Finding Political Identities
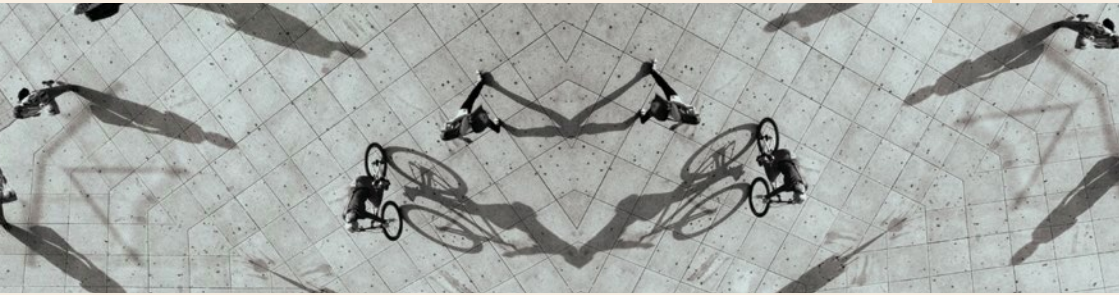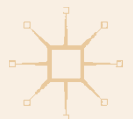
Young People in a Changing Europe

Alistair Ross

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Finding Political Identities

Young People in a Changing Europe

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For my grandsons, all born over the course of this study: Kit, Sandy, Robin and Pip.

Preface

This book explores how young people in Europe construct their political identities. It is based on 324 small discussion groups I held, with 2000 young people across 29 European states. Aged between 11 and 20, they talked together about the construction of their identities, creating contingent narratives of local, national and European identities with families, friends and through social media. As well as exploring *what* these kaleidoscopic identities look like and the sources they draw on, this book also examines *how* young people assemble these accounts, and how they are integrated with each other.

The study uses deliberative discussion as a way of allowing young people to develop their own constructs and terms in conversation with each other. The voices presented here are those of young Europeans whose origins are from many countries across the continent and the world, from small villages and towns as well as cities and metropoles: a complex polyphony of political beliefs, values and rights and affiliations to political structures and social institutions that often transcend traditional boundaries of state and nation.

These identities are narratives, multiply constructed and re-constructed around contingencies and contexts. This book looks particularly at how young people perform these narratives in creating and recreating their political identities within and beyond various European states. In Chapters 2 and 3, I examine the contingencies that arise from the events

around them: their narratives of rights in general, and then the specific narratives of diversity, migration, racism around the migration of refugees in 2014–16. Chapter 4 looks at the range of potential influences that may impact on this narrative-construction process – the family, friends, school and media.

Chapters 5 and 6 examine the contexts that are dependent on place: narratives that are driven by political locations of country, continent, settlement. These include both the influences of the geographical region of Europe, and of the various aspects of scale of location, from village or city, through country, region, Europe and the world. These contribute political and cultural narrative frames for identity construction.

London   Alistair Ross
June 2018

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On the Naming of Places and People

Places

The naming of places is sometimes contentious: many European place names have changed as a result of conquest, occupation or the construction of national languages, and many places are known by different names in different languages.

In this book, I have decided to call all *de facto* countries by their name in English, and to use the English version of the term employed by the majority population of the country at the time: hence Macedonia (not FYROM or North Macedonia), and North Cyprus and the Republic of Cyprus (for the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus and the Republic of Cyprus). The name of the Czech Republic formally changed to Czechia in the summer of 2016: my fieldwork there was before this, so I have retained the more familiar term, which is still more widely used, even in Czech official publications. While readers may have been at ease with Deutschland and España, they are thus spared Hrvatska and Magyarország (apologies to my Croat and Hungarian readers). The same rules have been applied to adjectives, languages, citizenships and nationalities of all countries.

