Ambiguous Identities at the Rhine border

Failures and Successes of Europeanisation in a Pioneering Laboratory of European Integration

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Introduction

Autumn is certainly one of the best seasons to enjoy the picturesque streets of Strasbourg. A fresh breeze blows around the millennial cathedral; geraniums are still blossoming at the windows of the famous half-timbered houses, and tourists become sparser, leaving café terraces to locals. In the autumn of 2018, in addition to posters announcing the traditional Christmas market to come, onlookers may also notice two advertisement campaigns on giant electronic billboards. At bus stops, a worrisome campaign from the municipality is inviting residents to 'register and vote, this time', on 26 May. A large blue star garnished with 15 smaller gold stars covers the face of American president Donald J. Trump. Nearby, at crossroads and parking lots, a stately red poster from the regionalist party Unser Land is calling for the region to 'break free' from the new administrative division of regions, and to take its fate into its own hands. A few hundred meters away, the Louise Weiss building of the European Parliament emerges from behind trees and bell towers. Such scenery might seem bizarre, yet, along the Rhine border, such things are part of the ordinary landscape. On both riversides, antagonistic aspirations of closure and openness towards national and supranational communities exist in a state of cohabitation. In a local context marked by the 2008 economic crisis, territorial restructuring and increasing engagement of regional political and societal actors in transnational cooperation, it is assumed that identification with the EU has evolved positively in recent years, together with a pro-regionalist feeling, to the detriment of identification with national capitals. Part of a larger comparative research project, this chapter seeks to test this assumption empirically with a focus on the French side of the river. The argument proceeds in four steps. The first section conceptualises identities through citizens' discourses and behaviours. The second section sets the scene by reviewing the systemic integration of the borderland where the research was carried out. The third describes and justifies the

research design as well as the use of group interviews. The fourth section presents qualitative findings. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the resilience of boundaries in a turbulent EU.

Conceptualising Identity through Citizens' Discourses and Behaviour

Models of identity

In 2000, Martin Kohli saw in borderlands a promising battleground for the development of a European identity (Kohli 2000). In border areas, memories of past struggles, historical traumas and socio-economic rifts between asymmetrical nations (Wilson/Donnan, 1998) might lead to a hardening of national identities. Or maybe daily interactions and fuzzy territorial attachments invite the inhabitants of such areas to renegotiate their identities (Hierro/Gallego 2018). the characteristic blurred heritage that arises from blended roots often results in strong territory-based identities, and a complex emotional relationship with the nation state (Keating 1998; Medeiros et al. 2015). The different socio-political layers – local, regional, national, European – make up unique and fluid constructions of multiples identities (Meinhof 2004). But how do these layers interrelate? A whole array of different competing conceptual models exists. It is not in the scope of this chapter to review them all, and I would like to elaborate on just three that are well-known in the field of EU studies.

The first model derives from the literature on social identity, which has long tended to see identities as incompatible. The exclusionary model conceives of identities as potentially destructive to one another. According to this view, national identities would be threatened, from above, by the development of a European feeling of belonging, or from below, by a strong regional identity, as in the case of Basque nationalism (Carey 2002; McLaren 2006). If individuals remain free to choose to which group they identify with, irreconcilable contradictions between identities do not permit multiple political allegiances.

A second model, by contrast, suggests that individuals are capable of negotiating between multiple identities, from the local up to the supranational, in concentric circles fashion: "people who identify strongly with local communities also identify strongly with nations, and with Europe" (Herrmann/Brewer 2004: 12). In the case of Spain for example, most Catalans and Basques see themselves as both Catalans or Basques and Spaniards (Diez Medrano/Gutiérrez 2001). This 'Russian-doll' model is based on theories of nested identity (Brewer 1993; Calhoun 1999), according to which sub- and superordinate identities can cohabite, as both fulfil different roles: of differentiation and inclusion, respectively. However, one problem

with this model is that it fails to explain the 'indeterminacy as to the relationship between lower- and higher-order nested identities' (Diez Medrano/Gutiérrez 2001: 759). How can we explain than in some regions with strong regionalist feelings, the middle-layer of national identity is bypassed, as, in the case of Scotland, for example (Grundy/Jamieson 2007)? Or that a new kind of regional Euroscepticism is developing, as in Flanders?

