

CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY IN GERMANY
DURING THE EURO AND REFUGEE CRISES OF THE EU

International Relations Multidisciplinary Doctoral School

THESIS BOOKLET



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1. Research Background and Justification of the Topic

The process of European integration aimed to raise the feeling of common European identity which triggers the sense of belonging of the European public to the European community. That was self-evident in Jean Monnet's statement that "We are not bringing together states, we are uniting people" in 1952. As against the difficulties in forming a shared European identity, European unification adopted the precious motto of "United we stand, divided we fall". The concept is mostly based on the envisagement of common European cultural policy initiatives in accordance with the Maastricht Treaty's object to "... bring the common cultural heritage to the fore".¹ The treaty also refers that "the Community shall contribute to the flowering of the cultures of the member states while respecting their national and regional diversity". With this respect, the Treaty envisaged constructing a common European identity based not only on gathering shared culture and history, but also conformity with the 'cultural diversity'.² In this light, Formation of the collective European identity with the European integration appeared as a continuous process of formation that involved discursive constructions within the public spheres by the political and media discourses promoting achievements of the Union such as common currency, motto, flag, anthem as the symbols of the sense of solidarity that can boost and increase the sense of belonging to and identification with Europe.

Against the backdrop of such a top-down process of identity construction in the making, the EU has always faced various forms of crises posing critical junctures and uncertain moments for the course of the European integration process³. While they entailed a risk of temporary stand stillness for the healthy process of European political project, historical overview of the crises revealed that general understanding has been that European integration has been moving forward through crises which have a certain role in shaping what the EU of today has become.⁴

Yet, recently experienced crises starting from the economic crisis of the Eurozone, challenged EU so unprecedentedly that the repercussions of the crises included EU's loss of its legitimacy to a certain extent, decreasing trust of the people to elite-driven policies, blossom of Eurosceptic movements and rift towards national-interest based policies and political agendas. The crises plunged the EU into various forms of challenges within which reconciliation among

¹ Tsaliki, L. (2007). The construction of European identity and citizenship through cultural policy. *European studies: a journal of European culture, history and politics*, 24(1), 157-182, p.159.

² Kap, D. (2006). *European Identity & The European Union: The Prospects and Limits*. MA Thesis: Middle East Technical University, p. 59.

³ Kjaer, P. F., & Olsen, N. (2016). Critical theories of crisis in Europe: from Weimar to the Euro..

⁴ Özoflu, M. A. (2017). *Rethinking European integration process in the light of crises* (Master's thesis).

member states for the common European good became an incrementally daunting task.⁵ Therefore, the relevant scientific inquiries within the literature often engaged with the questions of European solidarity, member states' willingness of giving up their sovereignty to a certain extent in times of crisis.⁶

Because of the emergence of the above-mentioned issues, the crises triggered the fundamental issues of identity which need an approach encompassing a certain sociological reference beyond the technocratic levels of economic and political setbacks. The reason was that technocratic setbacks including insufficiency or overload of the existing mechanisms stemming from the repercussions of the crises forced member states to formulate temporary/permanent mechanisms in responding to the crises. Accordingly, European integration became incrementally salient and politicized within the national political settings of the member states along with the wide articulations of both political and media discourses debating about Europe in addressing formulation of and formulated policy responses to the crises. In this context, the experienced euro and refugee crises of the EU have provided a viable ground for the articulations of the different manifestations of the European identity construction implying 'what it means to be European' as well. In this context, identity construction in shaping in-group members' social cognition and levels of identification with and sense of belonging to an in-group by the political and media discourses gained relevance and critical importance.

This is because, during these times of social, reorganization of multiple identities of the individuals presenting the typical shape of Russian Matroska dolls which refers that the member of a smaller community is also a member of a larger community at the same time come to the fore.⁷ It resulted that in-group members may experience doubt about each other and themselves.⁸ They have doubts about which identity to present and how to present it or about whether the presented identity is validated or to what extent. Too much identity doubt makes planning difficult and leads to deeper doubt about the self. In this respect, we conclude that the social, economic, and political processes may affect the construction, deconstruction, and

⁵ Ross, G. (2011). *The European Union and its crises: through the eyes of the Brussels' elite*. Springer, p.2.