I have called most settlements by the name used by the majority of their inhabitants. The International Phonetic Alphabet has been used to transpose place names in Bulgaria, Greek-speaking Cyprus and Macedonia (see the list

below). There are a number of officially bilingual settlement names, but I have selected that used by the majority language group: no problem in selecting Helsinki and Turku rather than Helsingfors and Åbo, but a close call for Tallinn and Rīga. Tetova in Macedonia is the Albanian form used by the majority of its inhabitants, rather than the Macedonian name of Tetovo/Τετοvο. Brussels presents a particular problem, and I have chosen Brussels rather than the Walloon Brussele, the French Bruxelles or the Flemish Brussel. I have used the alphabets of each respective language, hence København (Copenhagen) and İstanbul (Istanbul). Local names and forms take precedence: Hannover, Padova and Warszawa. This also means that when I use Luxembourg I am referring to the country, while Lëtzebuerg refers to the city in Luxembourgish. In the divided city known in English, Hungarian, Romanian, Spanish and Swedish as Nicosia (and its close variants in many other languages) is referred to as Lefkosia in the southern Greek-speaking part and Lefkoşa in the northern Turkish-speaking part. But: 'Treaty of Lisbon', not 'Treaty of Lisboa'; 'Warsaw Pact', not 'Warszawa Pact'.

If a young person in a discussion used the current English name of a place, rather than the name in their own language, I have used the name that was used: thus where I use Cologne, that was what was said, and if I use Köln it is either because this was the word used, or that I am writing about that city.

None of the above refers to any use of non-European place names: the common English/international name is used.

'Region' can refer to a region within a country, or a group of countries within a continent. I have generally used the term for a group of European countries (particularly in Chapter 5). For areas within a country I have either used the local term (*Länder*, Department, Province, etc) or province.

Table 1 Transliterated place names

Original	Transliteration	(language)
Благòевград	Blagòevgrad	(Bulgarian)
София	Sofija	(Bulgarian)
Велико Търново	Veliko Tarnovo	(Bulgarian)
Λάρνακα	Larnaka	(Greek)
Λευκωσία	Lefkosia	(Greek)
Прилеп	Prilep	(Macedonian)
Скопје	Skopje	(Macedonian)
Τετοvο	Tetovo (but Tetova in Albanian)	(Macedonian)

Table 2 Sample locations in the study, showing rank-size distribution using Doxiadis's settlement hierarchy

Settlement category, descriptive term	Size	Number of locations	Example
Megalopolis	>10 million	1	İstanbul, Turkey
Conurbation	3–10 million	2	Berlin, Germany
Metropolis	1–3 million	7	Warszawa, Poland
Large city	300,000–1 million	23	Skopje, Macedomia
Small city	100–300,000	28	Padua, Italy
Large town	20–100,000	30	Veliko-Tarnovo, Bulgaria
Small town	1,000–20,000	13	Hombrechtikon, Switzerland
Village	100–1000	3	Püünsi, Estonia

Settlements have often been contextualised with an indication of their size. Actual population data of each place is given in Appendix 1, but I have also used in the main text a form of Doxiadis's (1968) settlement hierarchy to describe a settlement's size. These settlements refer to the location of the school, not where an individual lives. There are several cases where a young person's school or college is located in a city or metropolis, but their home is in a nearby small town or village. All schools were over 200 students in size: when one is located in a settlement of a thousand people or less, clearly a proportion of their students will living in very small rural communities (Table 2).

People

All the young people I spoke with have been give pseudonyms. I have attempted to allocate pseudonyms that reflected both the individual's gender and the current use of given names in the country concerned. However, when an individual's given name reflected a different cultural origin, an appropriate pseudonym from that heritage has been used: for example, an Afghani-origin young man with a Pashto first name will be given a Pashto pseudonym. But had that same young man been using a given name taken from the population of the country he was now living in, I would use a name from that country as his pseudonym. As my study

expanded, I have had to ensure that there was no repetition of names, and I have thus very occasionally changed the pseudonyms given to some individuals quoted in earlier publications reporting some of this work (Ross 2011, 2012a, b, 2013a, b, 2014, 2015, 2016a, b; Ross and Zuzeviciute 2011). My apologies for any confusion this may cause, but all two thousand pseudonyms used are now different.