A third alternative suggests that the multiple components making up an individual's identity cannot be separated into inferior or superior layers. They are not nested or cross-cutting but rather highly entangled. This is known as the marble-cake model (Risse 2003; Risse 2010). Its most important corollary is twofold: since EU membership interacts with different national and local identity constructions, then there are potentially as many 'European identities' as there are European regions. And reciprocally, enmeshment with the supranational level implies a fluid and continuous (re)construction of local and national identities, which might allow contradictory positions within each component.

Identity through Discourses

If people 'choose' their identities rather than naturally possessing them, the question arises of how they are constructed. Symbolic interaction is certainly the most important perspective in sociology that provides theoretical underpinnings for the understanding of identity construction. Its basic premise is that individuals attach symbolic meaning to behaviours, objects, others and themselves and share those meanings through interaction among each other (Mead 1934). In line with the interactionist literature on identity, we assume that the key agent of these negotiations of who people are, of who the 'Other' is, is language. In other words, individuals produce identity through their *talk*. But the words we use do not only reflect the beliefs of the given social context we develop in, they deconstruct and reshape our social environment as well. Language plays a constitutive role in generating social relations: "language provides – as a metaphor puts it – the grammar of social life" (Eder 2007: 403)

The discursive construction of identity can explain the existence of contradictory positions and attachments as conceptualised in the Russian-doll and marble-cake models. This derives from the understanding of identity as a never-ending process of self-identification and assignment of in-groups and out-groups. It is near borders that on-going negotiations of boundaries between different ethnic groups are at their most salient (Barth 1969).

Negotiations and Inter-dependency at the Border

With 28 member countries in the European Union, 14,000 km of external land borders neighbouring 20 countries, and 26 countries within the Schengen area, borderlands make up a substantial percentage of the European Union's territory. One EU citizen in three lives in these border areas, which are home to 36 trans-border agglomerations and two million cross-border workers. The highly-integrated Rhine border between France and Germany is one of many examples. From a natural boundary, the river was framed over centuries as a social boundary, strengthening social orders on each side of the river and eventually crystallising into two national borders. By crossing the river, local populations construct, de-construct and re-construct those symbols of political identities (Simmel 1997). And the corollary holds, too: as does any institution, borders in return change social contexts and alter local populations' perception of social boundaries. This ability of citizens to participate in the (un)making of borders, through language but also through their everyday actions, as 'banal' as they might seem, constitutes 'borderwork' (Rumford 2009). Thus, in borderlands more than anywhere else, what local populations *say* about themselves, their region and their nation-state, Europe, and the 'Other', should be contrasted with what they *do*. Because the borderland is administratively and logistically integrated, because it separates a region with high unemployment from another with many work opportunities, borders are crossed and contacts occur. Can this prefigure a supranational identity? Cross-border mobility has been shown to be positively correlated to the development of a post-national mindset (Favell/Recchi 2009; Howard 2000; Sigalas 2010), and indeed, the 'contact hypothesis' proposes that interpersonal relations are one of the most effective ways if not the most effective way to overcome conflicts and negative stereotyping between two social groups (Allport 1954). Yet, Gordon Allport also restricted such positive correlation in terms of the qualitative nature of the contact, its context, as well as socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the two social groups that meet. With the French side of the Rhineland border changing nationality four times in 75 years (between 1870 and 1945), few regions in Europe are as likely to develop the feeling of supranational belonging as Martin Kohli called for in this case. Legal and administrative support is another of the criteria needed for positive contact, according to intergroup contact theory. As a matter of fact, it is in the Rhine Basin that local cross-border cooperation was pioneered in the 1950s (Schelberg 2001).Transnational political, economic and cultural structures have since been strengthened under the stimulus of the European Union and the Council of Europe, to encourage the border population to see beyond the 'national container' (Beck 2000)

