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'I am Europe': Experiences of multiple belonging

ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the issue of multiple belonging and transnational identification for people who have parents of different nationalities and who grew up in multilingual families outside their parents' countries of origin. Transnational bonds are commonly associated with movement that affects individuals' self-assertion of status and sense of belonging. Although the study's participants have not necessarily experienced mobility during their childhood, they relate to a persistent experience of otherness in their social relationships, which makes it impossible for them to identify with only a single or dominant cultural, ethnic and national background. Instead they show a preference for identifying as Europeans and their identification with Europe has become part of a self-chosen reality.

The paper discusses various functions of their sense of European-ness that relate to different aspects of possessing multiple cultural attachments. I propose that the participants' intertwined work of constructing belonging and identification is situated in an everyday experience of 'cultural borderland' and associated with a 'mobile mindset'. The participants engage in intercultural processes across and within specific boundaries by using notions of difference as a means of creating a tolerant and inclusive sense of communality across national borders, which is not exclusively restricted to Europe.

Introduction

Scholars have lately become interested in the movement and social mobility of Europeans across the borders of the European Union (EU) and explored the impact of cross-border experiences on individual life trajectories and social consequences in the practices of mobile EU citizens. A recent study on European mobility distinguishes between 'movers' and 'stayers' in the particular European context (Favell & Recchi 2011, 58). The study's authors define the overwhelming part of EU citizens residing in the member state of which they are citizens as 'stayers', whereas the term 'internal movers' describes EU citizens working and residing in a member state different from their own, and 'external movers' refers to non-EU citizens from Central and Eastern European countries residing in an EU-member state. The 'movers' are seen as being pioneers of European integration, whose personal mobility has a positive impact on their identification with Europe in the long run (Favell & Recchi 2011, 73).

The sociologist Adrian Favell suggests that the multiple overlapping identities and affiliations associated with mobile Europeans point to a detached experience that is uniquely available in terms of a European citizenship status and the freedom of movement for individuals (as implemented by the Treaty of Maastricht and the Schengen Agreement) rather than an elite privilege (Favell 2003, 399 – 400; Favell & Recchi 2011, 71,

74). Favell argues that the differentiation between ethnic migration and elite mobility is no longer applicable in the current context of European mobility (Favell 2008, 91, 102–3). Rather, he describes contemporary intra-European movement in terms of unconventional and increased individual movement that is not conditioned by rational economic motives traditionally associated with labour migration but largely motivated by various social factors, such as personal ideas of adventure, lifestyle decisions, quality of life, education, career and romance (Favell 2003, 421; see also Favell & Recchi 2011, 73). Mobility across nation states has become common practice for a broader population and has led to a differentiation between a foreign origin/identity and the notion of class, which has resulted in a rising middle class that is culturally and linguistically more diverse (Piller 2012, 1). This development has also been accompanied by an increase in the numbers of interethnic unions in which children are raised with multiple languages (Kazzazi 2009, 95).

My paper specifically addresses the situation of adults who have parents of different nationalities and who grew up in multilingual and 'multicultural' families outside their parents' countries of origin in Europe. The lives of the study's participants are closely connected with their parents' individual mobility, and the participants possess many emotionally significant bonds across different European languages, cultures and places. They share similar experiences of belonging and negotiation of identity in non-conflicting, routine situations. The participants' early awareness of plural and mixed attachments within and outside their homes makes it impossible for them to identify with only a single cultural, ethnic and national background. In addition, their sense of complex belonging is reinforced by the fact that they identify with distinct cultural norms and use diverse languages in interaction within and outside their families.

The individuals under study share many social features and transnational experiences attributed to today's mobile Europeans, but unlike the majority of European 'movers', the study's participants had already been immersed into culturally mixed and multilingual surroundings before they gained other significant cultural experiences. The partici-

pants did not eventually become multilingual and transcultural in later life through either education or migration, or as part of a lifestyle choice. Their culturally diverse experience is neither connected with Europe's history of colonisation nor limited to historically grown cultural or linguistic minority groups. Unlike with expatriates, mobile elites and Third Culture Kids (TCK), the personal experience of movement, commonly associated with career opportunities and lifestyle choices (Willis & Yeoh 2008, 214), is not necessarily central to the participants' narratives. In fact, the study's participants lived in one place until their late teenage years, and three of them still continue to live in their country of childhood. This leads to the question: how do the participants find ways to express their notion of multiple belonging that is not necessarily based on personal experiences of movement but associated with a broadened identity concept that includes cultural and civic components as well as the notion of cultural otherness?

