. 2012), searched for process structures and social mechanisms. For this, five coding categories were defined. To operationalize these, a working question was constructed for each category. Table 2 explains which process structures and social mechanisms the analysis aimed to reveal, what working questions were used to search for specific words or phrases, and a summary of the most frequent findings.

Table 2

Process structures/ social mechanisms	Working question	Findings
1. The creation of Us and the Other	What categories are used to construct the Other?	In order of frequency: Groups of other nationality, multinational regions, cultures, national regions and cities, socio-economic classes, religions, ethnicity.
2. Contextual identification	How do contexts matter for identifications?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - International experiences made interviewees feel more European. - They always chose the most specific unit possible to define their identification.
3. Hybrid identification	How are identifications combined?	All expressed hybrid identifications, either of two nations, a nation/Europe or nation/region.
4. Locational classification of the social world	To what locational units do the interviewees refer?	In order of frequency: nation, cities, multinational regions (Europe & other continents), national regions.
5. Attitudes towards Europe	What are the most common connotations with Europe?	Freedom, values, interconnectedness, culture, travelling.

All these findings contribute with insights of how social mechanisms and identifications are constructed. As the first social mechanism (1) was operationalized, it became visible, as already pointed out, that the Other is not only created in terms of locations, but equally often with references to cultures, socio-economic classes, religions and ethnicities. The second mechanism (2) resulted in insights of how different contexts activates different identification. For example, identification with Europe was important when interviewees were outside of Europe. Further, how they chose to identify themselves in accordance to locational units varied depending on where they were and who they interacted with. When interviewees were outside of Europe and met someone that did not know enough about “the interviewee’s nation” to identify them accordingly, they said that they are from Europe. However, when they were in another country and assumed that the other knew “enough” about their nation, they said what nation they are from. Further, if they met someone inside of their nation, they referred to a region or city, and so on. The third mechanism accentuated how identifications are multiple and hybridized (3). When the fourth mechanism was operationalized (4), it verified previous scholars’ claim that the nation is the most commonly used unit to refer to when identifying the self and Other in terms of locational units. Lastly, the fifth mechanism (5) was operationalized by coding connotations with Europe. The result showed that the most common connotations with Europe are positive. Further, Europe was not only seen as positive for individuals but also for nation states. Interviewees mentioned benefits like unification, solidarity and a greater say in the

international arena for European countries. Thus, interviewees did not view Europe as a challenge towards the nation state, but rather saw Europe as a collection of nation states and as benefiting the nations.

Now, as the key findings of the research have been presented, I will move on to the analysis. The presented findings will be used as examples of how research methods affect “knowledge” about identification. These insights will provide suggestions for how IR identification scholarship could contemporize research approaches and methods.

4.3 Soft Power and Categories

As Milliken’s juxtapositional and subjugated knowledge method was implemented to analyze discourses in the collected material, it highlighted how discourse and the usage of categories influence identification research. When respondents or interviewees were presented to categories, they responded differently than when they more freely could interpret questions or independently speak about identification, like in the interviews. By juxtaposing identification categories with alternative expressions of collective or group identification, the inherently political nature of discourses was revealed. If identification would not have been a political process, identification with categories and feelings of identification would align. Now they do not. For example, previous studies report that “the European identity” is weak or absent, but 96,43% of the respondents in my survey answered that they see themselves as “European” (Table 1, question 1). This shows that identification categories are neither value-free nor natural. Identification categories limit possibilities to control, monitor and define the own identity. Frequently used categories like “national” and “European” are laden with pre-established definitions, interpretations, memories and prejudices. Respondents might thereby feel like they lose mandate to portray their own identity and are forced to conform to these pre-defined requirements if they subscribe to the category. Hence, people do arguably rather “see themselves as European” than “identify with Europe”, even though this could be claimed to mean the same thing. Thus, categories matter because they decide how the question is interpreted and answered. Also, when identification is reduced to categories, we are not examining how, when or why individuals or collectives actually identify with the unit of interest, but only if they identify with a certain category. Hence, identification categories do not account for contextuality, neither for interpretations nor for the combinability of various identifications.