A European Microcosm in an Integrated Borderland

The last two decades have seen a 'new regionalism' emerging on the multi-level European geopolitical and geo-economic scene, with regions gaining significant relevance in the concrete work of shaping the EU itself (Paasi 2009). If Alsace does not have secessionist desires that exist in Corsica or the Basque-country, it does have a regionalist party, and it is not so uncommon to see discrete "*Elsass Freie*" graffiti and stickers decorating street signs alongside the Rhine. Since the 2015 French territorial reform erased Alsace from the map, those have flourished. As a gesture of appeasement to hurt local pride, the Philippe government put on the table a legislative proposal for the creation by 2021 of a *Collectivité européenne d'Alsace* [European community of Alsace] and the provision of specific competences, in particular a leading role in transboundary cooperation within its geographical boundaries.[1] The forthcoming creation of this new administrative framework endorsing so adamantly a supranational dimension is illustrative of the decisive role played by European regions in giving flesh and bones to European integration. This regional gaze turned towards the Rhine rather than Paris is nothing new. In 2010, after 50 years of transnational collaboration, the creation of the Metropolitan Trinational Region of the Upper Rhine was legally enshrined,[2] gathering the former region of Alsace together with North and South Baden, South-East Palatinate and North-West Switzerland.[3] The latest developments in the area also include the signing of the Aachen Treaty between France and Germany in January 2019, which significantly increased the competences of the Trinational Region's four Eurodistricts. Amongst them, the Eurodistrict of Strasbourg-Ortenau brings together in a 'pilot European territory' 61 French and 51 German municipalities, with 940,000 inhabitants, shaping a former conflict-riven border into a 'laboratory for European integration' (Schultz 2002). In this regard, the launch in 2017 of the binational tramway joining Strasbourg and Kehl was emblematic of the systemic integration of the borderland; the last time a tram had crossed the river being during the Second World War.

1 The legislative proposal for a *Collectivité européenne d'Alsace* was presented by the French government on 27 February 2019 and adopted by the Senate at first reading, with modifications on 4 April 2019. Review of the proposal started on 24 June in the *Assemblée nationale*. The proposed *collectivité* is set to couple the two *departements* of the former region of Alsace, Haut-Rhin and Bas-Rhin, by 1 January 2021 in a unique administrative scheme with enhanced prerogatives, in particular regarding road network and border management as well as defence of bilingualism.

2 *Région Métropolitaine Trinationale du Rhin Supérieur*/ Trinationalen Metropolregion Oberrhein

3 An Upper Rhine Franco-Germano-Swiss Council made of 71 elected politicians is tasked to represent the six million inhabitants of the borderland. This Council acts as the 'Parliament' of the Trinational Region.

Yet, for the *Eurométropole de Strasbourg*, the binational tramway line is not only symbolic, but also instrumental in securing its title as a 'European capital', in the controversies surrounding the seat of the European Parliament. Strasbourg is home to three major European institutions: the European Parliament, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights. It is also the home of the European TV-channel ARTE, the European Pharmacopoeia, the European Ombudsman, the Secretariat of the Assembly of European Regions and EUROCORPS. At the heart of the city's 'European district', the *Lieu d'Europe* [Place of Europe] education centre aims at bringing European citizens closer to each other and to European institutions.

Intense Europeanisation of the border seems to have had positive effects. Previous research conducted in this borderland has shown that Rhineland inhabitants on both sides are more likely to support European integration than their compatriots (Schmidberger 1998). The resilience of Europhile feelings in the region to political, social and economic changes remains, however, hypothetical. On the one hand, the existing literature on the impact of major exogenous events such as economic shocks, refugee crises or terrorism on secessionist aspirations converges towards a positive correlation (Orzechowska-Waclawska 2017; Rico/Liñeira 2014). On the other hand, empirical studies have long stressed that regional identity is an important predicator for how likely citizens are to identify with the EU (van Spanje/de Vreese 2011). Overall, there are compelling reasons to believe that European identification in the region has varied. Building on a sample of 15 group discussions with French families carried out in the Strasbourg area, this chapter offers to make sense of the 'identity mix' of one of Europe's most integrated borderland areas.

Operationalising the Identity-Mix: Comparing Family Interviews

In light with the theoretical approach presented above, it was essential to get local populations *talking*. Research in the fields of EU and border studies endorsing a similar conceptualisation have produced valuable insights based on original ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews (see, for examples relating to the German-Polish border; Asher 2005; Meinhof/Galasiński 2010). In this chapter, we are less interested in individual narratives than in understanding the negotiations of meanings in the formation of collective cultural identities.[4] Group interaction

4 By cultural identity, I refer in this chapter to what Michael Bruter defines as 'a citizen's sense of belonging to a human community' (Bruter 2013: 36) – as opposed to citizens' identification with a political system as an institution – with which they believe they share a certain heritage, regardless of so-called objective reality. This can include any form of history but also

is one way to gather such insights. Face-to-face interviews have been a successful method of collecting not only personal narratives, but also patterns of common sense and structural views. Here, however, we are also interested in the transmission of these views and potential contagion of affects between citizens. In contrast to qualitative in-depth interviews, group interviews provide data on intra- and interpersonal debates. They are also useful for contextually exploring 'the gap between what people say and what they do' as when participants know each other, they can contradict and correct each other (Conradson 2005: 131).