Each young person quoted is also described by their gender and age. Genders are as given to me by them, and transgender individuals (at least one) by the gender category of their preferred use. Ages are given as actual ages on the day of the discussion, and are never rounded up. Sometimes the birthplace of an individual may be relevant to what is said, and in such cases this is stated: if there is no such reference, it should be assumed that they were born in the state in which they were living (this was true in 93.7 per cent of cases). More frequently, the family origins of the young person were of possible significance: 27.9 per cent of young people in the study were of at least partial descent from a country other than the one in which they were living. It was not sensible to try and collect this systematically (see the methodological considerations in Chapter 1), but such material was often volunteered. I have in many cases been told the origins of the parents, and in sometimes of grandparents or earlier. Where this information is possibly significant to a particular observation, I have given this in the form of 'of *xxxx* origin', or 'of *xxxx* and *yyyy* origin'. When one of the parent's origins was the country of interview, and the other not, I have used the form 'of partial *xxxx* origin', and the reader should assume that the other 'part' is a parent of the country of interview. My intention in all this is to help the reader understand the context in an unobtrusive but informative manner.

Map of the Locations

SWEDEN

FINLAND

Jyväskylä

Gävle

Turku

Helsinki

Stockholm

Püünsi

Tallinn

ESTONIA

Tartu

Luunja

Moskvá

Jūrmala

Rīga

LATVIA

Rēzekne

Malmö

LITHUANIA

Kaunas

Elektrėnai

Vilnius

Berlin

Olsztyn

Minsk

Forst

POLAND

Białystok

Warszawa

Kyïv

Hradec
Králové

Kraków

CZECH

Ostrava

SLOVAKIA

Prešov

Banská Bystrika

Linz

Wien

Budapest

Oradea

Iaşi

AUSTRIA

HUNGARY

Pécs

Szeged

Ljubljana

Sostro

Novo

Prade

Mesto

ROMANIA

Koper

...ta

Zagreb

Timişoara

Rijeka

Bucureşti

Zadar

Veliko Tarnovo

Sofija

BULGARIA

Skopje

Blagòevgrad

İstanbul

ITALY

Tetova

MK

Prilep

Tokat

Matera

Ankara

Eskişehir

Bernalda

Çanakkale

TURKEY

Lapta

Lefkosia

Lefkoşa

Larnaka

CYPRUS

Town or City
where
conversations
took place

other city

Capital Cities

COUNTRY

1

Locations, Loyalties and Labels

This book examines how young people in some 29 European countries construct their political identities. This generation of 11–20 year olds are the first to have been born in an age of widespread internet use, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In many European countries, the school population has become much more diverse and mixed than in previous times.

Political identity is a complex and contested area: forty years ago, the political scientist Bill Mackenzie observed

> Those who share a space share an identity. Prima facie this is a fair statement, whether 'the place' is taken to be 'space-ship earth'; or a beloved land; or a desolate slum or a public housing scheme. Indeed, it is (like the concept of 'shared interest') rhetorically powerful because it appeals to solid sense, and it should not be allowed to melt away under analysis. (Mackenzie 1978:130)

This common sense view of a group of individuals having a shared loyalty to a particular location was developed by David Goodhart (2017), who divided the British in particular (and Europeans in general) into 'Anywheres' – a powerful minority of footloose, urban, social liberals who do not identify with any particular place, 'Somewheres' – rooted in a

specific place, lacking agency and less educated – and 'Inbetweeners'. Goodhart asserts that the Anywheres (about 20 per cent of the population) have become a deracinated and dominant elite, out of touch with the 66 per cent of Somewheres, 'socially conservative and communitarian by instinct … uncomfortable about many aspects of social and economic change such as mass immigration [and] an achievement society in which they struggle to achieve' (Goodhart 2017: 5). Goodhart's Anywheres are like the elite chastised by the UK Prime Minister Teresa May: 'if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what the very word 'citizenship' means' (May 2016).

Drawing on the narratives of nearly two thousand young people from across Europe, I will argue that political identities are changing: many people, and young Europeans in particular, generally do not see themselves as members of one of these fixed tribes, but as comfortably constructing flexible and multiple political identities. This book will trace how many young people identify with a range of political locations, from the local to the global. These identities are many and contingent: the significance of a location changes with the context of their talk: who they are with, the comparisons they are making, the values on which they focus, and the events of the day and the year. I will outline not simply *what* identities and affiliations they expressed, but *how* and *why* they constructed them.