⁶ Jabko, N., & Luhman, M. (2019). Reconfiguring sovereignty: crisis, politicization, and European integration. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26(7), 1037-1055.; Beetz, J. P. (2019). Safeguarding, shifting, splitting or sharing? Conflicting conceptions of popular sovereignty in the EU-polity. *Journal of European Integration*, 41(7), 937-953; Parsanoglou, D. (2020). Volunteering for refugees and the repositioning of state sovereignty and civil society: the case of Greece. *Citizenship Studies*, 24(4), 457-473.; Kramer, Z. (2019). Fiscal Sovereignty under EU Crisis Management: A Comparison of Greece and Hungary. *Acta Oeconomica*, 69(4), 595-624; Saurugger, S., & Terpan, F. (2019). The Court of Justice of the European Union, conflicts of sovereignty and the EMU crisis. *Journal of European Integration*, 41(7), 903-920.

⁷ Weigert, A. J., Teitge, J. S., Teitge, J. S., & Teitge, D. W. (2007). *Society and identity: Toward a sociological psychology*. Cambridge University Press.

⁸ *Ibid.*

reconstruction of the identity. They may be subject to change or fluctuate because of the social, economic, or political instabilities and setbacks within the ingroup. In this respect, crises have opened up a possible leeway for the member states to become less Euro-centric because of the possible dramatic repercussions.⁹ Therefore, political and media discourse became a critical tool of disseminating the collective identity construction that may increase citizens' sense of belonging to and identification with Europe. Especially, identity construction focusing on increasing the level of commitment to ingroup for the sake of the common good of the community is regarded as highly instrumental in convincing European citizens to bear the dramatic consequences and costs of the crises. Hence, I believe that any investigation of the crises of the EU needs to set up a be certain emphasis, reference, and ground for the way how European collective identity construction is manifested at both national and European levels. Only through such an approach, the micro-level of the individual and the macro-level of the social order within the crises can be bridged.¹⁰

Based on such a departure point to the phenomena of the crisis, this research aims to reveal the manifestations of the European identity construction by the political and media discourses respectively during the Euro crisis and the refugee crisis within the case study country: Germany.

2. Methodology and Research Design

The research qualitatively analyzed political and media discourses produced in Germany during the specific time frames of the Euro and Refugee crises. The importance of the media and political discourse for the central tenets of the research can be explained by the fact that they both became important arenas for the formation of public opinion on crisis-related matters and the relevant European identity construction. Within the political realm, the discourse served as a means of instrumentalization of the identity construction regarding the justification of the adopted decisions and policies for the solution of the crises that would also include the persuasion of the European public to bear the dramatic repercussions of the crises. In addition, political discourse in fact includes political information processing by providing a “mental representation about political situations, events, actors, and groups.”¹¹ Such representations unravel the political beliefs or political judgments hidden behind the cognitive foundation of the discourse, which is called political cognition by Van Dijk.¹²

⁹ Zielonka, J. (2014). *Is the EU doomed?*. John Wiley & Sons.

¹⁰ Preece, S. (Ed.). (2016). *The Routledge handbook of language and identity*. Routledge., p.3.

¹¹ Van Dijk, T. A. (2002). Political Discourse and Political Cognition. In Chilton, P., & Schäffner, C. (Eds.). (2002). *Politics as text and talk: Analytic approaches to political discourse* (Vol. 4) (pp. 203-239). John Benjamins Publishing., pp.206-207.

¹² *Ibid.*

As for the media realm, discursive practices in the media can enlighten the critical inquiries regarding:

“How is the world represented?”¹³

“What identities are set up for those involved in the story?”¹⁴

“What relationships are set up between those involved?”¹⁵

Through giving a viable ground of analysis for such inquiries, media discourse is expected to constitute social and culture change within the society. Moreover, it also provides a critical interface for the transaction between policy makers and the civil society.¹⁶ Therefore, the political and media discourses are chosen as a framework of analysis.