The paper addresses individuals' own assertion of status and relationships in a context that assumes that people belong to a well-defined category in terms of national and ethnic belonging. The study of identification processes is a very relevant topic considering the global situation of high transnational mobility and the current developments in Europe. My article discusses the different approaches the interviewees take to the notion of what it means to belong to more than one culture or nation. In this context, culture is associated with ethnic identity in terms of belonging to a particular group, based on shared cultural and ethnic features and experiences (Bruter 2004, 26; Scalise 2015, 595; Schroedter et al. 2015, 183). I understand culture as constituting and categorising cultural differences that provide both 'a frame of reference for [individual] self-definition' and 'a frame of reference for ordering social relationships' within and between various groups (Sussman 2000, 356).

The article argues that the problem with multiple belonging is not, on a personal level, that a person belongs to diverse national and ethnic categories. Rather, the problem is the prevailing existence of hegemonic ideologies and everyday understandings of cultural and social belonging

that restrict the current normality for some people, which the study's individuals resist. In this context, I propose the concepts of mobile mindset and cultural borderland as useful approaches for analysing the participants' conception of belonging. In my article, I point out that the findings are not limited to imagined cross-cultural communities in Europe but, in fact, could also be relevant for common identifications between people inside and outside Europe.

Research background and methods

My study uses empirical **material based on approximately** 35 hours of qualitative interviews that I conducted as part of my doctoral dissertation (Čeginskas 2015). My thesis focused on adult individuals with a multilingual family background who **were exposed to the influence of plural** (active and passive) languages and cultures, and possessed affective bonds that linked them with more than two ethnicities and locations. The data is based on semi-structured interviews, which also deepened issues covered in the questionnaire, and which the participants filled out in advance. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 100 minutes at least once; often a second interview followed 1.5 to 2 years later.

Although multilingualism is currently perceived as a great personal advantage, mixed couples were previously discouraged from raising their children with several languages and cultures at home because the use of multiple languages was regarded as potentially harmful for the children's linguistic and social development (Kazzazi 2009, 98). As a consequence, it was very difficult to find a sufficient number of adult interviewees, and using a personal network of friends proved more useful than approaching participants through international school settings, expatriate forums or organisations for bicultural families.

One of the reasons why I became interested in this topic is that I **share a similar family background** with the research participants, which makes me an insider in this field. In addition, I also interviewed my siblings whose experiences I compared and analysed in relation to other un-

related participants.[1] Given the diversity within cultural domains and across groups and individuals, there are certain facets of the researchers' selves that connect them with the people they study and other facets that emphasise their difference and create greater distance (Narayan 1993, 678–80). In this, I am at the same time an involved outsider/researcher and a reflective insider/sibling, which situates me as a researcher somewhere between emic and etic perspectives and enables me to consider the field from a variety of perspectives (Halilovich 2014, 88, 100). In this paper I focus only on those six participants in my thesis who expressively relate to Europe and a European identification, which also includes my two brothers. Table 1 below gives an overview of the participants whose experiences I discuss and who were born into interethnic, multilingual middle-class families between the 1950s and 1970s.[2]

A word on the use of the term 'multicultural' in this paper. The term is used in a literal sense to describe the participants' specific experience of possessing *multiple* transnational and culturally distinct components at the same time. When speaking of multicultural individuals, I do not refer to a process or intend to imply the existence of stable cultural identities or of homogeneous and coherent cultures. Rather, the use of 'multicultural' indicates the diversity of cultural influences and exchanges that the participants experience. Contrary to the prefix 'trans' (as in transcultural) or 'cross' (as in cross-cultural), I believe that the term 'multicultural' adequately captures the participants' emic understanding of incorporating a multitude of partly overlapping cultural perspectives as well as different cultural and ethnic traits and attachments, which become visible in various contexts of everyday social interaction, and are recognised both by the participants and others for constituting cultural differences between themselves/their respective groups and others. The participants' early experience of belonging to more than two cultures may initiate processes of transculturalism that result in a lasting appreciation of cultural differences but it does not necessarily require a loss of the previous culture, as originally suggested by the Cuban historian Fernando Ortiz (Birringer 2000, 174–5).