The 15 group interviews conducted in autumn 2018 each gathered families of three to eight members belonging to two to three generations (parents and children, and grandparents where possible) for a total of 78 participants. Working with families does not guarantee diverse political ideologies within one group to the same extent at artificial sampling. However, low polarisation of opinions is mitigated by mutual trust between participants and generational differences within each group. Conflicting political opinions, particularly regarding European integration, were freely expressed and clearly evident. As numerous research projects have shown, citizens' attitudes towards European integration are divided along social lines (Hobolt 2016; Kuhn 2015; van Spanje/de Vreese 2011), as well as national ones (Diez Medrano 2003; Herrmann et al. 2004). Since the research only focused on France, sampling of participants had to reflect the ethnic diversity of a historical country of immigration. Families were therefore recruited to enable comparison of discussions in these two dimensions: along social lines and according to nationality. Three categories of five families each – to ensure diversity of political ideologies in the sample – were constituted accordingly: the first group consisted of working-class families, the second of upper-middle class families, both holding only French nationality, and the final category of middle-class families holding multiple nationalities (French nationality *and* an additional EU/non-EU nationality). Recruitment was initially undertaken using a snowballing technique and later by direct solicitation as based on theoretical sampling, made easier thanks to the help of respected individuals from local associative outreach programmes. The theme of the discussion was kept deliberately vague so as to limit selection bias, and participants were offered a voucher for their participation in the study (cf. appendix 1).

Standardisation of the discussion was supported by the development of a unique interview scenario. All discussions were moderated by the researcher herself

moral or religious traditions, as well as values, philosophical and political norms. A cultural identity is therefore a social identity and can encompass a territorial one. Cultural identities can also turn into political identities 'when governments become parties to them' (Tilly 2003: 609). Here, we are considering a 'we-feeling' loosely defined, a sense of commonality expressed by participants.

and lasted ca. two hours. They were organised around four openly formulated questions only, one using vignettes, a second asking for active participation through free pictorial expression. This helped to make sure that participants enjoyed enough freedom to take the discussion in the directions that are most relevant to them, and to limit research biases. The four questions touched upon different aspects of European integration in the Strasbourg area: regionalism, the border and the figure of the 'Other', EU institutional design and policies, the 'crisis' of European integration, and the meaning of European identity (cf. appendix 2). Each room layout was unique, as the discussions were held in the comfort of each family's living room, but family members were invited to form a semi-circle, with the researcher sitting within this circle, as opposed to chairing from the centre.

Balancing Blurred Allegiances

In the remaining parts of this chapter, I present some of the preliminary results obtained from field research conducted between October and December 2018 in the Strasbourg agglomeration. I draw on extracts from five of the 15 group discussions; all 15 were used for the analysis, and those five extracts were chosen because they are illustrative of patterns that emerged in the overall sample.[5] In the transcriptions below, all names have been changed; // refers to cut-off speech, … to brief pauses and (…) to longer ones. Italics indicate that words have been left in their original language.

Choosing the 'Other': an Uneasy Task

In constructing cohesive social identities for themselves, individuals rely on opposition to an 'Other', using mechanisms such as stereotyping and flattened categorisations to build social boundaries. Negative stereotyping in particular plays an important role in self-identification, and typical topics for such process include fear as well as dislike. If fear did not appear as a recurrent theme in the discussions – at least in reference to neighbouring French and German communities – dislike and disapproval of behaviours – and occasionally the more extreme form, disgust – were central to all 15 discussions. What appeared as the most intriguing pattern, however, was the absence of a clear 'Other' between *and* within the 15 families. Half of the negative strategies of out-grouping relied on regional differentiation, while

5 Qualitative data are difficult to generalize, as samples cannot perfectly match the socio-demographic characteristics of the population. Results should be treated with care and extracts presented in this chapter were chosen because they were illustrative of clearest patterns in our sample.

the other half relied on nationalist discourse. The extract below is derived from a discussion between a family of four, two parents, Véronique and François, with their daughters, Lucie and Julie. Julie left Strasbourg for the neighbouring former region of Lorraine to attend university. The conversation had shifted from their cross-border habits to their support for the French team during the 2018 Football World Cup, when Véronique said that the family also decorated their house with the European flag. She then went on to talk about self-identification.