Within a plethora of political and media discourses, German national newspaper articles, political statements including press releases and public speeches of the policymakers are chosen as data to be collected. Rather than discursive materials such as party programs or election materials having diverse focal points with an agenda of electoral competition and concerns, the research is particularly interested in how discursive material communicating about the crisis constructs identity explicitly or implicitly. Thus, political speeches, newspaper articles and press releases specifically produced over the crisis-related issues were points of the target.

The chosen case study country i.e., Germany has a unique position in mediating and solving both crises which deemed the country to take somehow a leadership position against its traditional ‘leadership avoidance reflex’¹⁷ because of its Nazi past that presents its historical otherness to Europe. In this respect, on the one hand, crises have created a place for the country to demonstrate its historical commitment to Europe, on the other hand, they led to the articulations of different understanding attributed to the meaning of being a European and European community. Moreover, the fact that post-war national German identity is constructed hand in hand with the European identity, levels of identification is relatively higher than other member states. Germany which embraced the commitment to the project of Europeanization is generally regarded as the promoter of the European integration process.¹⁸ Thus, it is believed analysis on Germany will produce a valuable output in terms of the motivations of this research in the face of the arising question of whether manifestations of European identity construction

¹³ Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Koopmans, R., & Statham, P. (Eds.). (2010). *The making of a European public sphere: Media discourse and political contention*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁷ Hyde-Price, A. G. (2015). The “sleep-walking giant” awakes: resetting German foreign and security policy. *European security*, 24(4), 600-616.

¹⁸ Hurrelmann, Achim. "Constructing multilevel legitimacy in the European Union: A study of British and German media discourse." *Comparative European Politics* 6, no. 2 (2008): 190-211.

are successfully articulated only in periods of prosperity. Accordingly, the main research question of the current research is formulated as such:

How European identity construction was manifested during the Euro crisis and refugee crisis of the European Union by the political and media discourse in the German national setting?

Establishing such a central research question necessitated taking various issues into account to reach overarching findings and results. As complementary to such inquiry, the relevant hypotheses are formulated as in the following:

Hypothesis 1. The change in the identity construction is directly correlated to be reflected by the social processes within the society.

Hypothesis 2. The manifestations of the European identity construction appeared differently in framing the different EU crises.

The research employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) with a specific emphasis of discourse-historical approach (DHA). Several studies are utilizing quantitative methods in addressing European identity.¹⁹ However, this research shares the argument that quantitative methods such as survey research such as Eurobarometer or opinion polls do not adequately address the issue of European identity and identity construction. While they provide valuable insights especially in understanding the political orientations of the mass public,²⁰ quantitative methods risk imposing outlined answers of the surveys.²¹ Moreover, although previous studies²² have developed various methodological guides on how to measure identity, it is still seen as a slippery concept because of the abstract nature of the identity itself.²³

Therefore, a qualitative analysis frame employing CDA with a special reference to Ruth Wodak's DHA appears a reasonable and suitable choice because of the analytical tools they

¹⁹ On the studies employing quantitative methods to analyze the identity, see: Bruter, M. (2005). *Citizens of Europe?: the emergence of a mass European identity*. Springer.; Ejaz, W. (2019). *European Identity and Media Effects: A Quantitative Comparative Analysis* (Doctoral dissertation, Universitätsbibliothek); Van de Steeg, M. (2006). Does a public sphere exist in the European Union? An analysis of the content of the debate on the Haider case. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45(4), 609-634; Koopmans, R., & Statham, P. (Eds.). (2010). *The making of a European public sphere: Media discourse and political contention*. Cambridge University Press.

²⁰ Moravcsik, A. (2006). What can we learn from the collapse of the European constitutional project?. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 47(2), 219-241.

²¹ Checkel, J. T., & Katzenstein, P. J. (Eds.). (2009). *European identity*. Cambridge University Press.

