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International Institutions and Identity

by

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Introduction

Identity is back. It is simultaneously being manipulated (by politicians), negotiated (by citizens) and crafted (by international institutions). These new dynamics of identity construction often come with a rejection of the norms and institutions of the global order (Lake, Martin and Risse, 2021), which ranges from populist mobilizations against a globalized economy targeting the World Trade Organization; to campaigns against refugee rights that take aim at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (European refugee crisis of 2015-2016); to discourses placing migrant rights and national identity in a zero-sum competition, where the European Union is the target (2016 UK Brexit vote; 2022 French presidential election). And such mobilizations are not the sole preserve of civil society. They can also be state-led: the Russian Federation's 2022 invasion of Ukraine symbolizing a vehement rejection of the norms and values underpinning the European security order (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe / NATO).

Why this mobilization? In part, it is the policies these international organizations (IOs) and regional organizations (ROs) pursue; equally important, it is the values – liberal democracy, human rights, immigrant integration, open borders, cooperative/collective security – that legitimate and uphold those policies. But, as a mobilized citizenry shows us, those very values, despite assertions of universal validity, have led to a diminished and diluted sense of national control, of sovereignty and of national identity (Zuern, 2018: Preface).

To understand this trend, we need to explore the interplay between local and national identities – those citizens and politicians – and the broader senses of community promoted by regional organizations - those institutions. I argue that ROs do shape identity, but these effects are refracted through domestic politics, where daily lived experiences and articulated beliefs interact. Identity is thus constructed from both the top down and bottom up, and by both what we do and what we say.

I harness an inter-disciplinary set of theories and methods to understand, explain and measure such dynamics. From political science, I draw upon international relations and institutional theory, process tracing and standard interview methods; from sociology and everyday nationalism, I utilize practice theory, ethnography and interpretive interviewing. This epistemological, theoretical and methodological pluralism is the argument's backbone; it is essential for opening the black box of identity construction in today's globalized yet increasingly inward-looking world. My goal is to theorize in new ways where and how identities are constructed, and the role of institutions, causal mechanisms and social practices in this process.

International-relations (IR) scholars will gain novel insights on the shaping of identity and the tools needed to study it, while sociologists and students of everyday nationalism will benefit from my advocacy of process-based methods that capture the meaning-making at the heart of their studies. For those working in qualitative social science, the argument is designed to push one of its core methods – process tracing – to the next level, both epistemologically and in terms of data collection. Theorists of global governance, who were caught off-guard by the nationalist turn against the institutions of the global order, will benefit from the way I bring identity back to our thinking on governance.

In the larger project from which this paper is drawn, my theory-building explores these identity dynamics across three regions and country cases: the Africa Union and South Africa; the Association of South-East Asian Nations and Singapore; and the European Union and Germany. The project will shed crucial light on the extent to which these ROs – and the norms and values they promote – are weakening in an era defined by an anti-globalization pushback.

This matters, globally but also in Europe. A 'clearer European identity is not just a romantic goal; it is the only way to make [the EU] sustainable in the longer term' (*Economist*, 2018). If we see a lessening of the EU's ability to shape member state identity, this will be bad news for other institutions in Asia and Africa. They too are under attack, identity looms large, yet – compared to the EU – their ability to counter it is limited. To reverse or at least slow this trend, we must first understand it. And the latter is precisely the fundamental goal of the plural, process-based theory developed here.

The remainder of the paper proceeds in five steps. First, I review work on international institutions and global governance, arguing that the former has theorized identity, but in an incomplete manner while the latter has largely neglected it. Second, I develop the theoretical argument linking international institutions and identity formation. It is multi-level and plural epistemologically: Identities are shaped at the level of regional organization *and* locally, and they result from both causal reasoning *and* the enactment of social practices. Third, the larger project's tri-partite regional design is briefly introduced. Fourth, I introduce, justify and operationalize the methods needed to explore and test the theory. In a fifth – concluding – section, I defend the argument's theoretical and meta-theoretical pluralism, arguing that it is all the more necessary given current disciplinary trends to 'think small.'

International Institutions, Global Governance and Identity

Identities today are being shaped across multiple levels (global/regional; national; sub-national), in a variety of settings, through a plurality of processes – material, social, strategic, other-regarding. These facts require an approach to identity formation where epistemological, theoretical and methodological pluralism stand central. Yet, to date, the literature has shied from such a move.

Consider IR theorists. When they study the relation between identity and ROs, the focus is typically institutions, formal as well as informal ones (norms), and elites acting within or through them. These agents seek actively to construct an identity from the top down, as it were; one might call this the engineering view of identity (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004; Johnston, 2008). Related political science arguments build on Deutsch's (1957) pioneering insight that community and shared identity can emerge through transactions and information flows (Kuhn, 2015). Here, identity is shaped through security communities (Adler and Barnett, 1998), communities of communication (Bruter, 2005) or public spheres (Risse, 2010, 2014) – all of which are facilitated by ROs.

Such research, not surprisingly, employs theory and methods favored by political scientists. Theoretically, a nation-state analogy looms large, where identity construction at the regional level follows a script like that seen in nation states, with elites playing a leading role, seeking to shape identity through institutions, discourses or the media. Identity is essentially measured by 'what we say,' as captured through surveys, structured interviews or discourses evident in public spheres – a methodological preference evident even in state-of-the-art IR theory applications (Hopf and Allan, 2016).