Alias, year and place of birth	Céline 1972 CH	John 1975 B	Raphael 1976 D	Fiona 1976 UK	Augustinas 1957 D	Ivaras 1958 D
Family background and parents' nationalities	Mother: D Father: I	Mother: N Father: UK	Mother: USA Father: IL	Mother: DK Father: UK	Mother: EST Father: LT (stateless, then S; since 1990s: S-EST & S-LT)	See his brother Augustinas
Parents' lingua franca	French	English	Hebrew & English	English	French	French
Parents met in	CH	UK	USA	D	F	F
Languages during child-hood	French, Italian, German	English, Norwe-gian, French, Flemish	Hebrew, English, German	English, Danish, German	Estonian, Lithu-anian, Swedish Passive French & German	See Augustinas
Countries of residence (as a child)	CH (Francophone)	B, also UK	D	D; shortly UK	S, shortly D	See Augustinas
Citizenship and passport	IT & D until 2000 & CH since 2000	UK & N	USA & D since 2006	UK & D since 2011	S	See Augustinas
School education in	CH	B & UK	D	D	S	S & D
University studies in	CH & USA	UK, B, NL	USA & IL	D	S	S & N

Table 1. Overview of the participants. Abbreviations: B: Belgium; CH: Switzerland; D: Germany; DK: Denmark; EST: Estonia; F: France; IL: Israel; I: Italy; LT: Lithuania; N: Norway; S: Sweden; NL: The Netherlands; UK: The United Kingdom; USA: The United States of America

In the following, I will briefly discuss how the backgrounds of the study's participants relate to the current discussion of transnational mobility and then present a number of factors that have contributed to the participants' association with Europe and sense of European-ness. After that, I will introduce different concepts that facilitate the participants' self-identification with multiple cultures and discuss various functions of their European identity in relation to these concepts. The paper closes with some concluding remarks.

Adult children of 'movers': Experiences of European-ness

During the interviews I used an excerpt of Derek Walcott's famous poem "The Schooner Flight" as a starting point for the participants to discuss their notions of belonging. One participant, Céline, spontaneously exclaimed 'I'm Europe! Yes!' in reference to Walcott's lines that ended with 'ei-

ther I'm nobody or I'm a nation' (Walcott 1986, 346). As it turned out, she was not the only participant who referred to Europe when explaining her complex sense of belonging. The participants used the term 'European' according to their personal preferences of how they defined Europe in relation to the construction of their own identifications. This neither implied that other people with a similar transcultural family background automatically identified themselves as Europeans, nor did it exclude the possibility of using other identifications.

For some people, an identification with Europe has become part of a self-chosen reality, as is the case for the study's participants. A European identity may not actually exist beyond the economic integration of European nation states (Favell 2008, 16–17), but for the participants, Europe provides an alternative context in which to perceive and integrate their multiple cultural and social bonds (Favell 2008, 95). The participants shared the experience that their European

identity was rarely contested in social discourses, unlike their claims of possessing multiple distinct national, ethnic, linguistic and cultural identifications. Indeed, Céline argued that other people frequently suggested that she was European precisely because she possessed multiple attachments.

The study's participants grew up in surroundings in which multiple cross-cultural experiences had a significant impact on their social relationships and situated them outside the familiar social structures of national frameworks (Kendall et al. 2009, 93). The participants' plural cultural identifications and backgrounds of having grown up in mixed and multilingual families are not necessarily linked with classical labour migration or experiences ascribed to elite mobility. Rather, their specific situation of growing up with multiple allegiances outside their parents' countries of origin is actually the result of diverse developments associated with the post-war structuring of Europe, and primarily linked to the individual mobility of their parents, who share several aspects commonly associated with the recent mobility of Europeans. I therefore argue that the study's multicultural individuals should not be perceived in terms of either ethnic migrants or mobile elites, or non-migrants. Instead, it would be more useful to regard them as children of 'movers', who relate to the times before and after the introduction of 'European citizenship' and the freedom of movement across European nation states, which assisted in developing a 'mobile mindset' (Breier 2016, 20) and affected the participants' dynamics of constructing belonging.