²² On the studies developing concept for measuring identity, see: Abdelal, R., Herrera, Y. M., Johnston, A. I., & McDermott, R. (Eds.). (2009). *Measuring identity: A guide for social scientists*. Cambridge University Press; Schwartz, S. J., Zamboanga, B. L., Wang, W., & Olthuis, J. V. (2009). Measuring identity from an Eriksonian perspective: Two sides of the same coin?. *Journal of personality assessment*, 91(2), 143-154; Adams, L. L. (2009). Techniques for measuring identity in ethnographic research. *Measuring identity: A guide for social scientists*, 316-341; Abdelal, R., Herrera, Y. M., Johnston, A. I., & McDermott, R. (2006). Identity as a Variable. *Perspectives on politics*, 695-711.

²³ Flesher Fominaya, C. (2010). Collective identity in social movements: Central concepts and debates. *Sociology Compass*, 4(6), 393-404.

offer which enable to investigate the main research question of this study aiming to reveal the construction of the European identity in Germany contextualized within the crisis context of the EU. CDA regards the context within which the discourse is produced as crucial.²⁴ Moreover, both media and political discourse have been the central focus of analysis in CDA.²⁵ Thus, adopting a qualitative research frame better answers the research focus of this study, which is to conduct a deeper-interpretative analysis based on framing the discursive construction of the European identity at times of crises.

3. Findings

3.1. European identity construction and the Euro crisis

The detailed qualitative analysis of the media and political discourse covering the euro crisis found out that European identity construction is initially manifested through the intra-group differentiation implied the internal othering within the in-group of European identity by both the media and the political discourses. Nevertheless, later they began to be diverging which led us to assume the general conclusion that they generally did not form a unified voice or vision while framing the crisis. This was partially stemming from the deterioration of the crisis in the following phases that deemed the federal government of Germany to take the initiative to prevent further deepening, aggravation, and possible spillover of the crisis which necessitated the instrumentalization of the European identity construction in seeking for the political credits. Moreover, with the establishment of the Eurosceptic party AfD, the further cleavage within the political discourse itself became in question due to the articulation of the different political agendas and understandings of being a European.

The initially converging media and political discourses externalized the crisis rather than claiming a common responsibility for the cause of the community. Accordingly, they revolved around the debates of cultural differences in maintaining and presenting a commitment to the European norms and values in the sense of German ordo-liberalism which brought traditional North/South division to the surface. Within such German conception based on the ordo-liberal values, traditional good European is constructed as the one that firmly sticks to the European rule of law, norms, and values culminating in the designation of the ingroup behavior for the European communities. On the one hand, such understanding leads to the discursive construction of economically backward member states as the so-called ‘bad Europeans’ failing

²⁴ Wodak, R. (2001). What CDA is about—a summary of its history, important concepts and its developments. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, (pp. 1-13). Sage Publications.

²⁵ Van Dijk, T. A. (2015). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Tannen, H.E. Hamilton & D. Schiffrin (Eds.), *The handbook of discourse analysis*, (pp. 466-485). John Wiley., p. 477-478.

to fulfillment of the group behavior. In the middle of such classification, Greeks and Greece were given a particular space and emphasis as a subject to intra-group differentiation. On the other hand, German ordo-liberal based understanding of acting resulted in initial German hesitation that hindered the immediate reaction to the crisis and thereby leading to the aggravation of the economic situation.

This led the crisis to come to the point where an effective policy response under the German initiative would be formulated. The political discourse started to diverge accordingly. In this respect, the study traced a discursive shift from externalization to the internalization of the crisis as a common European crisis in the political discourses. The performed analysis demonstrated that the discourses framing the crisis at the later phases of the crisis by the government and the establishment parties, which were deemed to formulate a solution, instrumentalized the European identity construction while explaining the formulated policy responses to the crisis. It revealed that the European identity construction is manifested through frames of togetherness, solidarity, and community of fate, which played a contributing role in assuring the group cohesiveness. In this respect, European identity construction is manifested in a way to be instrumentalized for political legitimization and justification of possible costs of the crisis for the German public. Within such an act of discursive construction, European identity construction is manifested as an operationalization of consolidating Germany's commitment to the European community, which is regarded as its historical responsibility, vis a vis its historical otherness to Europe.