This top-down, institutional picture of ROs shaping identity is an important starting point. Yet, it misses other key arenas of identity construction, where individuals navigate multiple social environments and groups (schools, online communities, professional associations, political parties) and identity is shaped from the bottom up, as social anthropologists have argued (Holmes, 2000; Bellier and Wilson, 2000: ch.1). Their work on the RO–identity relation describes organizational culture and identity formation within a very specific arena, EU institutions (Shore, 2013; Abélès et al., 1993; Abélès, 2000; Zabusky, 2000; McDonald, 2012). It generally shares the political-science focus on just one half of the relation: ROs and

supranational arenas affecting identities. More recent studies do pay attention to meaning making in local arenas and at the individual level (Borneman and Ghassem-Fachandi, 2017; Karakayali, 2018), but these fail to link it back to ROs.

If theory on international institutions has captured identity in an incomplete way, then for students of global governance the problem is more one of neglect. Identity has not figured prominently in their thinking on institutions. Indeed, while the global governance literature accords ROs and international institutions a central place, it largely ignores their identity-shaping effects.

The state of the art for theorizing governance is arguably Michael Zuern's *A Theory of Global Governance: Authority, Legitimacy and Contestation* (Symposium, 2021). This is a rigorously developed, conceptually tight, and empirically rich theory built on three pillars: general normative principles, (international) institutions, and the interaction of those institutions (Zuern, 2018: 249). In contrast to much of the IR and global governance literatures, which still fail to take domestic politics seriously, Zuern's model allows for and expects contestation by social actors. This may take the form of a 'populist backlash against open borders and public authorities beyond the nation state,' where domestic actors question the transfer of authority to the international level (Zuern, 2018: 11, 253).

Here – without invoking the term – Zuern hints at the power of identity to re-shape patterns of global governance (see also Barnett, 2021: 140-141). In this paper, I make identity explicit and theorize its role via a three-step argument in which domestic discourse and practice are central, and where identity is both caused and enacted. My argument thus speaks directly to a challenge Zuern has formulated: 'A closer analysis of this link between domestic structures and the global governance system is vital. It will tell us a lot about the future of national borders and the future of the global governance system' (Zuern, 2018: 265-266).

Institutions and Identity: Opening Black Boxes & Transcending Silos

In response to these limitations, I argue for an approach that opens the black box of identity. I do so by working across disciplinary silos to theorize the multiple processes of identity construction and across epistemologies to measure both the causal mechanisms and social practices at work.

Defining Identity, ROs, Domestic Politics and Process. Building theory of any sort requires that one operationalize key concepts and terms; I begin with identity. Identities are collective beliefs about the definition of the group and its membership that are held by most members. They are rarely constructed in a single arena, which means they may be fostered by institutions, public debate and elite competition for power, while being shaped by everyday social practices (Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009: 4). This definition is intentionally broad and justified on both inter-disciplinary grounds (having a definition that integrates understandings from political science, sociology and everyday nationalism) and empirical grounds (identities being shaped in multiple arenas).

Identity construction denotes the broad set of processes – micro-macro, material-social, collective-individual – through which identities are formed. My understanding of identity construction is thus an integrative one, long favored by sociologists who study the topic (Cerulo, 1997).

Regional identities are the identity concepts, statements and policies articulated – for my purposes – by regional organizations. All three of the ROs studied – the AU, ASEAN, and the EU - have issued official statements on identity.

At the state level, I examine processes of national identity construction. Like most contemporary students of nationalism, I do not view these identities in essentialist terms, but as outcomes of political and social processes. Their content can vary widely and may include ethnic, linguistic and cultural dimensions, as well as shared commitments to values and rights.[1] In principle, regional identity can intersect and influence national identities along many – if not all – of these dimensions.

Regional organizations are formal and institutionalized cooperative relations among states or sub-state units of different countries. They can be task-specific (NATO) or general-purpose (AU, ASEAN, EU). Some are purely inter-governmental, while others entail some transfer of authority to the RO. The latter is referred to as supranationalism (Boerzel and Risse, 2016: 5-6).

I conceptualize process in two meta-theoretically distinct ways, as causal mechanisms and as social practices. This pluralism is mandated by the broad set of positivist/causal and interpretive/meaning-making dynamics through which identities are constructed in the (real) social world. Causal mechanisms are the pathway or process by which an effect is produced or a purpose is accomplished (Gerring, 2008: 178; see also Hedstroem and Ylikoski, 2010). In lay terms, they are what connects A to B; they put causal effects into motion. Social practices are socially meaningful, patterned actions that embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world (Adler, 2019: 109). In lay terms, they are ways of doing things.

Finally, I understand domestic politics broadly. It includes interest group lobbying, social mobilization, political party competition, as well as social learning and discursive contention. To understand the organization of politics, I rely on institutional theory and its close IR relation: domestic structure.

The Theoretical Argument. I theorize the RO–identity relation in a three-step argument that captures top-down and bottom-up dynamics, their interaction, and the politics of identity construction. Mine is a causal story, but one built upon a series of interpretive moves, theoretically and methodologically.

As a *first step*, I consider the causal mechanisms through which regional organizations promote a sense of shared community. These may be social – framing arguments in certain ways or fostering deliberative fora. Equally, they may be material – creating symbols (flags, coins, Eurovision song contest) or economic and social programs that blur existing boundaries between identities (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). On the latter, consider the EU's Erasmus university exchange program, where we have evidence of its identity-shaping effects (Stoeckel, 2016).

Here, then, an RO promotes certain policies and practices among national agents. For a number of reasons – education levels, professional mobility – the latter are receptive to thinking of identity and community in multiple ways (Risse, 2010). This captures the political science insight of top-down identity construction through institutions. As students of identity within both states and ROs have argued (Inkeles, 1966; Johnston, 2008), it is useful to conceptualize this top-down process as a socialization causal mechanism: the induction of actors into the norms and rules of a given community (Long and Hadden, 1985: 42–44).

