

Mette Kristine Nilsen

United in Diversity or Divided by Identity?

How Identity Affected the Brexit Referendum

Bachelor's project in European Studies

Supervisor: Anette Homlong Storeide

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Historical Studies



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Mette Kristine Nilsen

Candidate number: 10020

Bachelor thesis, European studies, Faculty of Humanities

Supervisor: Anette H. Storeide, NTNU

10. May 2019

Word count: 7432

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1. Introduction

Social identities are what ties individuals to the larger world. They can make people feel connection to others with the same hair colour, they can create bonds between people who speaks the same language and they can make people go to war to save people they have never met. The strong unifying power of identities have an equally strong dividing power that can and has created division in international relations. The 2016 Brexit referendum is an example of this.

The topic of European integration was highlighted in the wake of World War II as an absolute necessity for reconstructing European nation-states that were devastated by the war. It seemed that the best way to treat a continent torn apart by war was to rebuild it, stronger together. At the end of the war, in 1946, Britain's wartime prime minister Winston Churchill advocated for European integration. Britain did however not take part in the first European cooperation projects. At the time they were still in control of large parts of their empire and their special relationship with the united states(US) gave them enough security and power in the global arena that they did not feel the necessity to join the European coal and steel community(ECSC) nor the European economic community(EEC) when it was first formed (Kaiser & Varsori, 2010, p.97). They feared that by accepting commitment to supranational cooperation with Europe they would lose independence from the US and subsequently their status and influence with them, while at the same time weakening their links to the commonwealth (Millward, 2002, p.75). Though by the early 1960s their situation had changed. Through decolonization, the Suez war, stagnant economic development and growing instability in the relationship to the US, their role as a world power was dwindling. In 1961 they therefore sent in their first application for membership in the EEC followed with a second attempt in 1967 (Kaiser & Varsori, 2010, p.98). Both times their applications were vetoed by the French president Charles de Gaulle who sighted that Britain's economic practices would be incompatible with the goals of Europe and that their deep-seated hostility toward the transnational European cooperating project as reasons for them not to join. Eventually though in 1969, de Gaulle stepped down as president and Britain applied for membership a third time and was finally accepted into the community. They became official members of the EEC, Euratom and the European coal and steel community in 1973 under the leadership of conservative prime minister Edward Heath (Dinan, 2014, p.103).

At the time of Britain's impending accession into the EEC, Britain's regional areas had pressing economic problems. Britain therefore formed an unofficial bloc with Ireland and

Italy to promote the possibility of a European regional development fund. In addition to the hope of receiving financial assistance for its poorer areas, a development fund was an attractive possibility for Britain as their relatively small and weak farming sector would keep them from getting substantial agricultural subsidies through the common agricultural policy (CAP) (Dinan, 2014, p.143). There had been increasing dissatisfaction amongst the British public on the amount of money Britain had to contribute to the EC budget, most of which went towards the CAP which they saw little benefit from. The labour party, under the leadership of Harold Wilson, had won the general election and had promised to renegotiate the terms of Britain's entry into the EEC and then to put it to a referendum. Though Wilson was determined to negotiate the terms of their accession into the EU in the mid-70s, his efforts achieved very little and only two years after they became members of the EEC Britain's part in the European communities (EC) were put to a vote (Dinan, 2014, p.173). Wilson had managed to secure a regional development fund with agreeable size and distribution and a rebate on the contributions they had made to the EC budget, so even as the labour party was divided on their position, Wilson supported Britain's continued membership in the EC in the 1975 referendum. The opposition party, lead by Margareth Thatcher, was also split on their positions but Thatcher was clear on her position that economical integration on an intergovernmental level was good, and campaigned for continued membership (Dinan, 2014, p. 149). The result of the referendum was a clear 'yes' for continued membership, with a majority of 67 percent (Dinan, 2014, p.150).

Since that first referendum on the UK's membership in the EC the communities have changed both in form and in size, evolving into the European Union (EU), with cooperation covering most areas of member states public policy and enlarged to the point of almost enveloping the whole of Europe (and soon part of the middle-east). During its development the EU has seen several setbacks and struggles like the 2008 financial crisis, large increase of migrants coming into Europe and during it all the discussion of democratic deficit in the union has been prevalent. Through all the major changes and setbacks there has always been debates within Britain about their involvement in the EU. Political parties were still divided on the subject but the conservative leaning more on the negative side, and in the 2010s the United Kingdom independence party (UKIP) saw increasing popularity (Erlanger & Castle, 2014). In his campaign for the general election in 2015 David Cameron therefore promised that if the conservative party won an outright majority, not needing to form a coalition government, he would hold a referendum on the UKs membership in the EU (Walker, 2019, p.4). To many

people's surprise, he did, and he held his promise. The 2016 United Kingdom European union membership referendum was the first time since 1975 that the British electorate had been asked to vote on their relationship with the EU (Walker, 2019, p.6). As oppose to the 1975 referendum the 2016 vote could be interpreted as an outburst of enthusiasm for the United Kingdom contrasted by a subdued call for further membership.