Here, as another noteworthy result, the study showed that such solidarity-based discursive construction of the European identity was manifested within the limits of 'conditionality', which hinged on the fulfillment of the in-group behavior i.e., the firm compliance of the indebted member states to the strict austerity packages. Such construction of the in-group behavior affirms the European identity construction is manifested through the German understanding of solidarity and interpretation of European identity based on the ordo-liberal ethics, although it later shifted because of the imperatives of the deterioration of the situation.

On the other hand, in contrast to the mainstream political discourse, the discourses of the non-establishment party, AfD, which was originally established as an opposition to the common currency, was shaped to construct the common currency as a threat to the sovereignty of the European nation-states. In fact, the alternative discursive construction by the AfD built a bridge between discourses of nationalism and populism in manifesting internal othering which was based on the positioning of the German people as against its enemies i.e., EU, Euro, the process

of European identity formation. Thus, European identity, which was presented as a part of the top-down process driven by the EU elites, was constructed as the other of the German citizens. In this respect, European identity construction is manifested through being internally othered that locates the in-group of European identity in the position of the 'other' in respect to the German citizens which serves for the intra-group differentiation. The function aimed via such construction differs considerably from the mainstream political discourses.

Media discourses did not present such sharp divergences within themselves as in the political discourse, since the general stance is shaped in terms of the cultural differences of the indebted member states in framing the crisis. Nevertheless, the levels of critical stances of the media discourses differ in constructing the group differentiation. Accordingly, the analysis showed that the harshest criticisms came from the Bild newspaper that did run an anti-Greek campaign throughout the crisis, while Die Welt adopted a milder but still critical position. On the other hand, the discourses adopted by the Süddeutsche newspaper were sometimes converging with the mainstream political discourses in terms of the manifestation of the European identity through European solidarity, group cohesion, and German commitment to the preservation of the common currency to great extent.

3.2. European identity construction and the refugee crisis

The performed discourse analysis of the media and political discourse covering the refugee crisis found out that regardless of the political leaning and stance in respect to the crisis, the European identity construction is manifested as a tool of both internal and external othering to bolster both intra- and inter-group differentiation. It demonstrated that the pro-refugee stance adopted by the media discourses regardless of their political leanings exhibited often external othering vis a vis the in-group of the European community presented as a community of humanitarian responsibility. Therefore, they were highly converging with the pro-refugee mainstream political discourses. In this respect, the divergences between the political and media discourses manifesting the European identity construction in framing the crisis can be traced in accordance with their having whether pro-refugee or anti-refugee stances.

The research showed that media and political discourses that employed pro-refugee stance expressed two-folded othering within the construction of the European identity. The external othering relied on the construction of the refugees as the needy, deserving and defenseless others of the EU. Thus, European identity construction is manifested in a way to invoke a formation of an in-group behavior for the European community which would imply the behavior of welcoming refugees for the member states. In this respect, the inter-group differentiation and intergroup bias embodied within such discursive construction remain to be

considerably limited. Accordingly, the study showed the European identity construction is manifested through external othering that functions as an inclusive identity towards its 'needy' others. In addition to such othering invoking the European values of humanitarian responsibility, European identity construction was also manifested as an instrument to evoke a sense of commitment to the solidarity for the common good of the Europeans as in-group, in the face of the overloaded mechanisms of the southern member states because of the crisis. While doing so, the pro-refugee discourses highlighted an in-group favoritism of the European identity as a source of self-esteem for the members i.e., the European citizens through topos of humanitarianism and topos of culture which implied showing solidarity with overloaded member states and welcoming refugees. On the one hand, the constructed in-group behavior which was associated with the European humanitarian values and norms as the identity markers of the in-group of the European community serves as a means of political legitimization and justification for the open-door policy of the federal government. In this respect, the study showed how the European identity construction is instrumentalized for the political calculations. On the other hand, the existence of the anti-refugee member states refusing to comply with such constructed in-group behavior for the European community led to the internalization of the crisis culminating in the eventual internal othering within the pro-refugee discourses.