That discourse influences how individuals express identifications is most apparent in examinations of identification with Europe. Generally, identification with social groups varies greatly depending on how the question is phrased and in what context it is presented. Both respondents and interviewees were generally unwilling to express identification with “Europe” as a category, but all expressed some identification with “European values” or “European culture”. Here are two examples from different interviews:

“certain values are shared among 90% of all Europeans like the human value is sacred no discrimination because of skin color [...] and these are values that I advocate”

“when I think about the EU I think that the states that joined represent the free democratic basic order and stand up for human rights and for values and norms that I have and that I live and that I would like to see in the whole world and specifically in European frames”

Despite these clear expressions of identification with Europe, both these interviewees said that they identify more with their nation than Europe. So, if they would only have been asked “do you identify more with your nation or Europe?” their identification with Europe would not have been noted. This highlights the importance of flexible operationalizations of identification that acknowledge such indirect expressions. This also presents two severe limitations of surveys; they only recognize direct and explicit identifications because identification is limited to categories, thus benefiting dominating discourses. Also, the respondent must interpret these categories and it is nearly impossible for the researcher to figure out how they interpreted questions and categories. Therefore, the usefulness of surveys for identification research is limited. Surveys only convey how respondents identify with specific categories or react to specific questions. Consequently, context and wording are factors that IR scholars must recognize when conducting identification research or incorporating previous surveys’ results in their studies. The impact of these must be accounted for to examine the reliability of responses and results. In in-depth interviews on the other side, the interviewer has the possibility not only to ask about interpretations and why respondents preferred certain categories but also to examine identifications that circumvent dominant discourses and pre-defined categories. Accordingly, as shown in the interview quotes above, the conducted interviews exposed obscure expressions and acts of identification. Because of this ability to provide complex and nuanced insights, in-depth interviews are more appropriate than surveys for identification research.

Discourses, and thus identification categories, are relevant for IR scholars because they are outcomes of political struggles at the macro-level. Actors in the international system struggle

for power and my data indicates that the outcomes of these struggles influence discourses at the micro-level. Thus, by examining identification at the micro-level, we also gain knowledge about the macro-level. In the collected data, this link is foremost observable in two cases; when identification is reduced to identification with categories, and when various identifications are contrasted or related to national identification. For example, European identification did not seem weak or absent when examined independently (Table 1, question 1, 2, 9B, 12; Table 2:1, 3, 5), but when it was related to other identification categories, especially to identification with nations or national localities, it was disfavored (Table 1, question 3). Survey respondents interpreted a contradiction between national and European identification, even though no such contradiction was presented. The logic result would be, that since 96,46% answered that they consider themselves as Europeans (Table 1, question 1), the same percentage would answer that they identify with Europe. However, as seen in Table 1 (question 3), that was not the case; when presented to multiple options, only 62,24% chose Europe and 39.8% the EU as a category that they identified with. Respondents made a choice, even though they were encouraged to choose multiple categories. This shows that even though individual identification is not a zero-sum-game, the macro-level has transmitted the notion that these identification categories are dichotomous.

4.3 International Relation's Identification Blinders

As the collected data was analyzed, several fallacies of previous identification research in IR became apparent. Both the survey and interviews manifested various highly IR relevant identifications that circumvented the state-centric and antagonistic categories dominating the field. These were identification with collectives or social groups, which are part of the international system and directly linked to the macro-level. Four types of identifications were detected that are typically neglected in IR: Identification with Europe, not localized identification, contextual and situational identification, and regional/local identification. This research suggests that one progressive step forward for identification scholarship in IR would be to include these identifications in theorizations about the international system. Under the following subheadings, I explain why.