The topic of British membership in the EEC was controversial from the very beginning in Britain. It was highly contested in the media and by scholars while also splitting opinions within political parties. As the United Kingdom (UK) were deciding on if they should enter the EEC, identity became a divisive subject. Those against British membership warning about the loss of national identity if they took part, while those in favour of British membership downplayed the effects the transcendence of sovereignty would have both for the people and their identity (Dewey, 2009, p.26). Harold Macmillan, the conservative party leader and prime minister at the time, stated "I am bound to say that I do not see any signs of the members of the Community losing their national identity because they have delegated a measure of their sovereignty"(Dewey, 2009, p.26). Identity issues have however been brought up at every point of contact between the UK and the EU, including in the 2016 referendum. Britons seem to have always been less responsive to European identity and they have opposed European political integration at every turn. This thesis will try to discover how National and European identity affected the United Kingdom European union membership referendum in 2016? At the same time, it will answer if British national identity incompatible with European identity and look at how the different referendum campaigns utilised identity.

The article starts by presenting the theory that builds the foundation for the analysis, this includes social constructivist theory of identity, identity construction and identity in politics. From their it will present the methodological framework used, a qualitative case-study on the Brexit referendum, and present the literature. The analysis will deal with the Brexit referendum and how identity issues affected it.

2. Theory

Because this thesis will look at identity construction and how it relates to Brexit from a constructivist point of view, the theoretical basis will be built on constructivist scholars in international relations and especially European integration. To know if identity issues played

a part in the outcome of the Brexit referendum there first has to be established some concepts to define what the paper will be discussing.

2.1 Constructivism and identity

Thomas Risse (2010) writes about identity from a social constructivist point of view. Social constructivism became a part of the international relations debate in the late 1980s and developed approaches to European integration towards the end of the 1990s (Saurugger, 2014, p.145). The constructivists hoped to explain international phenomena using the constructivist framework. They were in part inspired by the Ernest Haas' work on European integration (Saurugger, 2014, p.148). Social constructivism is relevant for studying social identities in two ways, first it comes in useful for explaining actors' interests and how it relates to political outcomes social. Constructivists wants to explain why actors have particular interests, and how their interests are affected by norms and ideas. Secondly, it looks as identities as socially constructed. A social identity cannot be ascribed to a group with some similarities. (Risse, 2010, p.20). The starting point of constructivist assumption is that the process of European integration will subsequently lead to the emergence of a transnational identity. Further they assume that a certain degree of identification with the EU has to be present for citizens to consider the EU political system as legitimate (Saurugger, 2014, p.155).

2.2 Identity Construction

For the purpose of this thesis the term identity will refer to collective identities also known as social identities. Collective or social identity is what links a part of an individual's identity to a collective or a social group, it creates a psychological link between the individual and the group. Social identity does not occur spontaneously nor exist by itself, but rather it has to be created through social interaction in the convergence of people's sense of who they are and what their goals are (Risse, 2010, p.22). These social identities can therefore not be held by a single individual as they are shared between communities. The creation of a social identity in interactions between people only happens under specific conditions. The individuals that share the identity need to have mutual knowledge that they share it. The individuals must know that they are a part of the group and know what connects them to it. There also has to be an awareness of the other members of the group and a positive feeling towards them. (Risse, 2010, p.22). When these proponents are in place the affiliation to social identities can create attachment between the individual and the group so strong that they feel loyalty and obligations to the group's goals. However, the creation of these social groups also come with the distinction between members and non-members. Assembling a group based upon specific

unifying characteristic automatically creates awareness of those who do not have these characteristics and there is drawn a line between who is in and who is out. With positive feelings toward the in-group there often develops negative feelings towards the out-group. Identity construction is therefore not a peaceful process, and can lead to conflicts (Saurugger, 2014, p.156).

What the basis of unification is can vary between communities and even within them. Risse differentiates between three forms of identity formation; primordial, sacred and civic identities. Primordial identity construction focuses on the essentialized properties that unite the group, that is they view their uniting features as natural properties. At the same time the features of those in the out-group are also natural so individuals cannot move between the two. Primordial identities' view of the in-group as positive and the out-group as negative creates the belief that the in-group is fundamentally better or superior. Examples of these kind of identity construction often occurs in race or ethnic identities, focusing on the fact that individuals are born into them (Risse, 2010, p.27). Sacred identities however are not constructed on the same foundation. Sacred identity construction is based on common beliefs or faith. Meaning that people have the possibility to join the in-group if they convert. In the same way as primordial identity construction, sacred identity construction implies that the in-group is better than the out-group, and only by joining the "right cause" can the out-group advance into membership. Sacred identity construction also implies the possibility for a group itself to advance into the right cause establishing the group's past as the other and their new belief as the right one (Risse, 2010, p.28). Civic identity formation also contains the differentiation between the in- and out-group, but here the distinctions does not necessarily imply that the out-group is inferior (Risse, 2010, p.28). The basis for unification here is often shared values, which allows individuals to move between in-group and out-group without setting one being better than the other. In the case of national and European identity the construction of a common collective identity becomes a bit more complicated as both a national and an international community like the EU are imagined communities (Risse, 2010, p.23).