Yet, to date, IR theorists studying ROs have invoked socialization in a way that does not do justice to its rich, inter-disciplinary development in sociology and anthropology (Checkel, 2017a; Checkel, 2017b). As socialization is about how the group/organizational setting shapes

[1] My understanding of national identities thus builds upon Anderson's pioneering work (2006 [1983]) viewing nations as 'imagined communities.'

the individual, it is all too easy to ignore the agency of the latter (Epstein, 2012). Moreover, socialization arguments often fail to recognize that any individual is simultaneously subject to multiple socializing environments. Socialization thus needs to be conceptualized as layered and multiple, as anthropologists would argue (Rodgers, 2017; see also Checkel, 2014). Consider again those Erasmus exchange students. They are likely subject to socializing influences from other arenas (families, social-media networks), in addition to their university exchange experience.

The argument's *second step* addresses these critiques by exploring individuals' daily lived experiences. Sociologists would argue it is what people do, the practices they enact, that have a powerful effect in shaping identity in various socialization arenas. Building on Bourdieu's concept of habitus by essentially providing a theory of action, practice theorists define practices as 'socially meaningful patterned actions that […] simultaneously embody, act out, and possibly reify background knowledge and discourse in and on the material world.' Practices are 'meaning making, identity-forming, and order-producing activities' (Adler, 2019: 109; see also Lechner and Frost, 2018; and Drieschova, Bueger and Hopf, 2022). This work thus gives IR new ways to theorize the process of identity construction in different socialization environments (see also Favell, 2008; Holmes, 2009).

Practices become socially meaningful and make things happen only when they are elevated to the group, with practice theorists talking of 'communities of practice' (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 8). However, the process through which such communities come into being is not clear. In early work, diffusion was the process that moved practices from the individual to the group level (Adler and Pouliot, 2011: 8). Yet, more recently, diffusion has been replaced by socialization. Adler (2019: 119), for example, views communities of practice as sites where their 'members socialize one another and learn from each other by and through practice.'[2]

The invocation of such processes by practice theorists is both odd and cries out for further thought. These scholars argue that theorizing socialization is not necessary or possible, as this is out-of-bounds meta-theoretically - getting inside heads, as it were (Pouliot, 2010: 14-22). This is odd, and it highlights a tension between ontology and empirical operationalization in practice theory: An approach that is processual to the core fails to theorize key parts of the process through which practices become socially meaningful.

I thus theorize this missing process by drawing upon earlier work on social learning (Johnston, 2001; Johnston, 2008) and socialization (Risse, Ropp and Sikkink, 1999; Checkel, 2017b). Practices matter when they become a part of, embedded within communities of practice; we need this additional theory to deconstruct and map such a process. Placing into conversation interpretive social practices with socialization causal mechanisms brings to life my theory's deep pluralism, where it tells a causal story, but one that is built upon a series of interpretive moves.

With practices now fully theorized, we need to figure out how they will be observed, zeroing in on method. And here, the literature on everyday nationalism, which also views identities being constructed from the bottom up through the enactment of practices, argues they must be measured immersively (Goode and Stroup, 2015; Skey and Antonsich, 2017: Part II, Part IV).[3] These identity-forming practices are detected and measured through micro studies and ethnographic exploration (Draper, 1974; Borneman and Hammoudi, 2009; Goode and Stroup, 2015: 727). Ethnographically, one looks for several indicators of identity: boundaries (what is

[2] See also Cornut and de Zamaróczy (2021), where socialization plays the central role in the spread of practices.
[3] Part of nationalism studies, everyday nationalism builds on the work of Anderson (2006 [1983]) and Billig (1995).

inside and outside; their permeability); changes in and contestation over boundaries; and narratives expressing the implicit or explicit content of identity (Adams, 2009: 319).

This second step thus shifts our focus to domestic dynamics and practices, which must be theorized and measured to understand fully any new sense of community promoted by regional organizations.

In a *third step*, I capture the broader processes and politics of identity construction by scaling up. If the first two steps emphasize the micro, exploring how individuals navigate a changing identity terrain with its top-down and bottom-up components, now one explores the micro–macro link. How do these (micro) changes show up in debates and policy over a country's national identity and sense of community? Do the micro data resonate with or cause changes in cultural representations, social discourse, laws, or party platforms?

These macro structures and factors do not float freely; they play out in political settings. Here, my conceptualization of the politics of identity construction is purposely broad. For sure, domestic politics include the processes typically emphasized by political scientists and comparativists: interest group lobbying, social movement mobilization, party political competition, bureaucratic politics. And such processes clearly play a role in the formation or change of identity. Consider a European case, where the Alternative for Germany political party has weaponized identity in recent years. Alexander Gauland, its co-leader during 2017-2019, sought to shape the discourse about German identity and the EU strategically, in ways that served his interests and those of his constituents. Earlier research linking ROs to domestic politics (Solingen, 1998; Wilson, 2000) analyzes precisely this type of strategic behavior.

Yet, as Hugh Heclo reminds us, politics is more than political survival and self-interest. In his notable turn of phrase, politicians do not only power, but also puzzle – exhibiting what he called social learning (Heclo, 1974: 305-06; see also Hall, 1993). Writing over two decades before the constructivist turn in IR (Checkel, 1998), Heclo was articulating an alternative, social constructivist foundation for theorizing politics. It is no longer just a by-product of strategic interaction or a clash of material interests, but also a construction. This means politicians and other political actors may rethink policy positions or even their identities through processes of social learning, where they argue and debate, enact new social practices or reflect on changing social discourses. This is also a part of the 'politics of identity construction.'