4.3.1 Identification with Europe

Despite the general claim that “a European identity” is weak or absent, my data testifies that it is neither. Rather, identification with Europe is better described as fluid, contextual and situational. However, all identifications are contextual. One could claim, though, that

individuals quite rarely are in contexts or situations where identification with Europe is considered relevant. As seen in Table 2:1,4, nations are a more commonly used category to express identification. Europe as a category was rarer, but not absent. Several findings testify its presence. For example, the interviewees described contexts where they clearly identified strongly with Europe; the further away they were, both physically and culturally, the more European they felt, and the more they appreciated Europe. Europe was also a tool to distinguish in and outgroups; nations outside of Europe were referred to as “them” (Table 2:1). Further, the most common connotations with Europe were positive (Table 2: 5) and contrasted with more negative connotations with nations outside of Europe. Also, 78,06% of survey respondents answered that they could imagine living and working in another European country than their country of origin for 20 years, whereas 24.29 percentage points less could imagine living and working outside of Europe for 20 years (Table 1, question 12,13). Still, this does not disclaim that individuals’ identification with Europe is more rarely activated than identification with “their nation”. However, IR scholars do usually not consider frequency to be an appropriate measurement of any identification’s strength. For example, the United States’ “identity as a superpower” is activated more often than its “identity as a military superpower” (Andersson 2010:50), but that is not enough to claim that its identification as a military superpower is weak. On the contrary, it is more often referred to as one of the strongest in the world. So, since all identifications are contextual and relative, I argue that instead of asking how strong certain identifications are, there are other questions that are of greater importance for IR scholars. For example, when and why are certain identifications activated? And, what effects does identification have on international phenomena and relationships? These questions enable more flexible, accurate operationalization of identification.

4.3.2 Regional/Local Identification

Survey respondents and interviewees transmit a strong identification with national regions and local places. For example, 76,02% of survey respondents chose “Your hometown” as a category that they identify with and 82.66% have “often” or “occasionally” explicitly said ““I am from [domicile]” or “I am [domicile]” (Table 1, question 8). Despite an increased interest in regions in IR, their role is underestimated in identification research. State-centric identification categories diminishes the importance of these identifications and even though many IR scholars have acknowledged local and regional identifications, they are examined in isolation from national identification and thus often overshadowed by them. This can have serious effects for IR research. An example of that is Catalonia; what would happen if a survey asked Catalonians

to identify as either Spaniard or European? They probably could choose one of the options, but the importance of the region Catalonia would be disregarded. As we know, Catalonia has influenced not only Europe but also international relationships (see for example Vasile 2018). With this in regard, it is safe to say that regional and local identifications are vital for theorizing about the international system.

4.3.3 Not Localized Identification

Socio-economic classes, religions, cultures and ethnicities are categories that interviewees used to identify themselves and other; to distinguish Us from Them (Table 2: 1). For example, one interviewee described a conflict between religious groups in her hometown. She said: *“you would just be shouted at like white trash like Muslims would shout that to people but it was also the other way around so it was just like a racist area”*. Another interviewee explained how she did not have to travel to encounter groups that are different from her, since they are also found in her hometown. For example, *“both high class or low class or addicts or rich”*. The Other is, in these cases, identified as groups of other religion or socio-economic class and not based on any location or physical distance. The religious and socio-economic categories were used to identify in and outgroups within nations as well as between different multinational regions. Thus, not localized identifications are just as relevant for IR scholars as localized identification. The state-centrism in IR endangers all-encompassing theorizations about identification because this kind of identification is examined in isolation from other kinds of identification (see for example Zha 2017) or deemed as irrelevant in comparison to national identification. Identification with for example cultures and nations does not exist independently, it is one part of one’s identification. This should be accounted for in order to legitimately theorize about identification. For example, even though all interviewees expressed identification with their nation, they also disaffiliated from social groups within their nation, such as groups of other religion and socio-economic class.