2.3 Imagined Communities

Imagined communities are groups of people that are linked to each other as members of the same group without knowing all of their fellow members. They therefore have to imagine them. For these imagined communities to evoke a feeling of loyalty among the members they still have to feel real in the individuals mind, they do not have to know every other person in

the collective, but it has to have a psychological existence. This can mean anything from shared history to meaningful symbols. These are the essential factors for making imagined communities like the nation-state real in the eyes of its citizens and it can in the same way make an international community like the EU real by creating a European identity. Imagined communities emerge from a positive perspective of who 'we' are, and so it also comes from the negative comparison of the 'others' (Dewey, 2009, p.23) Evident in all types of identity construction is the clear boundary between the in-group and the out-group, the members and the outsiders. For imagined communities this clear distinction between the 'in' and the 'out' is important for making the community real in the minds of the individuals. The more clearly defined differences the group have from the others, the stronger the collective identity becomes (Risse, 2010, p.27). History has an important part in constructing identity for an imagined community. If the community is imagined so is its collective past. The stories that are told in order to make sense of why some people belong together legitimizes their union, distinguishes them from any other and creates a common goal (Dewey, 2009, p.27).

2.4 National Identity

When it comes to the construction of national identity, they are often divided into two ideal forms of national identity, that corresponds to the primordial and the civic identity constructions although the term ethnic identity is often used instead of primordial. Some scholars also highlight the existence of a third; cultural identity construction, but in order to simplify, the paper will only be discussing the two ideal types, keeping in mind that nationalism built exclusively on either civic or ethnic identity only exists in theory, and that within a nation different people base their nationalism on different factors (Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010, p.580).

A nation can be defined as an imagined political community with inherent limitations and sovereignty (Anderson, 1983, p.5). Like all identity construction, a key component in constructing national identity is distinguishing between the in-group and the out-group. In order to imagine every particular in the 'we' the nation must be imagined in relation to other nations, as one amongst many (Dewey, 2009, p.23) Identity construction within a nation then often relates to what people consider citizenship to be as that defines who is part of the in-group and who is not. As a nation-state have clearly defined borders and legal obligations for citizenship, who are considered a part of the nation can seem simple, but that is not the case as the view of membership in a nation depends on how the national identity is constructed. Like primordial identity construction, those who base their identity on ethnic nationalism only see

people that were born into nation state as having real membership (Fligstein, Polyakova & Sandholtz, 2012, p.112). They value national ancestry and without it, individuals are not deemed full members of the nation (Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010, p.579). Ethnic nationalism bases national membership on common language, tradition and religion but also stresses the importance of being a member of the nation's dominant ethnic or racial group. Because of this, ethnic nationalism is considered closed to outsiders, one cannot gain membership in it because it is not possible to change one's ancestry or race. On the other hand, civic national identity construction bases citizenship more on the political side. It focuses on adhering to the nation's legal, political and social systems as what grants membership (Reeskens & Hooghe, p.579). This frames civic nationalism as more open to outsiders as it contains the opportunity to assume membership in the society.

In Britain, like in any other nation, some hold a more civic national identity while others hold identities that lean more toward the ethnic view. There is no one way to define Britishness as one single thing or one single identity. The superimposed identity of Britons exists at the same time as there are regional and local identities that also constitute British identity. Different situations bring forth different loyalties from individuals (Dewey, 2009, p.23). Even Britain or the United Kingdom are imagined communities that hold within them the national identities of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and within those are even more regional identities. The distinction between those identities are important because they are also constructed in opposition to each other. Some scholars for example argue that English nationalism arose in the nineteenth century as a response to the rise of Irish nationalism (Brown, 2017, p.3). The thesis will mainly focus on British identity and its relation to European identity and show that the existence of different regional identities within the national identity of Britain made an impact on the voting patterns of the 2016 referendum, highlighting some differences between English nationalism and Scottish nationalism. That said, the paper will not be distinguishing British nationalism from English nationalism as the two terms are often conflated or used interchangeably (Vines, 2015, p.532).

2.5 European Identity

The notion of European identity has roots created long before the start of the European union, but in the context of European integration after the second world war the creation of European identity was first introduced in the 1960s by Ernest Haas. Haas was a leading scholar of European integration. He envisioned that as the European integrating project transferred more supranational rulemaking and cooperation to a new authority at the European level, actors

would become more actively engaged with the integration project and their behaviours and expectations would be oriented more towards the EU (Fligstein et al., 2012, p.106). The future of Europe, he thought, would to some extent be determined by the degree to which citizens of the member states could identify as citizens of Europe more broadly. Increasing cooperation on the European level did however not seem to correspond with increased public support (Fligstein et al, 2012, p.107). The EU itself has therefore worked consciously on creation a European identity that can unite people across Europe.