My theory thus views politics through both rationalist and constructivist lenses (Adler, 2013) – a meta-theoretical pluralism that has implications for our research design. In particular, I will not make one view of politics the main argument and consider the other as an alternative explanation. Instead, data on both will be collected simultaneously, which means that I look for evidence of strategic, cost-benefit calculations and learning/socialization mechanisms from the start. In the language of causal inference, my argument takes seriously the inferential challenge of equifinality, where different mechanisms and practices can lead to the same outcome (Bennett and Checkel, 2015: ch.1).

The Theory in a Nutshell. The theory gets inside the black box of identity formation. I do so by theorizing the *how* of identity construction – causal mechanisms and social practices – and the role of ROs in this process. It is inter-disciplinary and plural – epistemologically, theoretically and methodologically. I theorize the influence of international institutions and ROs on identity via a three-step process. It begins with national elites and policymakers – those closest to an RO, as it were – reconsidering or making more inclusive/exclusive national conceptions of who we are. Here my approach uses the concepts (norm-driven action, socialization) and methods (interviews, process tracing) of political science to measure a

possible change in identity by looking at what people say – in interviews or public/political discourse.

In the theory's second and third steps, I then consider these individuals in the thick institutional-normative-discursive environments in which they enact their identities – all part of domestic politics, broadly conceived. Key concepts such as social practice are drawn from sociology and everyday nationalism, while the methods come from both political science (process tracing) and practice theory (interpretive interviewing, ethnography, practice tracing). The focus is now on what people do. The second and third parts of the theory bring domestic politics 'back in' to our stories on identity construction, but in a way that goes beyond standard political science accounts of strategic behavior or socialization.

Institutions and Identity in Africa, Asia and Europe

In exploring the relation between regional organizations and identity, my theory building necessitates a cross-regional design, for two reasons. Most important, in exploring this relation, too much previous work has examined one case: Europe, the EU, and European / national identity (Favell, 2008; Fligstein, 2009; Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009; Risse, 2010). How do these arguments about the EU and identity play out in other parts of the world, where states are constituted differently and ROs employ different identity-shaping policies and instruments?

We do not know. The growing literature on ROs (Acharya and Johnston, 2007; Prieto, 2013; Closa and Palestini, 2018) and on comparative regionalism (Boerzel and Risse, 2016) are excellent fora for explorations of this sort. Yet to date, these studies have mostly had other analytic foci. Even when they do examine the RO-identity relation, the results are difficult to assess due to weaknesses in both research design and methods (Checkel, 2016). A comparative, cross-regional study, as proposed here, will begin to address these problems.

A second justification for the cross-regional design is the project's analytic goal to build new theory. My hunch is that three sets of factors are important in shaping the RO-identity relation: top-down identity construction (RO→state); bottom-up identity practice (sub-state→state); and the domestic politics linking the two. One way to sharpen and better specify these claims is to introduce variation among the cases studied.

Each of the three regions chosen – Africa, Asia and Europe – has at least one regional organization implementing policies to promote (regional) identity. In Africa, this is the African Union (AU); in Asia, it is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); in Europe, it is the EU. Equally important, these organizations' efforts at top-down identity building vary systematically – from low (ASEAN), to medium (AU), to high (EU).

Are these ROs candidates for a cross-regional comparison? At first glance, we might have an apples and oranges problem. In so many ways, the EU is closer to the citizens of its member states, both elites and the general population, than either ASEAN or the AU. This creates multiple pathways for influencing identity. Examples include: member-state nationals being posted to the EU Commission, whereby some are socialized into the norms and values of the European project (Hooghe, 2005); Europeanized public spheres shaping discourse and identity (Diez Medrano, 2009); or interactions among ordinary citizens, enabled by the internal market's four freedoms, fostering a European identity (Favell, 2008; Fligstein, 2009).

For sure, ASEAN and the AU have fewer such pathways for shaping identity, in part because they adopted the goal much later than the EU. But pathways and policies there are. For example, while ASEAN had little to say about identity in its first decades – the RO was founded in 1967 – in the new millennium, it has made the creation of a regional identity a central goal.

> The 10th general principle of the Bali Concord II, adopted in 2003, proclaimed that 'ASEAN shall continue to foster a community of caring societies and promote a common regional identity.' Amongst the goals listed by the ASEAN Charter adopted in 2008: 'To promote an ASEAN identity through the fostering of greater awareness of the diverse culture and heritage of the region'. ASEAN has since consistently stressed the slogan of 'One Vision, One Identity, One Community', in a good deal of its official statements and documents (Acharya, 2017: 31).

Indeed, ASEAN's Vision 2020 explicitly commits the RO to constructing a Southeast Asian region with a common identity (Neuvonen, 2019). Scholars have documented one pathway for such identity construction: elite socialisation within ASEAN, whereby they come to view themselves as part of a distinctive region (Acharya, 2017: 30; see also Glas, 2017).

What about the African Union? The predecessor of the AU was the Organization of African Unity (OAU), founded in 1963. OAU policy or organizational discourse did little to promote a distinct African regional identity until 2002, when it was transformed into the African Union, a more robust RO with greater independence from its member states.[4] Similar to ASEAN, in the new millennium, the AU has prioritized the creation of a regional identity. In its Agenda 2063, published in 2015, one of the seven 'Aspirations for the Africa We Want' is the creation of 'an Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, values and ethics.' Specifically, this will entail the AU diffusing Pan-African ideals so they become 'fully embedded in all school curricula' – a strategy taken straight from the nationalism and state building literatures. The goal of this and other policies is the 'construction of [an] African identity' (African Union Commission, 2015: 7-8).

