CONSTRUCTING EUROPE'S IDENTITY

THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION

EDITED BY LARS-ERIK CEDERMAN

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Constructing Europe's Identity

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Lars-Erik Cederman

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Political Boundaries and Identity Trade-Offs

Lars-Erik Cederman

The Treaty on European Union, signed at Maastricht, put the question of Europe's identity firmly on the research and policy agendas. According to its first title, the European Union (EU) should strive "to assert its identity on the international scene." But the treaty is only one of several reasons for the current surge of interest in identity-related issues. The ratification crises following the signing of the treaty and the ongoing controversy about the EU's legitimacy have also highlighted the identity issue. In addition, the end of the Cold War has prompted a heated debate about the EU's eastern border, a discussion that is likely to continue for years to come.[1] As more authority is transferred to Brussels without a corresponding increase in the EU's popularity figures, a creeping malaise is undermining the legitimacy of the entire integration process.[2] The golden days of Jean Monnet's functional integration are definitely over.

Realizing this fundamental shift, we attempt in this volume to break new theoretical ground on which to base future theorizing of European integration and identity formation. This task involves reassessing and criticizing the conventional theories of integration, as well as applying theories and concepts drawn from related but hitherto comparatively neglected disciplines, including social theory, anthropology, and the literature on nationalism.

Despite its ostensibly self-evident quality, Europe belongs to the most elusive and contested entities in today's international system.[3] It is certainly not for lack of trying that Europe resists a commonly agreed-upon definition. In the 1960s the pioneering federalist Denis de Rougemont thought (perhaps somewhat prematurely) that he had found the Rosetta stone to European identity: "Here then is a measura-

ble fact which depends neither on pride nor our humility as Europeans, one which can be easily verified, the objective data for which can be read off our global atlases and economic maps pending the day when they are photographed by a man-made satellite: *Europe is actually the centre of the world.*"[4] Yet the launching of European satellites has done little to answer the identity question. This does not come as a surprise to William Wallace, who believes that "it is the task of the politician and the lawyer, more than of the geographer or the economist, to reduce . . . loosely defined spaces to precise and bounded territories. The boundaries of Europe are a matter of politics and of ideology."[5] If satellite technology fails to deliver the solution, it might thus be hoped that careful scrutiny of the legal instruments of the European Union would clarify the issue.

Such hopes also prove ill founded: Despite several references to a European identity, the Maastricht Treaty never formally defines the concept. The more recent Amsterdam Treaty adds little in the way of definition. Even though the EU is eager to project its power in world affairs, it remains unclear what the union stands for. Going back to the Treaty of Rome is no more helpful: Article 237 specifies that "any European country is eligible for membership to the EC" but fails to define what "Europeanness" stands for. Given the absence of an explicit legal definition and the plethora of competing identities, it is indeed hard to avoid the conclusion that Europe is an essentially contested concept.[6]

Why bother, then? Is it really necessary to engage in philosophical hair-splitting? As long as the European integration process advances, there appears to be little need to coordinate the notions of Europe that exist in people's minds. From this pragmatic standpoint, Michel Rochard admits to "being rather indifferent to the spurious controversy between the proponents of a federal Europe and those of an intergovernmentalist one. What we are constructing, in fact, has on the face of it no known precedent. . . . Thus let us refer to Europe and wait until it is created before defining it."[7]

As Paul Thibaud has argued, however, such a leap into the dark borders on irresponsibility rather than pragmatism, for while an explicit discussion of identity issues carries with it certain risks, so does its absence.[8] Silences and omissions in identity politics are often as eloquent as heated arguments.

Instead of relying on geographical eyeballing or legalistic inspection, this book adopts an interactive approach to the definitional puzzle. A firmer grasp of Europe's identity (or identities) can be obtained by studying how its boundaries emerge out of specific interactions with the EU's external environment. From this vantage point, the main question becomes how these interactive processes are regulated through

inclusionary or exclusionary mechanisms and how such practices drive, and even constitute, the process of identity formation. More specifically, is there a trade-off between the exclusion of "non-European" goods, states, or people on the one hand and the strengthening of the EU's identity on the other hand?

By focusing on the external dimension, this collection of essays contributes to the literature on European identity formation. Although much has been written on the identity issue, so far there has been no book-length study of the EU's processes of boundary building.[9] Moreover, this book adopts a more critical stance with respect to identity formation than is common. Many integrationist politicians and scholars who study institution-building take the desirability of a common European external identity for granted: "Invariably defined in a positive way, [integration] implies the idea of relations transcending the nation-state as well as voluntary cooperation and peaceful change."[10]

This volume, by contrast, assesses not only the benefits but also the potential costs of attempts to assert Europe's identity. Those who try to forge a European identity and to put forward European ideals and values abroad need to consider not only the respective merits of "deepening" and "widening" but also the negative effects of "exclusion" and "dilution." On the one hand, defining too narrow an identity for Europe risks excluding foreign goods, immigrants, and entire countries. On the other hand, a wide and unfocused definition of "Europe" may dilute the very values that the European identity was intended to protect and project in the first place.