Risse (2010) found that European elites constructs the European identity in civic terms. Meaning that they try to unite people on the basis of their beliefs. More specifically focusing on humanity, modernity and democracy (Risse, 2010, p.6). These values have to be adopted by any country applying for membership and they have been formalized in EU in form of the Copenhagen criteria. New member states have to firstly guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for and protection of minorities. Secondly, they must have a functioning market economy that has the capacity to deal with the competitive pressure and market forces of the EU. And lastly, they have to be able to take on the obligations of membership which means adhering to the EUs aims of political, economic, and monetary goals (Dinan, 2014, p.258). The Copenhagen criteria does however mostly consist of abstract sentiments which does not easily translate to an individual's feeling of identity. The EU have therefore found more concrete ways of representing the union. All citizens of EU member states also have citizenship in the EU, they have created a common currency that is used in almost all their members states, and they have crates symbol like a flag, an anthem and a motto (European union, 2019). All of these are devises employed to materialise the unification of imagined communities. This view of what Europe is a more modern and secular view that fit with the civic view of identity and is therefore more open and accepting. Who counts as in- and out-group can change, and new countries are allowed to become a part of the in-group.

On the other side of this there is the more closed view of what Europe is. This has been constructed in ethnic terms and is based on the fact that the majority of European citizens have historically been white Christians. Which entails less openness and stronger boundaries towards countries where the majority of the citizens are members of other religions or of another 'race' (Risse, 2010, p.6). This nationalistic view of Europe has often been politicized by Eurosceptics on the political right to create debate about the EU. The ethno-European identity is constructed based on culture, history, religion and ethnic traditions. Those who

hold this ethno-European identity is often those who hold an ethnic view of their national identity (Fligstein et al, 2012, p.113). The construction of a European identity has not resulted in a uniform European identity that all Europeans identify with at the expense of their national identities, but rather it seems to have Europeanized national identities.

2.5.1 Europeanization

To explain the term Europeanization the paper will use the definition given by Thomas Risse (2010) which defines Europeanization as the domestic impact made by Europe and European integration. Furthermore, the meaning of Europeanization of national identities refers to the extent Europe and the EU have been incorporated into the constructions of identity in nations (Risse, 2010, p.9). It seems that European identity rather consists of the Europeanization of identities already held by individuals, this can be national identities, regional identities or gender identity. The European identity does not become more important than the already existing identities it just exists alongside them. Europeanization means that the EU is integrated into how individuals understand their own national sense of belonging. This way of looking at European identity is however more prevalent in the discourse of the European elite (Risse, 2010, p.45).

The most important aspects to keep in mind for the analysis, is the assumption that a certain degree of identification with Europe has to be present for individuals to see the European political system as legitimate. Furthermore, the distinction between civic and ethnic identity construction will be important for understanding the friction between British national identity and European identity even though European identity usually does not constitute an identity separated from the national identity but another part of it. The civic-ethnic distinction is also important for analysing how identity issues were highlighted in the leadup to the referendum.

3. Methodology

This thesis will take the form of a qualitative case-study, where the case is the United Kingdom European union membership referendum (commonly referred to as Brexit) that took place on the 23 of June 2016. The thesis will take the form of a cases-study as it is the best way to gain knowledge about the specific case being studied (Tjora, 2017, p.41). As the paper will try to illuminate how national and European identity affected the decision Britons took to leave the EU, a qualitative case-study gives the opportunity to gain insight into this one particular case. The main objective of the thesis is to gain knowledge about Brexit by looking

at theoretical work on the subject of social identities in imagined communities and comparing them to empirical data pertaining to attitudes and tendencies in Britain and Europe more generally. The paper will look at the tendencies of identification and voting patterns in the Brexit referendum and examine it through already existing literature on national and European identity. There are several agencies that gather statistical data pertaining especially to Europe and the EU, and British attitudes toward Europe and their connection to the EU. The empirical data used in this paper will mainly be studies done by the European commission's Eurobarometer as they are one of the leading providers of tendencies and attitudes of citizens across Europe and have been since 1973 (European commission, 2019). The main data used will however be focusing on the years around 2016 referendum. In addition, there will be an analysis of the voting patterns in the referendum. The thesis will be based on several of these statistics while at the same time linking it to previous literature on the subjects discussed and secondary literature on the topic.

As this paper is focusing on the Brexit referendum and to what extent identity had a role in the referendum, it will involve looking into literature on both European identity and national identity and how these are linked. The main secondary literature will therefore be Thomas Risse's book *A community of Europeans?* (2010) that pertains to transnational identities and especially European identity, and an article by Niel Fligstein, Alina Polyakova and Wayne Sanholtz on Nationalism and European identity (Fligstein et al. 2012). Both show how different identities relate to each other and how they can affect political outcomes.

Furthermore it will use Robert Franklyn Dewey's book *British national identity and the opposition to membership of Europe, 1961-63: the anti-marketeters*, and the review article *Post-Brexit Britain: Thinking about 'English Nationalism as a factor in the EU referendum* by Harry Brown which both look at how national identity in Britain has affected Britain's approach to Europe. Together the secondary literature gives an insight into the history of identity in politics.