More recently, the African Union has used Africa Day (25 May) to spark continent-wide discussions on regional identity. In 2021, the AU's Women, Gender and Youth Directorate organized and facilitated discussions among African youth in several member states to 'discuss pathways to reimagine African identity alongside thought-leaders and celebrities in the arts, culture, and heritage sector' (African Union, 2021).[5]

The particular country case selected within each region further strengthens my design. For each RO, I look for a member state whose identity is in flux and being actively debated. Thus, the choice of Singapore for the ASEAN case: a founding member of the RO (1967) and a country that only took on its current contours in 1965 when it separated from Malaysia. Today, Singapore prides itself on a multi-racial identity, one that is still a 'work in progress,' according to Finance Minister Lawrence Wong (Sin, 2021; see also *Economist*, 2021; and Bogacki, 2022). In April 2022, Wong was designated Singapore's 'prime ministerial heir apparent' (Telling, 2022), and since June 2022, he is also Deputy Prime Minister. These promotions likely ensure that his views on the need to debate and discuss Singaporean identity will gain in political salience.

For the African Union case, I consider the Republic of South Africa, which joined the RO in 1994, after its first post-apartheid democratic elections.[6] After the formal end of apartheid in 1994, the country has spent the better part of 25 years debating what it means to have a shared identity – not an easy task in a country with 11 official languages. Since 2017, this debate has been turbo-charged after the ruling African National Congress (ANC) proposed revising the constitution to allow for expropriation of farmland without compensating the owners. This would target the 10% of the population (South African whites) who own over 90% of the

[4] The AU is in part modelled on the EU, including the 'Union' in its name and the creation of several supranational entities within it – for example, the African Union Commission.
[5] On the AU and regional identity, see also Glas (2018).
[6] In 1994 the organization was still the OAU; it became the African Union in 2002.

agricultural holdings. In hearings across the country, much of testimony and debate has centered on land as a fundamental identity marker and how the proposed constitutional change will impact post-apartheid South Africa's multi-racial identity (Vorster, 2019; see also Smith, 2019).

Regarding Europe and the EU, Germany is the country chosen for study. This is a nation-state that has worked extraordinarily hard to escape the identity disasters of national socialism. Yet this same country is today in the midst of a profound and increasingly politicized debate over what it means to be German. This debate was initially sparked by the 2015-2016 refugee crisis, but has since broadened to question the very role and relation of Europe in German national identity (Kropp, 2021; Minatti, 2021; Kropp and Minatti, 2022).

For all three countries, I select a five-year period (2015–2020), during which debates on national identity were underway and the respective ROs all possessed the tools needed to intervene in such discussions. I recover identity inductively for the three countries, and do so by taking a snapshot of national identity at two points in time (2015 and 2020). This is largely done through a textual analysis and coding of numerous primary sources. The snapshot will reveal if any components of national identity *correlate* with activities/statements on identity articulated by the respective ROs. We then start the motion picture, as it were, exploring what causal mechanisms and social practices stand behind and are producing these correlations.

Finally, the domestic political system varies across the three countries, from the semi-authoritarian statism of Singapore, to the democratic corporatist pluralism of Germany to the still-evolving political institutions of democratic South Africa. Invoking an argument first developed in the Cold War context, this would suggest – counter-intuitively – that international/RO influence on domestic identity debates will be greatest in Singapore and weakest in Germany, with South Africa in-between (Evangelista, 1995; see also Risse-Kappen, 1991). Here, domestic institutions are key. In a more plural society with open institutions – like Germany – ROs compete with multiple other social and political actors in any identity debate. In a more centralized or statist polity – like Singapore – fewer actors can access and shape politics; an RO thus has less competition.

Finding Identity – An Inter-Disciplinary Methodological Toolkit

I should begin by answering the question likely on many a reader's mind: Why a methods discussion in a theory paper? First, methods flow from theory; if the theory is conceptualizing identity in a meta-theoreyically plural manner – as does mine - the methods must reflect this pluralism and their operationalization must be more extensive.

Second, I want the theory to be used, and this requires significant attention to methods. The utility of IR theory is often undercut by inattention to method – by realists (Mearsheimer, 2014), practice-theorists (Adler, 2019; Pouliot, 2020), constructivist security-studies scholars (Checkel, 2018), students of qualitative IPE (Checkel, 2021a) or institutional scholars (Viola, 2020). Third, over the past 15 years, qualitative methods – positivist/critical-realist and interpretive - have experienced a renaissance. For a theory building exercise such as mine, the bar is now much higher for the rigorous and transparent application of one's methods (Symposium, 2015; Symposium, 2016; Jacobs and Buthe, 2021; Kapiszewski and Wood, 2022).

The methods to test my theory come from political science, sociology and everyday nationalism. It is to these that I now turn.

Methods I – Process Tracing and Practice Tracing. Recall that the project's theoretical concern is to measure the interactions among organizations and actors as identities are constructed by top-down and bottom-up processes. Given this focus, process tracing is my

central method. It provides systematic guidance for measuring the empirical trail left in the data – more formally, the observable implications – by my central (processual) concepts: mechanisms and practices. I employ both standard process tracing, in the positivist/critical-realist mode (Bennett and Checkel, 2015; Beach and Pedersen, 2019), and interpretive forms (Norman, 2015; Norman, 2016; Cecchini and Beach, 2020; Norman, 2021) with a focus on practice tracing (Pouliot, 2015).