More specifically, the EU's structure suggests possible trade-offs associated with each of its three pillars. Since the first pillar, the European Communities, defines the economic core of the union, it is natural to consider the twin specters of trade protectionism and erosion of a European life-style in social and cultural terms. The second pillar, the Common Foreign and Security Policy, presupposes a political identity in external affairs. Will the inclusion of peripheral countries in the European Union undermine the EU's commitment to democracy and human rights and thwart the decisionmaking capacity required to project these values outside its borders? Finally, although the third pillar, pertaining to cooperation in the fields of Justice and Home Affairs, concerns mainly internal aspects of European integration, it also has important external repercussions. Here the possibility of a trade-off between exclusion and identity formation evokes the question of whether Europe's civic identity requires restrictions on the movement of people across EU borders and, if so, what the membership criteria should be.

Before turning to the empirical examples of interaction processes and their potential trade-offs, it is useful to consider the underlying

logic connecting exchanges and identity formation. While this volume reinforces the need to disaggregate such processes according to the substantive issue at hand, the next three sections introduce the theoretical background of external identity formation in abstract terms. We start by exploring the notion of boundaries and how they are linked to identity trade-offs, followed by a survey of four ideal-type approaches to identity formation. Then the focus returns to the boundary logic in the light of the four theoretical schemes. Together these sections are meant to provide a general conceptual map before we break up the analysis according to the policy area under scrutiny. After the theoretical discussion, this chapter ends with two sections on the methodological assumptions and a preview of the individual contributions to this volume.

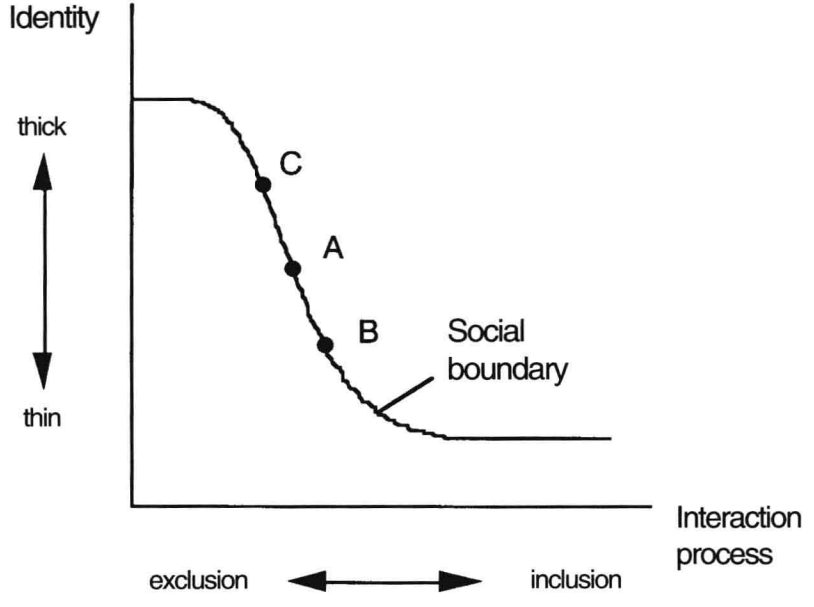
Theorizing Social Boundaries

Social boundaries are the key to interactive identity formation, for in regulating the flows going into and out of a group, these mechanisms shape the collectivity's notion of selfhood. Though using the language of independent and dependent variables can be deceptive given the inherent endogeneity of dynamic processes, it makes sense to think of Europe's identity as our main dependent variable and external interaction as the main independent one. Boundaries, then, mediate between a social organization's inside and outside. While some mechanisms operate inside such entities, there can be no general theory of identity formation without at least a rudimentary notion of boundaries.