Since this is the first instance of an EU-member leaving the union it is therefore important to examine this case closely. As identity is something belonging to private individuals and is very subjective, it is difficult to study and generate highly reliable data on the topic. The paper will therefore not be able to definitively say where identity was a more important factor than others but it will, through looking at surveys and interviews on the reasons why Britons choose either to vote leave or remain, try to distinguish between identity factors and other

factors that may have led to Brexit. As a case-study focuses on a single case, the information discussed cannot be generalized or necessarily used to gain insight on other subjects.

4. Analysis

The European union has since its inception in 1951 grown to be one of the largest international cooperation projects in the world, and before 2016 it had never imagined the union that had only grown in members since its inception would see one choosing to leave. The complex framework for cooperation and the highly intertwined economies involved made the prospect of a member state leaving the union almost inconceivable (Fligstein et al., 2012, p.108). That is however exactly what happened on June 23, 2016 when a majority of 52 percent of the British people decided through a national referendum that they wanted to leave the European union (Brown, 2017, p.1). Though the decision to leave may have come as a shock to many it was not completely unthinkable as Euroscepticism had grown over the past years all over Europe and especially in Britain where the nations participation in the European integration project was never really popular to begin with (Kaiser & Varsori, 2010, p.97).

The analysis will start by looking at Britain's relationship to the EU, how they have constructed their national identity and how that has impacted European identity in Britain. Then it will look at Civic and ethnic constructions of national and European identity and what that means for the British people. It will then move on to discuss the Brexit referendum, what lead up to it, the turnout for the referendum, the result, and what role identity played through it all. Lastly it will look at other factors that might have impacted the referendum.

4.1 Holding on to Britain

Britain has always been seen as the awkward partner in the European union. Part of their position comes from the fact that they have always wanted the European integration process to go in an opposite direction of their fellow members. Throughout the history of UK-EU relations British politicians has always, even if they support Britain's membership in the union, wanted to keep national sovereignty and maintain a strong British identity. Winston Churchill, who was an advocator for European cooperation after the war, famously said that Britain "was with Europe, but not of it", emphasising that Britain was separate from Europe (Vines, 2015, p.530). Margareth Thatcher was famously for economic integration in Europe but was strongly against its political integration. In her speech to the college of Europe in 1988 she expressed her view that Europe's future should be the continued intergovernmental

economic cooperation between independent, sovereign states that should relish their own customs, traditions and identity (Margareth Thatcher foundation, 1988). As the union and European identity has become stronger in Europe it does not seem to have impacted the British national identity in the same way.

The focus in Britain of keeping their nation and their national identity separate from Europe comes from several reasons, but one of the most obvious is the fact that their Britishness especially ethnic conceptions of Britishness is in part constructed on their separation from Europe. Dewey (2009) explains how Brits have built their uniqueness on several grounds. For many the very soul of Great Britain was built on the history of the empire, and even though it is in the past, the magnitude of what they achieved set them apart from other European countries (Dewey, 2009, p.30). In the same lines, Britain's role in World War II was a source for re-imagining of their identity. After the war, British pride centred around the feeling that they were the ones who had defeated the Nazis, which nourished a feeling of uniqueness. The victory of the second World War became a source for British self-understanding and pride (Dewey, 2009, p.36). Risse found that in general those who live in western and southern Europe are more likely to feel European than those in northern and central Europe, which includes Britain (Risse, 2010, p.42). In addition, the British Isles are physically separated from Europe, a fact which Brits have placed much significance on that divides them from the rest of Europe (Dewey, 2009, p. 30). Have construction the British identity in this way made British national identity incompatible with European identity? Risse partially answers this question. He found that in countries with strong and stable national identities that are not constructed to include Europe, like in Britain, elites that may identify with Europe or support European integration cannot use identity narratives as a way to support European integration. This is an evident problem throughout the history of UK-EU relations, and this shows that although British identity and European identity might not be incompatible the process of re-imagining a British future inside Europe becomes very hard for politicians when they cannot invoke identity narratives. This strong anti-European British identity stands in contrast to Scottish nationalism, which is in large part built on a separation from England and has in doing so embraced both European integration and European identity to a larger extent than England (Risse, 2010, p.82)

4.2 Civic European Versus Ethnic Brit

Risse found through empirical data that the identification amongst Europeans were divided between the majority of Europeans who held Europeanized national identities and those who

held exclusively national identities. Holding both European and national identity results in much higher support for the EU than those who exclusively hold national identity, who usually opposed all forms of European integration. (Risse, 2010, p.43). He also found that those who did hold the Europeanized national identities often saw the EU in civic terms, while those who held only national identity viewed Europe in more ethnic terms, focusing more on the continent not the union (Risse, 2010, p. 61). This creates an identity issue in Britain where in May of 2016 almost 62 percent of the Brits held exclusively national identities (European Commission, 2019).