Extract 1: Middle-Class French Family

> Véronique: "Me, I feel closer to Germans.
> Julie: Well, for us (looking at her sister) it is a bit different since we live… in fact, no, I do not feel close to Lorrains at all.
> (the entire family laugh)
> Lucie: No, me I would still say Lorrains. We are closer to Lorrains in mentality. We still have a common history against the… well, between quotation marks, the Germans //
> Véronique: Yes, but if you forget //
> François (talking to Veronique): Yes, yes, yes, but yes, she is right //
> Véronique: No, for me, we have to forget this side of history. For me, regarding the question, I believe that, looking at how we are, regarding work habits, regarding work expectations, well, even me, I would feel closer. How many times did I say, as a joke, 'Well, I think Alsace would be better off as a, how to say this, as a German region or départementt!' I find us to be closer.
> Julie: I would also say Germans rather than Lorrains. Meeting Lorrains every day, I do not share at all the same way of thinking, the same mentality, not the same way…even the way of talking. There are too many things that are changing. The way of driving… Well, too much stuff.
> Lucie: Now that I am thinking about it, when I was in Lorraine, I met more with people from Alsace than with Lorrains… because it is true that I take it badly, I get quite offended when a friend, who is not Alsacienne at all, she came to Strasbourg for her studies, and she told me 'No but you, you are résidus d'Allemands [residues of Germans]'. And it is true that, for me, this is the kind of thoughts that are offensive. No, we are not Germans, we remain French. Then yes, there is a proximity with Germany, you cannot deny that, but I do not like it when people call us and say 'No but you are quasi-Germans."

In this family, reference to national frames were not obvious, and the choice appeared to be rather between the two neighbouring regions, Lorraine and Baden-Württemberg, as later in the conversation, the distinction was made by mother and daughter between Germany and the *Länder.* The negative stereotyping of *Lor-*

rains as a general category by Julie takes the form of typically vague disapproval of their behaviour: their way of talking and driving. Among each generation, the out-group strategies differ. Lucie' initial uneasiness at labelling Germans as 'Others' disappears at the memory of an encounter. When she recalls her experience of being out-grouped herself by a friend, only then does she invoke the French national frame, in a typical example of looking-class self (Cooley 1902). Despite clear contradictions, she later expressed strong identification with her region, and then to the supranational, bypassing national identification.

How powerful social interactions are in building the regional self with both French and German nationals alike was palpable in all families, even in those who share a second extra-European nationality. In the case of middle-class French families, this was further strengthened by family memory of war(s). The abstract below comes from a discussion between a family of eight, bringing together three generations: grandparents (Joseph and Madeleine), parents (Christian and Françoise), uncle and aunt (Patrick and Marie) and two teenage boys (Jean and Thomas). In this extract, negative stereotyping targets Germany, while the French, as a general category, are kept at a good distance.

Extract 2: Middle-Class French Family

Marie: "Me, I think it is because of school that I do not like Germany. All we were seeing, it was factory workers, unemployment, pollution…it was just that…all the Erzählungen in German, it was that, so then, I had a vision of Germany, an Eastern country, the horror you know? It was a bit like…the bottom of Eastern Germany, you know… (she laughs)
Patrick: Yes. An industrial country.
Jean: Well, I think for me it is different because I speak as good German as French, almost…well… I speak good German so I feel just as good in France and in Germany. It is as easy to order at a table in France or there. And, actually, I even go more often than you to Germany, I think. Me and Anna, we go to Germany //
Thomas: every two days.
Joseph: It is maybe mean what I am going to say, or idiotic, but if I do not go there, it is out of respect for my parents. And if I do not go there, I did my military service in Ackern, nearby.
Jean: Yes?
Joseph: Back then, when you were taking a walk with the French uniform, you should have seen the face that old Germans were making!
Françoise: Ah yes, that….
Joseph: Ah yes, you got that right! In France, à l'intérieur, we were called 'boches' and then in Germany, we were called 'sales Français' [French scums]!