In certain ways, the parents of the study's participants might be called forerunners of the current 'pioneers' of European integration (Recchi & Favell 2009, 3), who moved for individual reasons associated with aspirations to improve their personal quality of life, which overlapped with issues such as further education, improvement of language skills and working conditions, and a spirit of adventure. For instance, the arrival of Céline's father in the French-speaking part of Switzerland coincided with the Italian labour migration in the 1970s. According to Céline, however, her father's main motive was to learn French in order to improve his professional situation in Italy.

Her mother had left Germany with the same aim of improving her language skills and prospects of employment, but after meeting in Switzerland the couple decided to stay there. Céline recalled that the fact that her family was half German and half Italian distinguished them from other families in the same French-speaking area who spoke Italian at home. The other Italian-speaking families typically consisted of two Italian parents who either had jointly decided to migrate from Italy to Switzerland or had met through the organised networks of Italian migrants in Switzerland.

Fiona's parents met in Germany while studying and improving their German language skills. After exploring several options in the UK and Denmark, her parents decided to settle in Germany, on a linguistically and culturally 'neutral' ground, which additionally provided economic stability for the family. Raphael's father chose to pursue his academic career in the US, and it was there that he met Raphael's mother. His parents then decided to move abroad in search of a better quality of life outside the US. Both Fiona's and Raphael's fathers worked for different units of the US Forces in Germany. My parents, refugees of the Second World War, met in France during their university studies in Strasbourg, funded by scholarships for displaced persons from the Baltic States. Initially, my family 'zigzagged' through Europe, from France to Germany, then to Sweden for a longer period, where my brothers grew up, and back to Germany for another equally long period of stay during which my father worked as a political journalist for a radio broadcaster financed by the US Congress. John's mother moved from Norway to England in the 1960s, formally to improve her English language skills but certainly also to experience the 'Swinging Sixties'. His parents met in England, and his father later applied for work at the European Commission in Brussels.

Apart from John's father, who worked for the European institutions in Brussels, the label of 'elite mobility' is not easily applicable to any of the participants' parents. They were not members of privileged classes or transnational business elites but rather educated people from middle-class backgrounds and with average middle-class aspirations, precisely as many contemporary mo-

bile and skilled Europeans are described in recent studies (Kennedy 2008, 120; Favell 2003, 421). In addition, the participants' parents cultivated expansive multilingual social contacts with people from different national and cultural backgrounds in various countries. Their work situated most of the parents in the context of the postwar structuring of Europe, which contributed to create a denationalising experience for the family members. Although the participants' parents were skilled experts in their respective fields, they were treated as any 'average' foreigner and nonnational in their diverse interactions with local authorities, and the participants remembered that their families struggled with similar issues as concerns residence permits or social and cultural adjustment to the local surroundings.

The participants acknowledged the presence of social and cultural boundaries in their everyday routine practices and encounters that accentuated differences as functional divides. For instance, Augustinas was also aware of the different dimensions of his bonds that created specific notions of cultural and social attachment and were not compatible with the claim of possessing exclusive membership. He revealed that he did not fully connect with Swedish culture because he continued to sense symbolic bonds to his parents' countries of origin and his birthplace. The languages of his childhood were an integral part of his memories, and his attachment to his birthplace gained in importance when the family moved back there. In his regular social interactions, he continued to sense the two contradictory notions of sharing familiar traits, thereby connecting to specific cultural ideas and languages, and also incorporating cultural features ascribed to other collectives.

The other participants also exhibited tendencies of detached nationalism and commonly perceived their link with Europe through the looking glass of their pre-existing social and cultural relationships. John stated that when he was younger and people would ask him where he came from, he used to reply he was European because he grew up in the European environment of Brussels and felt equally comfortable using French and English in his daily social interactions or Flemish and Norwegian in other situations. This made it possible

to establish an emotional connection with being European, although John critically remarked that he was European 'by default of not being English or Norwegian really', and because he grew up in Belgium his presentation as being 'European' simply 'felt right'.