4.2.1 Exclusive nationality

Following Risse's findings that meant that these 62 percent also viewed Europe in ethnic terms. People who view their national and European identities in ethnic terms define their identities on history, culture, tradition and religion (Fligstein et al. 2012, p.113). They are likely to be older, less educated, have lower paying jobs and lower social status than those more pro-European. They are more likely to dislike immigrants because they are perceived as a threat to British culture and will lean more towards the political right (Risse, 2010, p. 49). As outlined in the theory, ethnic nationalism does not allow the 'others' to become members of the in-group and the in-group is often seen as superior to the out-group (Fligstein et al, 2012, p.113). It is however not the fact that they hold strong national identity that makes them sceptical towards Europe, but the combination of ethnic based nationalism combined with working low-skilled jobs that make them more vulnerable to anti-European sentiments. Because their jobs are more exposed to work migration and their communities rarely benefit from European integration, they are more likely to be xenophobic and Eurosceptic (Risse, 2010, p.46).

4.2.2 Inclusive nationalist

Although most British people hold exclusively national identities in 2016 almost 34 percent of Brits felt both national and European (European commission, 2019). Studies indicate that young, well educated people from the upper middle class, who are well off financially are those most likely to feel European. These are the people who often travel for either work or pleasure and therefore socialize with other Europeans and build relationships that create positive attachment to them. Younger people are also often more positive toward the EU than others because they can, and do, often travel across Europe for education or work. Educated people often find that they have more things in common with people from other European countries like similar jobs, interests and activities and are therefore more likely to be more

positive towards the EU (Fligstein et al, 2012, p.110). Fligstein, Polyakova and Sanholtz (2012) also point out that people with higher income more often than others travel and come in contact with other Europeans. These are the same people who usually see their national identity in civic terms which means that they also usually have a more civic perception on what European identity entails and sees themselves as tolerant, open and in favour of peace and democracy (Fligstein et al, 2012, p.112). They are more positive towards immigration, often hold cosmopolitan views and are politically leaning more left (Risse, 2010, p.47).

4.3 The Referendum

4.3.1 The Campaign

In Britain, like other countries, people with the communalities present in the inclusive nationalists often congregate in urban cities like London. British elites, scholars and politicians often migrate from rural areas to the cosmopolitan to get educated or to work. The remain campaign focused heavily on targeting the urban areas they knew would be young, diverse and affluent (Goodwin & Heath, 2016, p.325). Their campaign relied heavily on professors and experts showing how membership in the EU was beneficial for the country. The continued problem of lack of European identity, they steered clear of the identity arguments and relied solely on the economical benefits.

The leave campaign was also aware of who their most likely supporters were and targeted the ethno-nationalist, blue collar workers who, through an analysis of voting intentions before the referendum, were found to be mostly concerned with preserving the national sovereignty against intervention from European level, and controlling national legislation and borders (Andreouli & Nicholson, 2018, p. 1335). The campaign arguments for voting leave were the 350 million pounds used on membership that could have been used to better the country, taking back control of the UK laws, borders and the amount of immigration, and lastly that they would again be free to trade with the rest of the world (Vote Leave, 2019). The leave campaign also emphasised the point of the EU expanding to traditionally 'non-European' countries as what was in store for them if they did not leave the EU (Vote Leave, 2019). All of these arguments could have played on the concerns for national identity, but they could also have pointed to factor like economy and sovereignty. What may show that they treated the British identity is their focus on Turkey accession into the union. As the EU were deciding on the accession of Turkey into the union, the distinction between the modern EU and the

nationalistic Europe became painfully clear. According to the enlightenment views of the civic perception of European identity Turkey's membership in the union would be welcomed as long as they accepted the Copenhagen criteria. For the ethnic construction of European identity however Turkey, as a mostly non-white, non-Christian nation, could not become a part of Europe.

4.3.2 The Turnout

The turnout for the referendum was higher than usual with 72 per cent of British citizens casting their vote. Though the rates of turnout were not spread evenly around the country. The highest turnout rates were in predominantly white areas with a history of supporting UKIP and it was generally higher in areas that voted to leave. In contrast the turnout in the big cities like London were much lower than the rest of the country with 25 out of the 50 areas with lowest turnout scores being in London (Goodwin & Heath, 2016, p.326). This geographical division of the turnout could reflect the high degree of affection for the nation versus the low degree of affection for the EU. The referendum brought more anti-Europeans than pro-Europeans to the polling station showing how this vote may have seemed more important for them while those who voted remain might not have felt as strongly about their vote.

4.3.3 The Results

The results of the referendum were to a large extent divided along the same lines as identification with Europe. The number of leave votes were higher in areas where many people had no career qualification while in areas with many educated people the leave vote was low. In areas where there were many young people the remain vote was stronger, that included many university cities, and in areas with large amounts of older people the leave vote was stronger (Goodwin & Heath, 2016, p.27). This pattern became stronger as London and Scotland were excluding, showing that the voting patterns were different in these areas. Below are the illustrated results of the referendum. They show a clear divide between the urban and the rural areas and show a show that Scotland does not exhibit the same patterns as England.