Jean: Yes, but all this is over now papi! Me, I feel closer to Germans than to ceux de l'intérieur [those from the inside], clearly; I feel better in Berlin than in Paris. (Joseph laughs)
Madeleine: Me, I feel better with les gens de l'intérieur [the people from the inside].
Christian: With my dad, it is not worth discussing, I mean, they are the casques à pointes [spiked helmets]. For us it is funny, because me, personally, I rarely go in Germany. But we put the two of them in bilingual schools and for them, Germany, it is just a continuity of France //
Françoise: Me, I find that Germans are still closer to us than les Français de l'intérieur, still. Culturally, we need to say what needs to be said //
Patrick: Ah! that is funny, that you say we! Because, you, you are a rapatriée [repatriated] anyway!"

In this second abstract, negative constructions are labelled in terms of regional distinctions: generalisation and stereotyping of Germans and Germany, and distancing work from the French national frame by the systematic grammatical use of "*gens de l'intérieur*" to refer to French nationals, and the word "*rapatriée*" to refer to Françoise, who was not born in Alsace. Here, the strong vocabulary used, far from being merely anecdotal, materialises a frontier between the former Alsace region and the rest of France, perceived as such even by those who feel close to France. Generational patterns are made visible through the contrasting interpretations made by Joseph and his grandson concerning the family memory. In-grouping strategies do not follow a clear pattern; with the exception of the grandparents, who express strong regionalist sentiments, the two adult couples and two teenagers disagree in their primary political allegiance. Jean was one of the rare participants in our sample to express a European identity 'first', which he defined as a "*manière de vivre*" [way of living] rather than a feeling.

Europe between Daily Border-Crossing Habits and Great Unknown

It was no surprise that all families were involved in borderwork. But surprisingly, it was among those who did not speak German, namely working class and French families with an immigration background, that borderwork was the most intense. Typical border-crossing activities did not only included occasional hikes or weekly grocery shopping, but daily ice-creams and walks in Kehl, as well as regular afternoons at German swimming-pools. The third extract is taken from a discussion amongst Franco-Turkish local residents. It is exemplary of the appropriation of the border by the local population, but also of the reminiscence of the frontier as an axis of socio-economic inequality in the narratives of the local population.

Extract 3: working-class Franco-Turkish family

Ela: "We go to do grocery-shopping, to eat ice-cream //
Melis: We are just nearby.
Feride: Yes, this is really nice.
Azra: And even more now, with the tram that goes directly //
Feride: and the gardens to take a walk in the summer.
Melis: Yes, we do not have that chez nous [at home].
Feride: In fact, we have a link with Germany, that is the thing that is good. Just the bridge, it binds us…
Feride: and financially, we notice the difference when we shop.
Melis: Oh yes, when it comes to prices…it seems to me it is easier there…there is like a sort of facility…
Halim: Me, I have the feeling that, when you cross the border, it is a bit more developed…the buildings…I like the nature there…it looks clean…We go there with mum, we eat ice-cream. It is nice.
Azra: and with my friend, we go there, to the swimming pool and to do shopping. We could stay here, but it is more (…)
Melis: The mentality of Germans is different than chez nous, too. For people who wear the veil, we are not looked down upon, but in France, we feel it //
Azra: At the swimming pool, we all go there because we have the right to enter dressed.
Halim: There are more freedom there. And fewer unemployed…"

Calls are growing for the reconceptualisation of European identity as a way of *doing*, rather than being (Favell, 2005). Enjoying EU citizenship, crossing borders to go shopping or take a quick swim, not noticing EU logos on tramways on the way: those are signs of a banal Europeanism (Cram, 2001). But if it is clear in our sample that the presence of institutions and opportunities offered by infrastructures have enhanced European behaviours, is it enough to spur emotional identification beyond borders? The abstract below derives from a conversation between six family members. Emilie, the oldest daughter, expresses discomfort at the confusion between the Rhine border and Europe.

Extract 4: Upper-Middle Class French Family

Emilie: "But really, this is not Europe, this is Germany…
Théo: Yes, it is mostly Germany.
Emilie: how to say this…Alsaciens, they are going to speak about Europe, but they are just talking about Germany in reality. Because, I remember, when I was singing at the conservatory, we participated in a concert for the new countries joining the