How, more precisely, do boundaries shape identities? In order to reduce the complexity of this tricky question, I draw on one of the few political scientists who have analyzed boundary formation explicitly. Because of his interest in social communication, Karl Deutsch traced not only information exchanges but also the hurdles that lie in their way: "What really makes a *boundary* is a sharp drop in the frequency of some relevant transaction flow."[11] Observing that the density of transactions declines with distance, Deutsch studied the particular shape of density curves. While some "step-functions" exhibit a sudden fall in interactions, others, referred to as "threshold boundaries," are smoother.[12]

While replacing the behaviorist notion of interaction frequencies by a focus on an intersubjective measure of identity as the dependent variable, I draw inspiration from Deutsch's boundary curves.[13] Loosely modeled on Deutsch's graphical schemes, Figure 1.1 illustrates a stylized identity trade-off. The horizontal axis marks the openness of any interaction process ranging from exclusion to inclusion along some

Figure 1.1 A Boundary-Mediated Identity Trade-Off



arbitrary dimension of exchange; the vertical one indicates the cultural "thickness" of the resulting identity.[14] Borrowing a dichotomy introduced by Michael Walzer, I define thick identities as those involving a comprehensive functional scope including many cultural aspects of private life. Their thin counterparts, in contrast, are limited to communication within the public sphere and thus to what is absolutely necessary to sustain political communication.[15]

To understand how this particular boundary definition creates an identity trade-off, let us assume that some arbitrary group can be described by the position A on the boundary curve. An attempt to expand the group's scope of interaction by moving to point B will reduce the identity's thickness. This effect captures the trade-off: Under the assumption that the boundary structurally constrains the possible interaction-identity combinations, inclusion can be had only at the price of dilution. Conversely, if the group seeks to "thicken" its identity in transition from A to C, exclusion will be the necessary side effect. In essence, inclusion and intensification of identities cannot be achieved at the same time. Whichever direction is chosen, the result is either dilution or exclusion.

It goes without saying that the shape of the boundary curve determines the nature, and even existence, of the trade-off. The sharper and more abrupt the boundary's drop, the more dramatic the loss of thickness beyond some level of inclusion. In the case of a vertical line, the boundary marks a razor-sharp, all-or-nothing limit. In contrast, a horizontal line represents the other extreme case. Here there is no boundary effect at all, and as a consequence no trade-off either. The interaction process runs orthogonally to the level of cultural identity formation, and inclusion can be embraced without any concern for cultural dilution.

It may seem that this bare-bones account lacks theoretical relevance, but this is far from the case. In fact, the idea that boundaries contribute to the crystallization of identities is not a new one. Sociologists, social psychologists, geographers, anthropologists, and indeed some political scientists have developed sophisticated conceptualizations along these lines. To start with the latter, no analytical review would be complete without a reference to Albert Hirschman's brilliant *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*, which explicitly connects the internal structure with boundary mechanisms.[16] It is precisely the postulated negative relationship between "exit" and "voice" that connects a group's internal structure with its external dimension. Yet Hirschman's account is not directly applicable to our main puzzle, since his primary interest concerns movement out of the group rather than entry. In this respect, Stein Rokkan's application of Hirschman's logic to various cases of European state formation offers a more direct example of the exclusion-dilution dilemma. Breaking up his analysis along functional lines, Rokkan articulated mechanisms of boundary control operating according to an economic, cultural, power, or administrative logic. Like the contributors to this volume, he studied barriers to the flow of different units, such as goods, services, information, and people.[17]

To find earlier illustrations of explicit theorizing about boundaries, it is necessary to broaden our search from political science to sociology. Georg Simmel's famous conflict hypothesis offers perhaps the best-known and earliest example of a sociological theory connecting a group's inside with its outside.[18] According to this famous postulate, external conflict increases in-group cohesion. Translated to Figure 1.1, this hypothesis states that exclusion leads to a thicker group identity. Indeed, political scientists have used this idea to explain wars and other cases of political violence.[19] More seldom, however, they have reversed the causal arrows in order to explore the emergence of new and maintenance of already existing boundaries between the conflicting parties.[20] But Simmel's theory goes well beyond the simple but important conflict hypothesis. In fact, Simmel provides arguably the first full-

fledged constructivist account of social boundary processes in time and space. To sum up his position using his own words, "The boundary is not a spatial fact with social implications, but rather a sociological fact that forms spatially."[21]

Following in the footsteps of Simmel and early social psychologists, such as George Herbert Mead, modern social theory has picked up the thread and continued to spin an often somewhat convoluted tale involving actors and their "others" interacting their way to selfhood.[22] Building on Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualization of habitus and identity, the German sociologist Bernhard Giesen has developed a theoretical framework for the study of nationalism that helps articulate the central logic of this volume.[23] To place identity into a truly historical perspective, Giesen proposes a process theory that traces boundary-forming practices and mechanisms:

> Boundaries separate and divide the actual multitude of interaction processes and social relations; they mark the distinction between inside and outside, between the foreign and the familiar, kin and alien, friend and foe, culture and nature, enlightenment and barbarism. Precisely because these boundaries are contingent social constructions that could have easily turned out differently, they require social justification and symbolic clarification.[24]