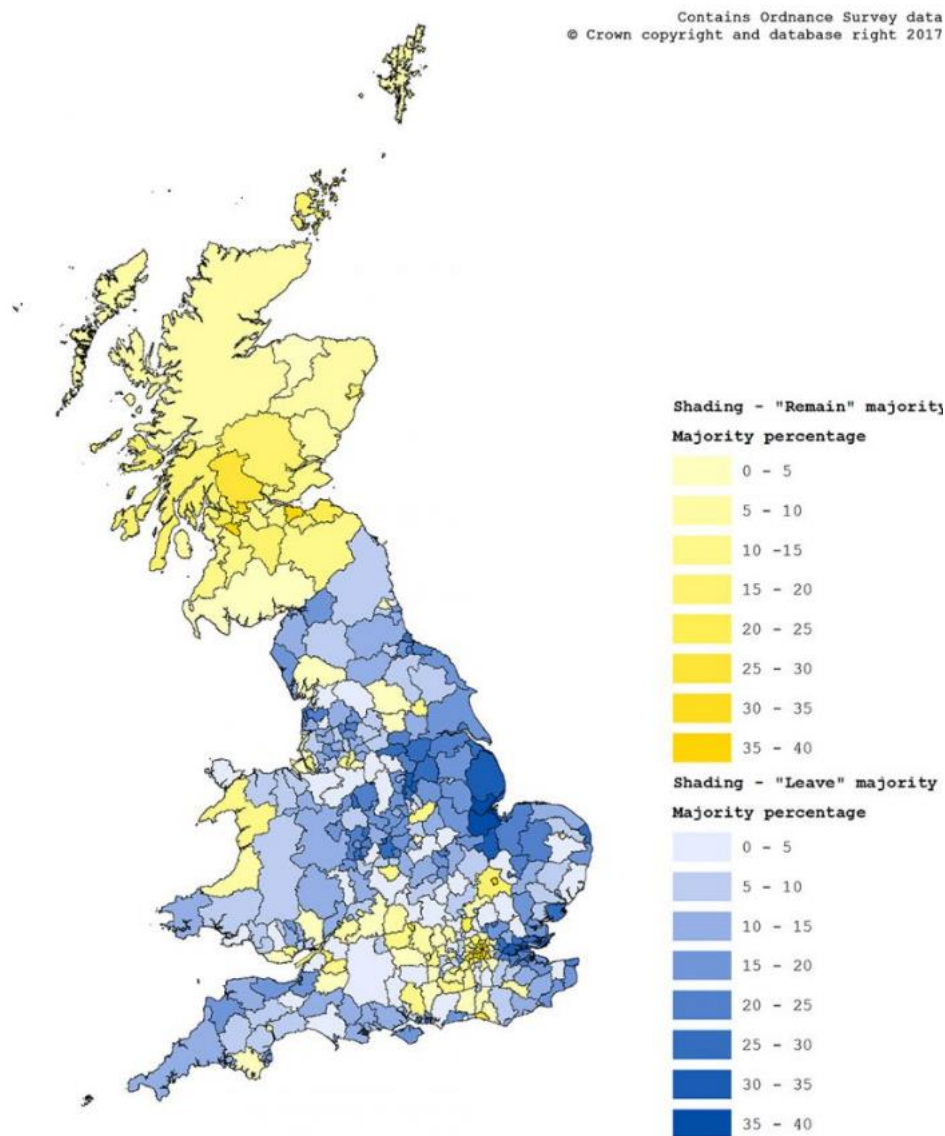


Figure 1. Brexit vote result by district; shaded by percentage majority towards "Leave" or "Remain"
Source: (Green, 2017)

A factor that can show how the leave vote was for many based on identity over other factors relates to the implications of immigration. One of the most used arguments for leaving the EU were the amount of immigration Britain had seen from Europe and that they needed to take back control of the national borders. This sentiment was high among those who held their nationalism in ethnic views. The results of the referendum however showed that the leave vote was higher in areas that had seen the least number of immigrants (Goodwin & Heath, 2016, p. 328). This might reflect that their vote was less based on the actual negative consequences of immigration than on the fear and dislike of it. In addition, the fact that Scotland did not exhibit the same voting patterns as the rest of Britain and that the country as

a whole voted to remain in the EU helps to show how the British identity build on separation from Europe might have been a strong factor in the outcome.