To do this, this first chapter explores political concepts such as the nation, citizenship, country, state, Europe and other localities, and how identity politics relate to studies of young people's socio-political constructions. The use and meaning of these terms varies across generations and between different states. A variety of models have been used to characterise the plasticity of social construction, of political and locational identities, including Bauman's liquid identities (2000), Balescu's description of identity as a palimpsest of successive configurations, each partially written over earlier versions (2009), and the way that Crenshaw (1989, 1991) and Collins (2015) use intersectionality to describe multiple identities as constructions that explain oppression and advantage. I also examine how young people are described as participating (or not participating) in politics, and the way in which they are sometimes characterised as part of the 'democratic deficit'.

I then describe how I gathered empirical data of young people talking about these issues, and how their constructions contingently shift as the

lens through which they focus changes. I draw on the 324 discussions that I have had with small groups of young people in 29 different European states, carried out between 2011 and 2016. Two thousand young people, scattered across 104 villages, towns and cities, took part in these discussions about their sense of political and social identity. The countries involved (listed in Appendix 1) included 24 members of the European Union. (Greece and the United Kingdom were not included, because particular issues each of these countries had with the European Union at this time would, I felt, have been so dominant to exclude anything else from discussion: they may form the basis of a later study. Ireland was not included, because any exploration of identities in the United Kingdom ought to be conducted in parallel with Ireland.) Also included were two counties who were in the accession process to join the Union at the time I began (Macedonia and Turkey), and three countries closely associated with the European Union (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland). Not a statistically representative sample, it nevertheless reflects the diversity of views in the various countries: the indigenous population, those of migrants and settler origin, and the hybridities that are increasingly characteristic of European societies.

Chapter 2 examines the values and concerns expressed in these discussions: these were the measures they used to construct identifications with different political institutions, criteria that framed their affiliations. These values underpin Chapter 3, which analyses their responses to the increasing diversity of the societies in which they are constructing their ideas, and how they saw these as different from the views of their parents and grandparents. Migration (from within and without Europe), wars and boundary changes have led to situations in which many are growing up in heterogeneous and plural societies: Chapter 3 charts the views of both indigenous young people and those of different origins about this. Many young people seem to be developing a range of identities that they see as very distinct from those of some older people, which many of them characterise as overtly racist and nationalistic. This generation is developing a new and different availability for political mobilisation, rather as Fulbook's analysis of twentieth century German young people showed: this is a time of 'transition with respect to the ways in which people can become involved in new regimes and societies' (Fulbrook 2011:488).

Chapter 4 looks at some of the resources that are drawn on to substantiate and illustrate these ideas. These include understandings and interpretation of political and social events of which they have some immediate and contemporary knowledge – in the locality or further afield. Talk and discussion with friends, parents, and sometimes teachers is supplemented with the critical use of media, both traditional and social.

In Chapter 5 I examine the particularities and differences that are local, at country and regional level, asking how these resources are filtered through particular national and regional discourses. Chapter 6 analyses the nesting hierarchy of geo-political levels around which identities contingently shift, from the village or city, through the province to the state, the region of Europe, Europe itself as an entity, and a sense of global identity.

Chapter 7 draws these strands together, to focus particularly on how young people make sense of these diverse identities. How do they construct coherence between apparent contradictions?

Identities and Places

The particular concern of this study is how young Europeans construct their identities with respect to particular locations – places that might be their country, their locality or city, Europe or the world, or all of these. I argue that there is both contingency and plasticity in this process. The great majority of these young Europeans confidently manage to express a variety of identities, and which of these identities are most significant can change, depending on the context of their discourse.