Rather than attempting to distill general principles of boundary formation, Giesen suggests that it is thus more fruitful to explore the "situational construction of difference." This strategy, which is the one informing the structure of this book, requires the analyst to focus on how the actors develop self-images to make sense of particular social environments. Such identities emerge from specific instances of symbolic interaction: "As a result of these communication processes, social structures form such as institutions, boundaries between social groups, etc. Collective identity is thus always a product of social communication processes."[25]

In order to understand the interactive logic of identity formation, then, the attention of the analyst should not be confined to the symbolic sources of internal unity but must be extended to the "ritual of inclusion and exclusion."[26] Whereas in the premodern world, this process boiled down to direct personal contacts, the long-standing trend leading to advances in communication technology has opened the door for abstract, symbolic codes.[27] Niklas Luhmann captures this historical transformation aptly: "Since the late Middle Ages and especially the early modern world, there is a growing trend toward politics of explicit exclusion (which is thus accessible through historical

sources). Targeting abstractly defined groups rather than individuals, exclusion no longer remains under the control of households alone, but is part and parcel of the politics of professional organizations and territorial states."[28]

Inevitably, this trend toward abstraction leads to a "decoupling of code [i.e., identity] and process," with reification of collective identities the likely result.[29] It is the task of the critical social theorist to engage in reflection as an antidote to such reifying tendencies.[30] As will become clear, the constructivist approach guiding this book encourages problematization of objectified collective identities and mythical accounts of social boundaries.

Political geographers have also had a long-standing interest in boundaries.[31] The last few decades have seen a burgeoning literature on how competing and complementary spatiotemporal constructs are represented in the minds of both insiders and outsiders.[32] Taking his cue from social theory, the Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi introduces the notion of "spatial socialization" defined as "the process through which individual actors and collectivities are socialized as members of specific territorially bounded spatial entities and through which they more or less actively internalize collective territorial identities and shared traditions."[33] A focus on spatial socialization helps clarify the role of boundaries as "political manifestations of political processes" rather than static geographical compartmentalizations. From this standpoint, it is obvious that boundaries not only separate groups from each other but also allow for and regulate intergroup communication.

But it is perhaps in anthropology that we find the most explicit attempts to grapple with the interactive process of identity formation. Anthropologists routinely study interactions as a way to better understand identity formation and maintenance, though until recently mostly in premodern settings such as tribal communities and ethnic groups.[34] Even the briefest survey of anthropological perspectives on boundaries has to start with the classical volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries,* edited by the Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth.[35] Whereas previous generations of anthropologists had been cataloguing ethnic groups according to their ostensibly objective cultural traits while holding their identities constant, Barth problematized boundaries as his conceptual starting point. In his view, "ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built."[36] Here the original idea of interactive identity formation recurs in an especially lucid form.

Built on the (sometimes modified) foundations of Barth's interactive approach to boundary formation, contemporary anthropology con-

ceives of social groups as socially constructed through social institutions and everyday practices. More recently, many anthropologists have attempted to liberate themselves from the professional norms of exoticism celebrating the hardship of fieldwork in the Third World by adding cultural phenomena of the developed world to their research agendas.[37]

In particular, Cris Shore's work on European identity formation anticipates more closely the analytical focus of the present volume. Combining fieldwork in Brussels with theoretically informed analysis of the European Commission's cultural policies, Shore adopts similar assumptions as those guiding the chapters that follow. In addition to being explicitly constructivist, his perspective also stresses the interactive nature of identity formation: "By emphasizing the 'imagined' and 'invented' character of collective identities, [anthropological approaches] alert us to the fact that all communities—European as well as nation—are culturally constructed. They also highlight the fact that identity-formation is an ambiguous and dualistic process involving the manipulation of boundaries and the mobilization of difference for strategies of inclusion and exclusion."[38] Agreeing with the conclusion that official EU sources fail to define Europe, the interactive approach to identities and boundaries offers crucial clues that help disentangle the definitional puzzle: "Evidence of a more coherent 'applied' definition can be seen emerging at the borders and boundaries of the new Europe, particularly in the spheres of immigration control and external customs barriers. In these areas the terms 'non-EC nationals,' 'third countries' and 'non-European' are being defined with increasing precision and thus, as if by default, an 'official' definition of European is being constructed."[39] Although the starting point is politics rather than culture, the structure of this volume reflects closely Shore's reference to identity formation in specific policy areas.

This brief multidisciplinary review of the literature has served to illustrate the importance of boundaries for the emergence of collective identities. Albeit applied to very diverse empirical settings, these analytical perspectives share the basic idea that groups categorize themselves by regulating the communicative flows between themselves and their respective environments. It is this fact that enables the analyst to adopt a pragmatic, interaction-oriented strategy of "revealed identities," to paraphrase the rational-choice equivalent.[40]

Four Approaches to Identity Formation

The previous section's graphical depiction of social boundaries begs the question as to the curves' shape. The answer of course hinges on under-