4.4 Brexit Backlash

Data collected by Eurobarometer on how Europeans would identify themselves in the future showed some interesting development around 2016 (European commission, 2019). Eurobarometer posed the question if the informant saw themselves in the future as; only national, national and European, European and national or only European going straight into how they identify in relation to Europe. Identification with only Britain has the highest percentage ranging from 49-70 percent before 2016. While those who identify mainly as British but also European ranged from 22-34 percent in the same period. The amount of people who identify mainly as European but also national, and those who identify only as European was never higher than 7 percent. The chart shows that from 2012 to 2016 that the number of people who only held British identity stayed between 60 and 64 percent, while those either mainly British but also European identity stayed around 30 percent. After 2016 however the national only decreased to 47 percent, which is the lowest rate of identification with only Britain that has been recorded. At the same time there was a spike in those who identified with Britain and Europe to 42 percent which is also the highest recorded. Although the chart seems to suggest that the two alternatives are widening again, the drastic change in identification might reveal that the British and national identity had a powerful impact on the 2016 Brexit referendum which sent shockwaves through their national identification patterns.

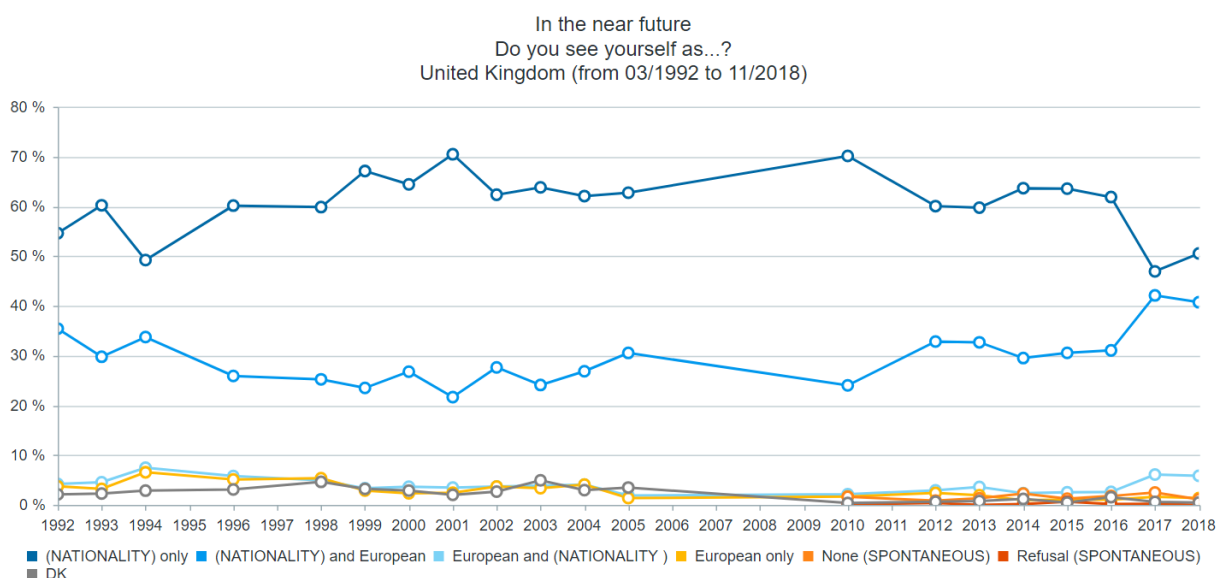


Figure 2. Eurobarometer results feeling of nationality and European identity (European commission, 2019)

4.5 Impact of Other Factors

Factors that influenced people voting in the Brexit referendum were many, and it is impossible to say that identity was the most important one. Many Brits said that they made their decisions on cost-benefit analysis on how membership in the EU was good for the country and in what way it was bad (Andreouli & Nicholson, p.1336). The harsh line of voting pattern in cosmopolitan areas versus rural areas also might have had more to do with economy than identity, as membership in the EU tends to benefit larger cities as oppose to the countryside. The rural areas where there were large amounts of unskilled labour were also more exposed to immigrants looking for in Britain. Increasing tensions within Britain between ‘the elites’ and a growing number of Britons that feel insecure about their future and shut out from power The Brexit vote was not only a vote that showed that the British people did no longer want to be a part of the EU, it expressed populist sentiments held by Britons in rural areas that felt like they had been pushed to the margins and excluded from power (Goodwn & Heath, 2016, p.331).

5. Conclusion

By looking at how social identities are constructed and how they relate to political action, the article has shown how constructivist theories relates to how British national identity was constructed and why that creates problems for its Europeanization. The literature on who holds civic and ethnic nationalisms and who are most likely to identify as European also made it possible to look at the correlation between who held Europeanized identities and how they voted in the referendum. Like Harry Brown’s article, the thesis looked at identity factor in the Brexit referendum and like his it could not conclude to what degree different factors influenced the referendum. As oppose to Fligstein, Polyakova and Sandholtz who concluded that European integration would continue even with a weak and shallow European identity, this thesis found that is was a lack of Europeanized national identity that influenced Britons willingness to leave the European integration project

Finding a definitive answer for what factors influenced whose votes in the 2016 United Kingdom European union membership referendum is impossible, but this thesis have shown firstly, how the construction and re-imagination of British national identity has made is almost

impenetrable for European identity. Secondly it has shown that the voting patterns in the referendum highly resembles the identification patterns of Brits around the time of the referendum. In doing so the paper concludes that British and European identity did have a significant influence on the decision made by the British people.

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