Standard process tracing will be used to piece together the overall causal narrative: how identities were being shaped over time (top-down, bottom-up), through what mechanisms, and how – if at all – they entered the domestic political process. Specifically, this means recording the observable implications of the socialization, social learning, instrumental mechanisms sketched earlier. Like most methods, process tracing proceeds in two steps – data collection and data analysis. The former involves within-process-tracing methods (Checkel, 2021a), which we address below.

I conduct the data analysis for the process tracing in two different ways. Currently, the process-tracing literature is divided on how to conduct data analysis, and leading scholars have argued it should be done with the aid of Bayesian logic and math (Bennett, 2015; Fairfield and Charman, 2017; Fairfield and Charman, 2022). This allows a process tracer to quantify her belief that a particular piece of data is indeed evidence of one causal mechanism and not another. This type of process tracing has become dominant in the literature and is the principal way the technique is being taught at methods schools in Europe and North America (Checkel, 2021a).

I argue that this approach is inadequate. It is not that Bayesian logic is flawed – although, it takes a rather simplistic view of the human mind as rational updater – or that quantitative analysis can play no role in process tracing. Rather, there is no clear evidence that it delivers better results – better in that we have more confidence in our causal inferences about the workings of some mechanism (Zaks, 2021). In addition, Bayesian logic carries real opportunity costs. Mastering the math and logic of Bayesian takes time and effort, and this leaves less time for other important elements of process tracing – for example, mastering the within-process-tracing methods without which data analysis is impossible.

I will use my theory development to put these competing types of process tracing to the test. Specifically, three types will be used: non-Bayesian standard; Bayesian standard; and practice-tracing/interpretive. For those parts of the project where I am working in a positivist mode, Bayesian and non-Bayesian standard process tracing will be carried out virtually side by side.

However, I will make equal use of interpretive process tracing, or what I will henceforth call practice tracing. Here, measurement centers on the observable implications of social practices. However, practice tracers disagree on their within-practice-tracing methods. Some argue that practices can be accessed by interviews (Pouliot, 2010), and others claim that it is possible through document analysis (Cornut and Zamaroczy, 2021). I will use my theory building to push this debate forward, arguing that the only way to measure practices is through ethnography and participant observation. To be more precise, ethnography must always be the main within-practice-tracing method; to triangulate on the exact details of a particular practice, interpretive interviews could also be used (Checkel, 2021b).

Practice tracing will play a key role helping me order and systematize the data acquired ethnographically. What practices are invoked – and in what order – as an individual navigates, enacts, or negotiates her identity? Consistent with an interpretive ethos, the purpose of the practice tracing is to inductively reconstruct identities – not to tell a causal story.

None of the three process methods – standard and Bayesian process tracing, and practice tracing – is useful without good data. For my studies, the data come from three within-process/practice-tracing methods: document analysis, interviewing and ethnography/participant-observation. Regarding document analysis, at the RO level, key documents will be those that implicate identity directly (for the EU, see Bulletin, 1973, for example) or indirectly (for example, policy statements on student exchange [EU] or international youth events [AU]). Also relevant will be the ROs' own efforts to gauge citizen identification with it. In Europe, Eurobarometer surveys have included identity questions since 1982. At the national level, I analyze South African / Singaporean / German documents that address identity issues (citizenship, immigration and integration, borders); these will be collected from the media, government, NGOs, foundations and think tanks.

Beyond document analysis, my bet is that drilling down and making within-process/practice-tracing methods more immersive is the best way to develop and test my theory.

Methods II – Interviews and Participant Observation. I utilize both positivist and interpretive types of interviewing. Early on, my emphasis will be on the positivist. I will interview individuals at the three ROs and three country studies in a way designed to maximize the data obtained. We are interested in what they say about an RO and its efforts at identity building or about their own identity. This is standard political-science interviewing (Mosley, 2013: chs.1, 3, 9; Bryman and Bell, 2016: ch.11), and it provides an early sense of the identity landscape.

However, given the challenges of accessing identity with such standard interviews – where priming effects and social desirability bias are often in play – the bulk of the interviewing will be interpretive and ethnographic (Gusterson, 1996). In this case, I use a protocol, but the interviews are less structured, remaining open to moments when we do not know what to make of the exchange. This will keep the focus on 'verification of perceptions' rather than on 'authorization of results' (Borneman, 2014: 443). Some ethnographers call this life history interviewing (Gusterson, 2008). Whatever the label, our goal is what Lee Ann Fujii has called relational interviewing – a type of interpretive interviewing for political scientists (Fujii, 2017). Such interviews seek to understand how people identify, if at all, with an RO, but also and crucially how their daily lived experience – what they do – and socialization in various arenas may amplify, negate or simply complicate that identification (Favell, 2008). This kind of interviewing can also reveal if an individual wears his/her identity like a skin, or like a sweater, with the latter suggestive of a strategic use of it.

Relational/ethnographic interviewing, with its emphasis on interaction, takes much more time; one needs to build a relationship with an individual over the course of several meetings. Such close interactions place a premium on a researcher's ethical obligations (Fujii, 2017) and that the interviewer has been trained to reflect and act upon her positionality, where issues of power, gender and race are typically in play (Holmes, 2020; Soedirgo and Glas, 2020; Glas, 2021).

My goal for each RO-country case is 80 interviews with a broad cross-section of elites and non-elites. These will include: individuals in the respective RO secretariat; officials in the foreign, interior and education/culture ministries, and officials tasked specifically to interact with the RO; key actors in the main political parties, as well as in their challengers on the right and left; academics; journalists; NGO leaders; and ordinary citizens.