To illustrate this, and give the reader a sense of these young people's narratives, here is an extract from one of my conversations. I was talking with an articulate group of six 17 and 18 year olds in an upper secondary school in the small city of Odense, in Denmark (the discussion lasted 53 minutes: the following is about six minutes from the early part of this). All names are pseudonyms: I have described my use of names for people and places in the fore note on page xix. Agnethe's father worked in robotics, and her mother was a project coordinator; one of Lilli's parents worked in sales, the other as a nursery teacher. Cæcilie's father was a computer programmer and her mother a photographer, and Julius's parents were unemployed. Evald's father wrote film sub-titles and his mother

was a financial consultant. Hussein's parents were retired: his father had been a mechanic. Our conversation was in English, but I was accompanied by a bilingual colleague, a social scientist, who would help interpret if needed, which was not necessary as they were fluent, and often sophisticated, in their use of English.

Having introduced myself – as a British researcher studying young people's sense of identity in a number of European countries – I asked them to begin by describing their own identity. Agnethe and Lilli both began by describing themselves as Danish girls [1], and Cæcilie agreed, adding 'I feel – very Danish [laughs] – even though my grandfather immigrated from Scotland' [2]. Julius pointed out that all three had said that they were Danish, rather than European: 'so … we are nationalists' [3], which provoked general amusement. Evald then also said he felt Danish, 'but my father, and my grandfathers, my grandmother, they emigrated from Germany, so I also feel some connection with Germany – but I feel mostly Danish' [4]; and finally Hussein explained that while his parents originated in Palestine, 'I'm born and raised in Denmark – I don't feel as quite as Danish as the others, I feel more a bit of both – I feel more European than Danish – it's like the same culture as Arabic' [5]. I responded:

AR   … I wonder what it actually means to you, when you say you 'feel Danish' or you 'feel mostly Danish'? [6]

Lilli   I feel that it's mostly about the culture of the country. When I say I feel Danish it's not like I feel that I *belong* in this country, I could easily move to another country … [7]

Cæcilie   I think most of it has to do with the way I was raised – for example, my mum feels more Scottish than me, so she sort of raised me to be proud to *be* Scottish … [8]

Hussein   When we talk about different identities, people often mistakenly say that there is a clash of cultures, that the youngster doesn't know where to put himself. Is he German or Danish or Palestinian or something? But I see different cultures as being an advantage- you take the best of both cultures, the best of both identities and make your own – that's an advantage, from my point of view … I don't fancy the Danish culture as much, but I'm born and raised in Denmark, so a lot of what I do can be interpreted as being Danish – but I consider myself as being

more Arabic than Danish – that's not because I'm not integrated into society, just because I feel more Arabic than Danish. [9]

Julius   I feel Danish too – and that makes it much easier, because you have a lot of people that you feel connected to in that way… when you're abroad you can find Danish people and then you feel at home. I'm aware that it's a social construction, and that until the eighteenth century you wouldn't have had nationalities in the sense that you have it now – and I try to look away from nationalities more or less, because I want to be able to travel and feel at home everywhere I go with different cultures. I agree with Hussein that you can learn a lot from different cultures – every time I go abroad my identity changes a bit, because I pick up from different cultures what I find interesting – and what I find is an improvement to my Danish culture – and then I think the Danish culture will change a bit if everybody goes abroad and we'll get stuff in from different places in the world – but you will also try to stick with certain ideas and certain norms, the Danish values – because it's such a big part of your life that you'll never give them up. [10]

Cæcilie   I think our nationality is a way of expressing ourselves when we're abroad, but also at home, using it to feel secure … you can tell people that I do this because I was raised in Denmark, because I feel Danish …For example, I feel European as well, because we have some fair rules and stuff that unites us – even though we have very different cultures in the different countries in Europe. [11]

AR   I haven't used the word 'nationality' or 'nation' – but you've both brought the word in – is that the same as feeling part of the country? Is feeling Danish the same as having Danish nationality? [12]

Hussein   No it's not, because if you feel Danish you feel integrated into the culture … you so like this culture that you feel you are Danish. But *loving* the country, that's nationalism. And nationalism didn't really exist before the first world war – this concept is new, and it's being eradicated, because we are a global society and even more a European society … the world is being more globalised – you can see we are just six people here, and half of us have different roots than just Danish, though we are in a Danish town. [13]