Further, as described previously, localized categories, like nations or regions, are not enough to identify the Other. It is not primarily the physical, but the mental distance, that creates the Other. This means that location categories are not enough to theorize about identification; other factors that constitute the Other are equally important. A shorter physical distance may create a smaller mental distance because of historical integration and connectedness. However, this is not always the case: the mental distance between different groups living close to each other can be greater than groups farther away. In the interviews, eastern European countries were more often described as different than for example Canada, even though they are physically closer. And in

the survey, 78,06% claimed that it is possible to “be European” without a European citizenship (Table 1, question 14). In this case, the Other is not constructed based on essentialist, but more obscure, criteria. Localized categories are thus not enough to theorize about identification.

4.3.4 Contextual and Situational Identification

In the collected data, individuals’ identification changed; they were stretched, modified and reversed, especially in the interviews but also in the survey. The problem is that conceptualizations and methodologies in IR have not been adapted accordingly. IR scholars continually operationalize identification in terms of fixed categories that are unable to account for contextuality and situationality. Also surveys from the Eurobarometer and WVS are based on fixed categories that recognize neither of these characteristics. The important “why?” and “when?” are ignored. In the conducted interviews, on the other hand, these questions were asked. They revealed an important insight: when identifying themselves, interviewees seek the most specific category that is appropriate for the situation they are in (Table 1, question 2). Thus, the aim when expressing any identification is to be as specific as possible, but still understandable and relevant. This stresses that a rare identification category, like Europe, not necessarily represents a weak identification, but rather that the contexts, in which that identification is activated, are rare.

4.4 The Nation State: A (un?)Threatened Hegemon

Since identification categories have been examined as dichotomous and contradictive, many IR scholars have interpreted increasing European integration and evolving European identification as a threat towards the nation state’s sovereignty and hegemony. Identification is viewed as a zero-sum game. If other units in the international system gained public support or loyalty, the nation state would suffer a disadvantage. However, so far, there is no proof that individuals’ identification with Europe should be interpreted as a threat towards the nation state. Before jumping to such a conclusion, it should be recognized that all surveys, including my own, and the majority of all IR research, claim that the nation state still dominates the international system and identification categories. The WVS from 2010-2014 did for example report that 91.7% of people under the age of 29 born in Europe “strongly agree” or “agree” that they see themselves as citizens of their “[country] nation”, whereas 20.4 percentage points less chose the same answer categories for the same question about the EU (WVS, “I see myself as citizen of the “European Union”).

According to IR scholars, no other units, local or national, have been able to seriously threaten the nation state's sovereignty. Research rather suggests that new forms of hybrid identifications, that combine national and European identification, are evolving (Table 2:3). So, when conceptualizing identification in terms of categories, national identification remains dominant. However, even if flexible conceptualizations of identification would recognize that identification with Europe is equally strong, it would not necessarily indicate that nations are losing their sovereignty. Accordingly, even if European integration would lead to a weakening of states' sovereignty, we cannot be sure that individuals' identification with the nation state would decline proportionately. So far, no such correlation has been established. This is because individuals, just like states, identify with multiple units and because these identifications are both contextual and combinable. Accordingly, there are different contexts where different identifications are activated. My gathered data thus suggests that individuals identify with Europe and the nations in different contexts and that they are not dichotomous. Rather, interviewees viewed Europe and the EU primarily as a collective *of nations*, and not as a post-national system. For example, one interviewee said the EU is good because "*countries that have a strong economy and well-built infrastructure can use this wealth to help other countries*". Further, the connotations with Europe (Table 2:5) show that interviewees largely view Europe as something positive *for nation states*, and not as a threat or challenge against them.