The unwillingness of those member states is often handled through solidarity and burden sharing-based argumentations by the pro-refugee media and political discourses employing inclusive-identity in respect to Europe's other. They illustrate solidarity as the demonstration of willingness by the Europeans as an in-group to sacrifice for the common European good in realizing the necessities of being an in-group of the European community. Accordingly, the in-compliance of those member states in adopting in-group behavior is often read as a reluctance to render European solidarity leading to the intra-group differentiation. With regard to this, topos of threat are utilized within such internal othering against the anti-refugee member states which are constructed as deeming European in-group to lose its status by not following the framed European commitment to the humanitarian values, norms.

In fact, the performed discourse analysis presented descriptions of the others are constructed for some purpose fulfilling different functions leading to different consequences in terms of social perception for both sides of the political spectrum. Regarding the other side of the political spectrum, the study revealed that anti-refugee stances that were incorporated sometimes also with anti-European sentiments were predominantly expressed by the AfD. The performed discourse analysis found out that anti-refugee discourses also exhibited two-folded

othering including both internal and external. Nevertheless, the way how they employ internal and external othering differs highly from the pro-refugee discursive constructions. During the course of the crisis, the incremental shift of the party towards being far-right was traced by its discursive construction of the EU as the other of German citizens. In this respect, European-level formulated solutions were also presented as a threat to the in-group of German community. That implied intragroup differentiation vis a vis the in-group of European identity. However, external othering directed against the refugees idiosyncratically utilized cultural and primordialist essentialist accounts of the European 'Self'. Accordingly, the discourses constructed inter-group differentiation as the European self/European community as a whole versus its others.

The constructed inter-group differentiation involved out-group discrimination and out-group derogation implying the in-group favoritism and bias of the European self. The discourses revolved mainly in two categories, refugees as cultural aliens and refugees as a security threat to the European community. Accordingly, the cultural-based othering referred to the incompetence of the Orient with the developed homogenous European systems of norms, values, freedoms, and rule of law which is commonly explained with religious-based associations that Islam is incompatible with the Western values. In this way, the traditional east/west divide was resurfaced. Moreover, the emphasis on the Greco-Roman roots and process of Europeanization contributed locate refugees as 'the Orient' as the ultimate and historical other of the European societies. Based on the established inter-group differentiation, the discursive act of securitization was employed to construct cultural security representing refugees as an external danger for the survival of the Western civilization.

In addition to the cultural securitization, external othering against refugees, vis a vis the European community, was constructed through representing refugees as an existential threat also to the internal security of the European peaceful society. In a context where the successive terrorist attacks were conducted, what started as a refugee crisis developed into a security crisis. Thus, anti-refugee discourses of the AfD found a viable place for the negative rendering of migration directed towards refugees and asylum seekers. The internal securitization contained security connotations of illegal and criminal activities, terrorist attacks, which were highly interlinked with the asylum seekers and refugees. Moreover, internal securitization also covered argumentations of concerns based on the financial burden, public health.

In this light, the study showed that European identity construction is manifested by AfD through situating it facing the external dangers coming from the out-groups that expose the identity markers of the in-group and European space to the existential threats. In doing such

manifestation of the European identity implying the protection of the fragile in-group prone to the danger/threat from the out-groups, AfD proposes the restriction of the population flow. In this respect, European identity construction as manifested within the inter-group differentiation instrumentalized to justify and legitimize the discriminatory attitudes towards and exclusion of refugees and asylum seekers of the political party. In this respect, the European identity construction can be assumed to be employed by the AfD to claim political credits.

As a sum of the findings of the analysis of both crises, the research revealed that different phases of the crises have involved different discursive practices of identity construction, thus, the first hypothesis, 'change in the identity construction is correlated to be reflected by the social processes within the society' is proven to be right. Although identity construction encompasses different angles as per each crisis, it has been mainly within the German understanding of the European identity. Therefore, the second hypothesis, 'The manifestations of the European identity construction appeared differently in framing the different EU crises' is proven to be wrong.

4. Main References

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