Of course, there are a number of other reasons for the participants' cultural identification with Europe. For instance, the participants considered it natural to present themselves as Europeans in the global arena both because of their family origins and a shared sense of 'European cultural connection'. Fiona explained that she was aware of her lack of crucial personal experiences that could situate her in other outer-European contexts, whereas she possessed manifold bonds with several cultures and societies in Europe through direct interaction, contacts and family relations. Several participants also emphasised their experience of living and working in Europe as an important aspect for their self-representation as Europeans. For instance, Augustinas explained that although he had identified with cosmopolitanism in an earlier period of life, he now felt more European. According to him, this experience was also shaped by his close working contacts with both European and national agencies all over Europe. Also John's, Céline's and Fiona's work lives required professional cooperation on a European level or were situated in mixed-European settings, and they agreed with Augustinas that this certainly had an impact on their willingness to become associated with Europe.

Education in European schools was another aspect that influenced both John's and Fiona's identification as Europeans and connected with diverse aspects of 'European civilisation', as John expressed it. However, John clarified that his European school had nationally segregated curricula for different language sections. While he did not recall much interaction between the different sections during his time there, he agreed that the exposure to plenty of other children from different national backgrounds increased his general acceptance of cultural otherness.

Fiona emphasised that becoming European was a process and explained that despite going to a European school, she had not initially identified herself as being European. Rather, she went through

different stages of attempting to create national belonging with the help of her distinct cultural attachments. She used to present herself first as English, then as Danish and later focused on her German or Bavarian side, until she eventually realised that her sense of multiple belonging was stronger than any exclusive association with a specific culture, language or nation ever could be. Elsewhere I discuss that it is common for the study's participants to pass through different phases of belonging, but that eventually the multifunctional dimension of their sociocultural bonds becomes a very important aspect of their self-representation (Čeginskas 2015, 73–74, 107).

The participants' positive attitude towards Europe is also based on their ability to compare today's Europe with memories of the practical difficulties of maintaining transnational relationships in the times before the introduction of the euro and the implementations of the Maastricht Treaty and Schengen Agreement. While conducting the interviews for my doctoral research, I noticed that the interviewees born in the 1980s were quicker to criticize Europe, its politics and achievements when compared to older participants. I believe that one reason for the difference in attitudes is that the younger participants had comparatively little personal recollection of the previous situation in Europe. They could not compare what impact the introduction of the euro, European citizenship, the free movement of individuals and more affordable travel across European borders had actually made on their lives in terms of being individuals with multiple, cross-cultural bonds.

Concepts of mobile mindset and cultural borderland

In my discussion of the participants' self-identification with Europe I draw on two interrelated concepts, which, combined, offer a new approach for understanding the relationship between culture, ethnicity and identity for the individuals, as well as help analysing their spatial attachments. Individuals with transnational bonds are often described as falling between two stools but this is not necessarily how they perceive their situ-

ation personally. Despite their familiarity with feelings of uncertainty, people nevertheless tend to construct notions of belonging, whether they are concrete or imagined.

The concept of mobile mindset is commonly associated with the ethos and identification processes examined in the context of transnational mobility and migration. The ethnologist Dorothea Breier (2016) originally introduced the concept in relation to the discourses of a mobile and transcultural lifestyle that reflect the complex reality of the German-Finnish participants of her PhD research project. Breier associated the development of a mobile mindset with the possibility of moving between two cultures and having 'bases' in two different places, which decidedly affected the individual's self-assertion and sense of multiple belonging (Breier 2016, 22).

Although the participants of the present study are children of 'movers', they show a similar mobile mindset that influences their views on belonging, ethnicity and nationality. In their case, the mobile mindset is associated with experiences of cultural otherness but does not necessarily depend on experiences of actual mobility as in the case of Breier's bicultural interviewees. I understand the concept in terms of developing a particular mentality that is based on primarily positive assessments of cultural contact situations, which explains why in some contexts multiple cultural affiliations become very salient and in other situations less. A mobile mindset is connected with a process of appreciating cultural otherness, which allows for a new, unconventional way of thinking about the cultural component of political identity, one that is based on the acknowledgement of cultural and ethnic differences rather than founded on political, symbolic and social elements.