Just as the WVS, Eurobarometer and previous IR research, my survey and interviews showed that, in terms of explicit identification, people rather identify with their nation than with Europe. However, that claim is not an endpoint in my study. The discursive research approach also accentuates that dominant identification categories are not natural but enabled by the exercise of soft power and construction of "regimes of truth". By recognizing who is benefiting from dominant categories, we can assume the strength of actors' soft power and ability to shape discourses. In both IR research and individuals' narratives, the nation dominates identification (Table 1, question 1, 3, 7, Table 2: 1, 4) and is seen as a natural identification hegemon. As outlined above, other types of identification are appreciated in relation to the nation. Thus, most identification, at macro, meso and micro-levels, emanates from an understanding of the state as the "naturally strongest" identification. However, when the juxtapositional method is employed and indirect expressions of identification are recognized, European identification does sometimes even surpass the nation state in my data. For example, among the respondents that recognized that there is something like "European values and norms", 84,91% felt that these correspond with their personal values and norms, for the same question about the EU, 82,08%

agreed, but fewer (78,49%) felt the same about national values and norms (Table 1, question 9B, 10B, 11B) . This means, importantly, that an examination of explicit versus indirect expressions of identification produces different results. Thus, what is “true” about identification varies depending on how it is conceptualized and operationalized. That certain categories (for example Europe) are used less frequently does not necessarily mean that there is a lack of identification with the unit that the category represents. As shown in the survey, collectives or individuals might choose not to identify with certain categories, but they might identify with aspects of what the category entails, for example its values and norms.

So, the reason that nations dominate identification categories and discourses might not only depend on the nation state’s sovereignty and political power in the international system, but also on how it has been fixed in discourses and how identification categories are interpreted. Identification with other groups and collectives are obvious in the gathered data, but state-centric discourses construct a truth about the nation as a natural identification hegemon, which obstructs the exposure of other identifications. However, Milliken’s subjugated knowledge method (1999:242) enables the visualization of other social groups and collectives as equally natural and “true”. This visualization of alternative accounts accentuates how identification with Europe, cultures, socio-economic groups etc. are not inferior to national identification. This means, that there is nothing natural or fixed about the nation’s position. Accordingly, history quickly disregards such claims. The problem is, that even though many IR scholars would agree with this claim, it does not show in their research. Identification scholarship have paid concerningly little attention to the nexus between power, identification and discourse. The domination of the nation state is seldomly questioned or examined but presented as axiomatic. This is another sign of the nation’s hegemony; also IR scholars are accepting and contributing to the discourse in which this “knowledge” is constructed because they participate in the discourse that reinforces the nation state’s soft power.

The thesis at hand has not sought to disclaim the prominence of nation states, but to remind that this is a social construct and that its discourse dominance is depending on its soft power; thus, it could change. My research showed that alternative “knowledges” are enabled in discourses that do not completely overlap with this dominating one. State-centric discourses diminishes the importance of alternative identifications. For example, in the Eurobarometer, WVS and IR literature, “the European identity” is reported as weak or non-existent when respondents 1) are presented to a dichotomy between Europe and the nation 2) are forced to choose between the nation or Europe 3) must appreciate their identification with Europe relative to the nation.

Thereby, identification research only takes place within the dominant discourse. It emanates from national identification and is unable to distinct between identification with categories on the one hand, and feelings, acts or indirect expressions of identification on the other hand. The thesis at hand has provided examples of how this might endanger theorizations about the international system. If we as IR scholars uncritically contribute to the dominant discourse, we might miss phenomena in the international system that this discourse ignores or rejects. By circumventing identification categories, individuals in my study were able to express identifications that are not overlapping with the dominant discourse. This showed, that the reported lack of “a European identity” might not be the result of an actual lack of identification with Europe, but that the dominant discourses, which benefit the nation state, hinder European identification to take place in discourse, especially when directly related or compared to the nation state. However, discourse is productive and also contributes to actual feelings of identification. So, since the national identification has been fixed in discourse for a relatively long time, it has constructed the “knowledge” that national identification is superior. Thus, alternative identifications (for example hybrid and contextual) are hindered in dominating discourses, where identification is understood in terms of axiomatic, dichotomous categories.