To construct interview rosters for each RO-country case, I use two strategies of non-random sampling: purposive sampling of key actors identified through desk and field research, and snowball sampling based on recommendations from previous interviewees or participant observation (Mosley 2013, 41–42; see also Gusterson, 2008). In constructing the category

'ordinary citizen,' we follow students of everyday nationalism and employ a two-prong sampling strategy (Knott, 2015). The ordinary citizen must be accessible and 'in motion', as it were. Accessible simply means that – beyond interviews – participant observation is also possible. In South Africa, for example, the 'accessible' ordinary citizen is more likely to be a farmer than a police lieutenant. And for the 'in motion' part, the South African farmer will do a number of things and go several places in the course of her/his day. From an ethnographic perspective, this motion is key as it allows us, as participant observers, to learn how she enacts and negotiates her identity through various social practices.

The process/practice tracing's ethnographic component demonstrates my intent to work across disciplines and epistemologies, and marks quite a departure for IR in methodological terms.[7] For each of the country cases, I will follow up interviews with participant observation, where access is possible (see above). The goal is to attend – per country – 30 meetings or events involving interviewees, for example, a journalist giving a public talk. This will allow me to observe how she navigates a country's identity terrain and, put simply, how she both 'talks about and enacts' identity (Adams, 2009: 318; see also Knott, 2015). This ethnography, and the self-understandings of identity that we reconstruct from it, will serve as a cross-check on the interviews (triangulation, in the jargon). It expands what can be inferred from texts (interviews, discourse) by allowing us to put identity talk into a larger framework that includes contingency and conflict, and what an individual considers and discards as she practices her identity (Adams, 2009: 341).

Conversely, interviews do much more than serve as a baseline for cross-checks. Participant observation cannot access the past; it allows us to see how an individual enacts her identity *now*. Relational interviews can then probe what practices and events in past years have fed into that identity (Knott, 2015).

As the above implies, I use the data from the ethnography in two slightly different ways. With the practice tracing, the data allow me to see and measure the various social practices at work in identity construction. For the standard process tracing (Bayesian and non-Bayesian), the ethnographic data helps to reconstruct the causal chain. These causal links are: 1) ROs to top-down construction of national identity; 2) bottom-up identity enactment to national identity; and 3) domestic politics – broadly understood – to the ways in which these identities are eventually reflected in law, policy and discourse. With the standard process tracing, the ethnography is more accurately called political ethnography (Schatz, 2009), which is a form of immersion that has been developed by political scientists who see fieldwork as more than simply recording what people say (Wood, 2003: ch.2; Autesserre, 2010; Simmons, 2017; see also Fujii, 2017).

Methods III – Data Analysis. Data from documents, interviews and the ethnography will be analyzed in three ways. First, I will construct thematic analyses, cross-referencing across different subjects, and across the same person in different settings. What was being said about identity, by whom and when, and before what audiences? Which events seem to be experienced collectively as revealing sharp borders between 'us' and 'them' (Alba, 2005)? Which events seem to align or re-align individual and public moods (Borneman and Ghassem-Fachandi, 2017)?

Second, to systematize the data collection, I will employ NVivo software. It facilitates the classification and arrangement of unstructured data in ways that reveal patterns and relationships and can guide further data collection and analysis. I will use it principally to

[7] Surprisingly, this holds even for interpretive IR, where scholars who require the method shy away from using it (Pouliot, 2010; Hopf and Allan, 2016). For the rare IR exceptions to my claim, see Thaler (2021), and Vadrot and Rodríguez (2022).

generate a concept map of identity meanings implied by specific rhetoric or actions, to catalog mechanisms such as socializing venues, and to explore new ways to capture and depict the construction of identity and community membership.[8]

Third, employing both process and practice tracing, the data will be analyzed in two – epistemologically – distinct ways. For the standard and Bayesian process tracing, the core of the analysis is fitting to the data the (pre-theorized) observable implications of our causal mechanisms. Standard process tracing relies on the researcher's judgment as to whether there is evidence in the data for a particular mechanism (Schwartz and Straus, 2018). Bayesian process tracing formalizes this assessment, requiring a researcher to assign probabilities to her hunches on the mechanisms being present in the data (Fairfield, 2013).

For the interpretive practice tracing, the data analysis involves a sequence of empirical observation (chiefly through participant observation), the researcher then inferring a particular social practice at work, and then further observation to see whether the practice indeed leaves a particular empirical trail. Key with this type of data analysis is knowing when to stop. The answer – taken from ethnography – is when repetition and sameness occur upon further observation (Pouliot, 2016: Appendix).

Our use of these different types of process/practice tracing will result in a structured narrative, one that explores how identity was being constructed in three different countries and ROs, and that avoids the limitations of purely top-down or bottom-up stories. This is the heart of the process/practice-tracing method, and rigorous scholarship based on it offers compelling accounts (Schimmelfennig, 2003; Bakke, 2013; Pouliot, 2016; Kastner, 2018; Schwartz and Straus, 2018; Skagerlind, 2019).

The Methods Defended. I access identity by combining positivist/critical-realist and interpretive qualitative methods: process tracing (three types), document analysis, interviews (two types), and ethnography (two types). Is this the correct way to measure identity and identity construction? After all, political science has come to favor experiments or sophisticated quantitative methods to study many phenomena, including identity.

My theory and its testing buck this trend, for three reasons. First, experimental/quantitative designs do not let the subjects speak for themselves, failing to investigate how they understand and practice their identities. Second and regarding surveys, the problem is that the questions 'are specified in advance, limiting the choices subjects have, in fact, forcing subjects to choose identities they may never have even considered in the first place, and foreclosing their own answers to the question' (Hopf, 2016: 13).