European Union //
Christine (the mother): Ah yes, I remember!
Emilie: Yes. And that…that was a powerful moment, but still…for…. well, it is not that we do not hear about it, but just that, for Alsatians, in Strasbourg, Europe, it is just about going on foot or with the tram to Germany. Voilà. That is also a bit (…)
Louis (the father): It is true that we are a little bit //
Théo: No, but it is true, I also find that, when there are cultural projects, which are a bit bigger, it is often France, Germany, Switzerland, but well, you never hear about France Norway or even France Spain.
Mathilde: Yes…but then first, the fact that France and Germany are the countries that are a bit…. the authors?
Louis: The founders.
Emilie: Well, but…. what are we, how are we, us, close to Europe, what do we know about it, at the end…except, concretely, our relationships with our close neighbours…"
(silence, then laughs)

The Europeanisation of the border and her family's many border-crossing habits are undermined by Emilie's unease and feeling of discomfort in the face of her own lack of knowledge about the EU. For many respondents in the sample, intense borderwork and banal Europeanism did not automatically equal closeness to Europe, illustrating the clash between concrete and abstracts experience of Europe. Their active European citizenship is balanced by apparent indifference to European integration, and to my surprise, their full awareness of this contradiction. This resulted for many participants in unease regarding their own lack of strong emotional attachment to Europe as a polity. A more direct question about the meaning of a European identity at the end of the discussion was an opportunity for participants to try to 'make sense' of it. The last extract below brings together three sisters and one of their daughters at the kitchen table.

Extract 5: Working-Class French Family

Christine: "We still feel European, right?
(silence)
Nathalie: …But you, what are you?
Catherine: Well, French first of all…I mean (…)
Nathalie: Me my region…At the beginning, I am Alsacienne. I would put my region first, that yes! I am Alsacienne, then French, and European after.
Catherine: Ah yes! You see, me, European, I would not have thought about it. I would have put Alsacienne and French.
Christine: Me I would almost put France and then Alsace…

Nathalie: Ah yes? …and you (she turns towards her daughter) what would you have put first? French or Alsacienne?
Rose: Bah Alsacienne.
Christine: Well, it is not that obvious.
Rose: No, for me, it is logical.
Nathalie: Even Fogo [the family's dog], on its European passport, it is written 'dog, Alsacien, Français'!
Catherine: Voilà!"
(laughs)

As illustrated in this extract, in-group constructions are multi-layered and variable between members of a single family. From the three models of identity presented previously, we can exclude the exclusionary model. Although identification to the region was strong, it should not be confused with regional closure (with the exception of Joseph). For most participants, identification with the region and the nation state follows the strategies of differentiation and inclusion of the nested identity model: French in Germany and *Alsacienne* in France. Yet, it is when looking at the salience of attitudes that the ambiguity – and not simply hybridity – surrounding multiple political identities more clearly emerges. While hybridity refers to a logically composed coherent identity-mix made of different realities, ambiguity as a concept better stresses the context-dependent character of attitudes on identities (Bachleitner et al. 2010). In particular, in our border context, a European attitude only emerges when provoked, either by the moderator or by a provocative family member, despite regular border crossing, so much so that European identity does not appear as a particularly significant referent. Contrary to other regions such as Scotland where a regionalist attitude spurs pro-European feelings, it does not seem to be the case here, despite the immediate proximity of European institutions.

Discussion

To some extent, cross-border regions mirror the working of the EU itself. They share with the EU a complex multi-level governance involving European institutions, nation states, regional authorities, as well as a strong civil society made of non-governmental agencies and citizens' initiatives. The cross-border context has created the potential for peaceful negotiations of social identities between ethnic groups, despite linguistic and cultural differences. I have justified the focus on the Strasbourg agglomeration for the opportunity to study (a) hybrid identities in a pioneering borderland of cross-border cooperation, and (b) a symbolic border of European integration and the seat of several European institutions. In the conclu-

ding remarks of this chapter, I would like to go back and sketch two thoughts on the future of regional boundaries in Europe.

Ambiguous Identities, Faded Borders?

People construct their political identities in relation to a range of political and cultural factors, as well as out of their own experiences. In borderlands, those factors vary and clash as the rhythm of everyday life is determined by encounters and border-crossings, but also by difficult memories and stereotypical beliefs. In-group and out-group constructions are continuously re-negotiated. As exemplified above, this happens within families, but more disturbingly, cutting across generational patterns (thus in contradiction to Hipfl et al. 2003; Meinhof 2004). Out-grouping strategies from younger participants with only French nationality were barely more likely than their parents' to be based on supranational and national identification. Strong regional identification was expressed by a majority of participants, distinct from but not in opposition to both France and Germany, as results show that the frontier subsists in border narratives as an axis of contemporary socio-economic inequality. Interestingly, it is only when confronted with the geographical determinism of the border with Germany that the national referent is then reinvoked and gains in legitimacy, with participants leaning towards a concentric circles identity-mix.