5. Conclusion: New Ways Forward for IR Identification Scholarship

This thesis asked how identification research in IR could be improved. First, it answered why this is needed and secondly, how it could be done. The following sections summarize the findings and present the thesis' conclusions.

The incorporation of the micro-level was beneficial for highlighting fallacies of previous research. It contributed with insights into how collective identifications are fluid, contextual and ambiguous. Accordingly, the thesis demonstrated that it is impossible to operationalize identification in a clear-cut, unambiguous way without compromising its complex dimensionality. Such a compromise results in the production of a biased "truth" about how people identify themselves and the Other. This endangers the reliability and relevance of IR research. For this purpose, the thesis contemporized research methods and operationalized identification in a flexible, all-encompassing and sensitive manner. Even though obscure operationalizations are often criticized in IR, this thesis exemplified why identification scholarship must embrace them to transmit accurate understandings of identification.

Previous IR scholarship has often contributed to dominant discourses by reducing identification to state-centric, fixed categories that are presented as axiomatic. This thesis gave examples of how this effects not only the accuracy of IR theories about the international system but also general understandings of identification. For example, the thesis showed that IR scholarship has underestimated especially four types of identification, namely: identification with Europe, regional/local identification, not localized identification, and contextual and situational identification. Neglecting these identifications sets IR's relevance and ability to explain international phenomena at play.

The literature review explained how state-centric approaches have been insufficient for theorizing about identification previously. Accordingly, my discourse analysis showed that state-centrism disadvantages theories about the 21st century's complex international system by producing a generally accepted "truth" about the national identification as dominant. The conducted survey presented that when the national category was included, alternative forms of identifications were disfavored. However, the target group did express identification with Europe and various, not localized, social groups in both the survey and interviews. Though, since these expressions were indirect and not explicitly referred to in terms of "identity" or "identification", they are neglected in current dominant discourses where identification is reduced to fixed, state-centric categories. Thus, identification scholarship must encompass

alternative expressions of identification to understand, who the Other is and how it is constructed, which is a deciding factor for international relations.

This thesis' main conclusion is that discourse is vital for identification and, accordingly, for identification scholarship. Discourse shaped not only the results of the conducted survey and interviews, but also the thesis' research design. One of the research aims was to reveal alternative truths and knowledges about identification by avoiding dominant discourses. Ironically, this was impossible to do without including dominant discourses in the argument. Hence, dominant discourses could not be completely avoided but were necessary for the thesis' purpose. This insight accentuates how discourse dictates the possibilities to speak about identification. Further, the analysis gave examples of how all results from identification research depend on how identification is conceptualized and operationalized, how questions are phrased, and what possibilities the target group has, to express themselves and their identifications. Concerning this, the thesis showed that surveys are of limited use for identification research; partly because pre-defined categories limit respondents' possibilities to express their identification and partly because surveys only enable examinations of identification that the researcher foresaw and thus incorporated in questions or answer options. This makes it hard to circumvent dominant discourses and rather contributes to an understanding of identification as reducible to fixed, dichotomous categories. Such fallacies are easier to avoid in in-depth, biographical interviews where the interviewee dictates the conditions and decides the content without having to navigate between pre-constructed categories. However, in this research, the survey did, in combination with interviews, provide both complex and all-encompassing understandings of the nexus between discourse and identification.

5.2 Final Thoughts and Suggestions for Future Research

The need to contemporize methods and approaches of identification research has been verified throughout this thesis. Various examples of how previous IR scholarship has produced limited understandings of identification and how research could improve have been provided. One continuous argument has been that identification research requires flexible and adaptable frameworks. So, instead of proposing any framework, three points will now summarize appropriate research approaches for future IR identification research.