Third, experiments have multiple limitations that call into serious question their current status as the gold standard for causal inference. For one, the ethical issues in play are often quite problematic, but are too often left unaddressed (Carpenter, Montgomery and Nylen, 2021). In addition, experimental designs and their findings do not travel, with external validity subsequently very low. Last and certainly not least, while experiments may look (relatively) easy to execute, they in fact are typically parasitic on a prior qualitative/field component to verify that 'as if random' is indeed 'as if random' (Dunning, 2015), or require the use of process tracing to measure causal processes and not simply causal effects (Beach and Littvay, 2022). These multiple limitations have led both prominent philosophers (Cartwright and Deaton, 2018; Cartwright, 2022) and social scientists (Katzenstein, 2022: 289-92) to question the very utility of experiments.

[8] For one of my country studies – Germany – we have already used NVivo to create a database on German identity and its content in two years: 2015 and 2020 (Kropp, 2021; Minatti, 2021). It includes over 1900 unique data entries – from leaders' speeches, party political programmes, school textbooks, and the main daily newspapers – that have been coded and analyzed.

This said, I appreciate there are different perspectives on using quantitative/experimental techniques to measure identity. On these measurement issues, I will thus compare my findings with scholars working in other traditions – for example, Hooghe (2019), who employs a number of field experiments to measure identity.

Conclusion: Theorizing Identity – A Need for Pluralism

I seek to build new theory and apply new methods to the study of identity, generating novel insights on the mechanisms and practices behind identity formation, and do so by drawing upon insights from political-science/IR-theory, sociology and everyday nationalism. This allows me to unpack the black box of identity. The theory provides a roadmap for studying the RO-identity relation, and where to look for arenas of identity construction and practice outside and beyond institutions. It captures both top-down and bottom-up dynamics.

In the early years of the new millennium, Ted Hopf argued that constructivist work on identity too often focused on the system level, while ignoring powerful identity dynamics 'at home' (Hopf, 2002: ch.1). Hopf was right – but his argument was incomplete. My theory incorporates his bottom-up and interpretive exploration of identity, with a first step that recognizes the key, top-down role played by institutions and elites.

My theory building can also help push scholarship on global governance to the next level. Much of the best governance literature is built on rationalist social theory (Zuern, 2018; Rodrik, 2020; Lake, 2021). While there is nothing wrong with such a choice, it does typically lead to a neglect of identity.[9] The argument advanced here brings identity back to our thinking on governance, and it does so by its commitment to meta-theoretical and theoretical pluralism.

The intellectual bet is that inter-disciplinarity in theory and method and the epistemological pluralism and openness on which it is premised will yield significant gains for identity scholarship. Are the risks of this inter-disciplinary move too great? What is the cost in terms of analytic clarity or meta-theoretical consistency? With analytics, I took what were already complex arguments on identity and added more; my argument cannot in any sense be characterized as parsimonious. Perhaps, though – and as recently suggested by leading IR theorists (Katzenstein, 2022) – the search for such precision and certainty in our theories is a profound mistake.[10]

In terms of meta-theory, my argument might appear to be built on multiple 'sleights of hand.' I combine epistemological apples and oranges – positivist, mainstream theory on institutions and identity, and interpretive ethnographies of social practice. While there may be philosophical reasons to shy away from such a combination – although I doubt it – there is nothing preventing it at the level of a concrete, carefully executed research design (Hopf, 2002, 2007).

But, still, does the field of international relations really need all this inter-disciplinarity and methodological pluralism? For two reasons, the answer is 'yes.' First, there are growing calls – at the conceptual, philosophical levels – for international relations (and political science more generally) to embrace such pluralism (Jackson, 2016: chapter 7; Bevir and Blakely, 2018; Katzenstein, 2022). IR has lost its theoretical mojo over the past 10-15 years – an assessment shared by a strikingly broad cross-section of leading theorists (Snidal and Wendt, 2009; Mearsheimer and Walt, 2013; Checkel, 2015). A rigorous turn to inter-disciplinarity and pluralism can help the field return to 'thinking big' theoretically.

[9] In a recent symposium on Zuern's book, only one of ten contributions even mentions identity (Symposium, 2021).
[10] The meta-theoretical case against parsimony and certainty in our theory building rests on a move from classical physics to quantum physics for understanding the social world. See Wendt (2015); Symposium (2022); and Katzenstein (2022).

Second, we need inter-disciplinary IR as a counter to the growing pressures to make our theory – and theorists – less ambitious. These pressures come from multiple directions and disciplinary initiatives. For one, experimental designs and causal identification strategies, while invaluable for their ability to capture accurately a causal story, inevitably involve trade-offs. They force a scholar, for example, to zoom in and test just a small bit of theory that is often simple and obvious (Hangartner, Dinas, Marbach, Matakos and Xefteris, 2019). In addition, IR scholars are faced with growing calls to make their research more transparent – so called data access and research transparency, or DA-RT (Symposium, 2015, 2016). While some have argued that DA-RT has serious, and deleterious, consequences for ethics (Parkinson and Wood, 2015; Kapiszewski and Wood, 2022) and others have noted that it diverts the discipline from addressing more pressing racial-gender issues (Fujii, 2016), my concern is that it will incentivize younger scholars to spend even more time on methods (Checkel, 2020). And more time on method means less for theory.

Finally, at many American and European universities, doctoral training programs provide significant incentives to 'think small' theoretically, as article dissertations replace manuscripts. Writing such a dissertation gets a young scholar all-important journal publications at an early point in her career. Yet, the article format does not leave intellectual space or word count for theory, especially of the innovative, inter-disciplinary sort.

The arguments advanced in this paper will certainly not magically fix or correct such trends. My hope is more modest. By contributing to the development of an IR that is rigorous, plural and deeply grounded in the field, it will add new currents to these debates.

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