Laboratories of European Social Integration

In this multi-layered construction, 'Europe' is not a self-chosen category of identification, which contrasts with the intense usage inhabitants of Strasbourg make of their European citizenship. In the scenario for our discussion, families were invited to order pictures of the city's iconic landmarks from those they were most attached to those they were least attached to. Interestingly enough, the two pictures illustrating European institutions were, in a majority of cases, placed last. When asked if this was deliberate, to my surprise, many shared that they had already visited the European Parliament: for Europe Day on 9 May, celebrating the anniversary of the 1950 Schuman Declaration, on school trips, or because they used to work as cleaning staff, delivering newspapers, or in the catering service of the European Parliament. "Euro-indifference" alone then fails to explain the detachment that many participants have shown. Despite intensive integration of the borderland and the presence of European institutions, and in full awareness of the resulting political and socio-economic they enjoy, local populations expressed strong mixed feelings towards European integration as a whole. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore the various aspects of Euroscepticism and what is 'going on' behind apparent indifference towards European integration, it appears clearly that bor-

derlands are not only valuable research field to enhance our understanding of the European project in terms of systemic integration, they also offer a unique basis to grasp European unification from below.

Acknowledgement

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Figure 1: "Example of advertisement for participants: Strasbourg." Created by Dobler, Camille (2020) for this Publication.

Appendix 1 – Advertisement for Participants

Figure 1: Example of advertisement for participants: Strasbourg

RECHERCHE DE FAMILLES PARTICIPANTES
POUR UN PROJET DE RECHERCHE
Dans le cadre d'une thèse en sociologie

'PARLER POLITIQUE'
Bon-FNAC/Darty d'une valeur de 15€ par participant

Je suis à la recherche de FAMILLES volontaires pour participer à des entretiens groupés portant sur des questions politiques et sociales actuelles.
Ces entretiens se tiendront entre mi-Octobre 2018 et Janvier 2019.

L'entretien se déroule idéalement chez vous, ou dans un lieu public (centre social et culturel)

Les participants doivent avoir au moins 15 ans et avoir la nationalité française.

Aucune connaissance préalable n'est nécessaire.
Votre anonymité est garantie.

Durée de l'entretien: autour d'1h30

Si vous êtes intéressé.e, merci de contacter la chercheuse principale:
Par e-mail: [redacted]
Par téléphone: [redacted]
(si indisponible, laissez un message vocal ou envoyez un SMS pour être recontacté.e)

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Source: own figure

Appendix 2 – Family Discussion Schedule

Presentation of the session (researcher) & introduction roundtable ~ *10min*
I am giving each of you a few stickers, and I would like to ask you to think about

what summarizes best the region you live in. It can be anything, one thing, several things, you can draw something or write a word. Think a little moment and then I would like you to show your stickers to the others, and to explain to us what you meant and why you picked this. ~ *20min*
I am now shuffling your stickers with 7 pictures. I would like you to, together as a group, rank them from what is the most important to you personally (what you are the most attached to), to what is the least important. You can add or remove stickers.

7 photographs include (without legends): European Parliament Louise Weiss building, Council of Europe with European Court of Human Rights, Europe bridge with binational tram over the Rhine, Two riversides Garden, Rhine Palace in the Neudorf district, Strasbourg cathedral, Petite France neighbourhood with Vauban barrage ~ 15min
Now, I would like you to draw something on the stickers: a smiley face! I would like you to think about your current state of mind about the European Union. How do you feel about the European Union right now (if you feel anything at all)? What is the first smiley (or smileys) that come to you mind? I leave you to think for a few seconds. Then please show it one by one to each other and express what you meant and why you chose this smiley face. ~ *20min*
Would you have drawn the same smiley a few years ago? How so? ~ *15min*

Would you have drawn the same smiley if I had asked you about France right now, and not the EU? ~ *15min*
Lately, we often talk about crisis when we talk about Europe. For you what crisis does this refer to? Why do you think about this? Is there anything you want to say about it? ~ *20min*
I have a final question. What does it mean to be European? ~ *15min*
END – Open floor for remarks & free discussion ~ *30min*