First, identification should be analyzed as a *process* that produces social constructs. There is nothing inherently natural or fixed about the nation state's hegemony or other kind of identifications' irrelevance or relative weakness. Secondly, IR scholarship must recognize how

operationalizations affect research results and knowledge about identification. This includes scrutinizing the role of categories, phrasing and methods in identification research. Thirdly, future research must embrace the complexity of identification. Identifications are ambiguous, fluid and contextual. To produce valid claims about identification, operationalization must recognize these traits.

Hopefully, these points will stimulate discussions on how identification can be researched in an operationalizable yet all-encompassing and accurate manner. It is my belief that such innovative discussions would ensure IR's relevance in identification research.

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Appendices

Included Material:

1. Survey

Who is European? What are European identities?

THANK YOU FOR BEING HERE!

My name is Rebecka Ambjörnsson, I am a student of International Relations at Malmö University and this survey is part of my bachelor thesis. The purpose is to examine how European identities are constructed and discussed. Therefore, I want to know more about how and when young people identify with different places.

By submitting your answers to this survey, you give consent to the usage of your answers in my research. However, no names will be used!

Personal information

1. If you want to be anonymous...

Click here

.. otherwise write your name here (you will be anonymous in the thesis)

2. Age

27-30

22-26

18-21

3. City of residence

4. Country of origin

5. How many people live in your city of origin?

More than 2 million

1 million - 2 million

300.000 - 1 million

100.000 - 300.000

50.000 - 100.000

0 – 50.000

6. Occupation

Now to the fun part!

In the coming questions, "Europe" refers to the geographical region and not to the European Union (EU).

7. Do you see yourself as European?

- Yes
- No
- Other answer: _____

8. Do you feel like you have benefited from being born in Europe?

- Yes
- No
- Other answer: _____

9. In the following list, mark all places that you identify with. More than one answer is possible. Feel free to add more options.

- Your home (apartment, house)
- Your country of origin
- A place of worship (mosque, church, synagogue etc.)
- Your region of residence
- Your hometown
- Europe
- Your region of origin
- The EU
- A sports club
- Your country of residence
- Your workplace
- A holiday resort
- Other answer

10. Have you ever traveled within Europe?

- Yes
- No

11. Have you ever traveled outside of Europe?

- Yes
- No

12. Have you ever explicitly said "I am European" or "I am from Europe"?

- Yes, I do it often
- Yes, occasionally

- Yes, once or twice
- I don't think so
- No, never

13. Have you ever said "I am from [country of origin]" or "I am [nationality]"? For example, Ireland/Irish etc.

- Yes, I do it often
- Yes, occasionally
- Yes, once or twice
- I don't think so
- No, never

14. Have you ever said something equivalent to "I am from [domicile]" or "I am [domicile]"? For example, Helsinki/Helsinkian etc.

- Yes, I do it often
- Yes, occasionally
- Yes, once or twice
- I don't think so
- No, never

15 A. According to you, is there something like "European values and norms"?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

15 B. If you answered YES above: Do you feel like these European values and norms correspond with your personal values and norms?

- Yes, mostly
- No, mostly not

16 A. According to you, is there something like "values and norms of the EU"?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

16 B. If you answered YES above: Do you feel like the EU's values and norms correspond with your personal values and norms?

- Yes, mostly
- No, mostly not

17 A. According to you, is there something like "national values and norms" in your country of origin?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

17 B. If you answered YES above: Do you feel like these national values and norms correspond with your personal values and norms?

- Yes, mostly
- No, mostly not

18. Could you imagine living and working in another European country than your country of origin for 20 years?

- Yes
- No

19. Could you imagine living and working in a country outside of Europe for 20 years?

- Yes
- No

20. In your opinion, is it possible to "be European" without a European citizenship?

- Yes
- No

21. Would you be willing to do an interview? If yes, write your name and how you would like to be contacted. This is not binding nor an assurance that I will ask you for an interview.