The concept of cultural borderland is constructed in relation to the socio-political category of modern Western nationhood and often discussed in geopolitical terms that mark sociocultural boundaries between different states with culturally and historically distinct communities (Bartov & Weitz 2013, 1, 17, 19). Recently, the concept of cultural borderland has been used as an analytical approach in historical research for studying the cultural relations in former multi-

lingual regions of Central and Eastern Europe. In this context, the concept of cultural borderland shifts the focus away from emphasising cultural differences to the exploration of social practices and cultural exchange in specific geopolitical areas that indicate former zones of regionally constructed culturally and linguistically mixed identities across all strata of population and boundaries (Judson 2012, 18–19; Bartov & Weitz 2013, 2).

The concept of cultural borderland is more than a mere geographic marker that highlights division or a space of direct contact between two neighbouring countries. It is also to be understood as a space of cultural contact that allows for the exploration of different levels of political and social interactions between both the national and the regional, and between different cultural and linguistic groups that make up the region, as well as diverse forms of transnational or hybrid cultures (Haas & Herrera-Sobek 2012, 1). Cultural borderland describes a space in which individuals negotiate manifold cultural encounters, and the experience of different contexts in which everyday social interaction takes place. The concept helps to understand the participants' identification with Europe as a sociocultural space, which, on the one hand, includes increased cultural mixing and, on the other, the confrontation with (in)visible boundaries.

The combined use of the concepts of cultural borderland and mobile mindset offers a constructive approach both for exploring the processes in which the study's multicultural individuals construct belonging with various groups or places and for understanding how their sense of European-ness relates to a specific spatial experience. The concepts place emphasis on the experience of difference and cultural otherness not only in terms of a divide between distinct cultures and social systems, but also as a means of experiencing cultural contact that allows for the creation of communality across existing boundaries and distinct cultural practices (Anzaldúa 2007, 7, 100, 102). They complement one another by situating individuals in a geopolitical and sociocultural context defined by the use of multiple languages, appreciation of cultural diversity as well as the possibility of moving between different cultural spaces. While the concept of mobile mindset allows for understanding the self-assertive identification of transcultural individuals associated with mobility, flexibility and a sense of multiple belonging, the concept of cultural borderland implies a spatial belonging related to border-crossing cultural and ethnic experiences, which enable to understand the study's participants' multiple social and cultural identifications.

Various functions of European-ness

The development of a European identity and a greater association with Europe fulfils various functions for the participants. It covers individual, collective and spatial dimensions of belonging, which contribute to the construction of a specific cultural space in which the participants negotiate their selves and their social relationships. This paper discusses three aspects of the study participants' experiences of European-ness. First, **on an individual level, a European identity serves to confirm the participants' culturally** versatile belonging. When discussing their European identity, the participants referred first and foremost to the perception of a culturally and linguistically diverse Europe that corresponded to several aspects of their self-image. Second, a European self-perception supports a sense of community and establishes communality with other individuals across borders despite persisting cultural differences. The participants thereby draw on a multitude of discursive interpretations of being European. Third, a European identity alludes to a geopolitical space that provides a both personally and socially acceptable way of defining oneself towards others in sociocultural and spatial terms. However, this spatial dimension of a European identity should not be confused with discussions of the economic and political structures of the European Union.

(1) Europe: Object of identification

Europe is frequently presented in terms of a 'patchwork of stable regional and national cultures' in which each nation state and region preserves its space and identity as a whole by maintaining barriers of distinction from its neighbours

(Favell 2008, 25–6). The participants also invoked this description of Europe's cultural and linguistic mix when constructing their European identity. When Céline claimed that she 'was Europe', she specifically referred to the image of a culturally and linguistically diverse Europe of different nation states, which mirrored her particular situation of speaking multiple languages and having several cultural backgrounds and nationalities. John also associated his personal background of having 'a little bit of everything' with this conception of Europe and argued that to be 'European' always meant 'mixed', whether in a historical, cultural or political context.

The other participants also provided an understanding of their European identity based on their experience of growing up in particular sociocultural spaces, with these being characterised by extended, non-confrontational cultural contact, mixed practices and the use of multiple languages. For instance, Augustinas emphasised that he was 'proud of [his] mixed background' and 'conscious of [his] different origins.' Raphael established a connection between feeling '*Multikulti*' and European, which was associated with a tolerant way of practising various allegiances and contributed to his sense of non-conformity and unique individualistic culture. He considered belonging to 'one category' as 'too narrow' for himself, whereas 'being European' offered the inclusion of different cultural components, languages and national categories. Similarly, Fiona rejected xenophobia and nationalistic positions and defined her European identity in terms of developing a particular receptive sensibility towards others, such as 'greater open-mindedness' and 'the willingness to broaden [her] own cultural horizons'. She connected European-ness with the experience of primarily peaceful relationships between different cultures, adding that '[nationalism] has a negative touch for me. I don't support any country, maybe because I would never fight for a country, […] and that's where the European comes in'.

Despite mixing and using plural languages and cultures, the participants did not necessarily consider themselves in terms of cultural hybrids but rather interconnected their plural affiliations in various contexts and for different reasons. The

construction of a European identity served as a confirmation of their own culturally versatile belonging, which preserved distinctive local, national and cultural identities (Held 2002, 57 − 8). At the same time, this conception of Europeanness assisted in relativising national attitudes and dismissing socially constructed discourses of exclusive belonging. The participants associated a European identity with the possibility of having multiple cultural attachments without needing to limit allegiance to one of them. Thus, Europe became a crucial 'object of identification' (Delhey et al. 2014, 357) in relation to the participants' subjective experiences and flexible modes of seeing and interpreting social life, and thereby confirmed their sense of culturally versatile and multiple belonging.

Recent studies of European mobility suggest that the combined experience of movement, living abroad and constructing extensive transnational networks and social relationships across territorial borders results in a common experience of 'social estrangement of neither belonging nor unbelonging' (Kennedy 2008, 121). Similarly to mobile Europeans, who faced difficulties in stating to which sociocultural entity, nationality or place they belonged (Kennedy 2008, 131–132), the participants' personal biographies and numerous dimensions of cultural and social interaction provided a context in which they learned to (de-)construct notions of belonging. Different dimensions of allegiances were not perceived as antagonistic but produced a discursive and very individualistic interpretation of Europe and of being European.

A European identity served to confirm the participants' common experience of 'not fitting in anywhere but [having] connections everywhere' through their experience of a multitude of different relationships. For instance, their childhood experience of residing in countries in which they were immersed into local social structures and nevertheless perceived as foreigners, as well as their regular travels across the borders of European nation states, reflected different forms of daily transnational engagement, which assisted in opening their minds to cultural differences. Their sense of European-ness was not an artificial con-

struct alone (Beck & Sznaider 2010, 388); rather, the participants **associated their European identi**ty with the development of a cultural disposition that facilitated the acceptance of otherness and cultural difference as something desirable, similar to cosmopolitanism (Kendall et al. 2009, 105; Čeginskas 2015, 98, 113). While most discussions on cosmopolitanism tend to regard individuals as free from belonging to social and local spaces through different processes of transnational mobility (Kendall et al. 2009, 39), the participants relate to experiences of multiple dimensions of social belonging and solidarity with others, which allow them to participate in a variety of cultural settings, albeit in a detached way.

Although John differentiated between being 'linguistically more French and English' and 'culturally more British', he related primarily to a notion of multicultural belonging in terms of having multiple culturally distinct and transnational bonds. His social relationships and networks included various people within and across national borders, people who shared one of his national or cultural backgrounds as well as other Europeans, international foreigners and local social contacts. However, he explicitly rejected associations with any national or expatriate community and argued that such communities were the national and social extensions of their respective countries (Kennedy 2008, 120), which tended to construct a clichéd notion of, for instance, 'little Britain' abroad. He actually preferred to interact with people who had 'broader perspectives on diverse matters' while being open to local structures of immersion, and who considered themselves in neither national nor international terms but related to transcultural relationships that produced the experience of possessing multiple attachments.

(2) Experience of Communality
A sense of communality is commonly defined with regard to group conformity and based on shared sociocultural ties (Puri 2004, 174). Linguistic practices and contrasting situations of cultural contact produce notions of difference and otherness, which strengthen the development of exclusive social identities in relation to outsiders

(Puri 2004, 174). Paradoxically, the participants used notions of otherness as a means of creating a sense of communality with others, regardless of whether they were national 'compatriots', shared the same language preferences or cultural identifications, or simply had in common the experience of possessing multiple attachments. This can be attributed to the participants' increased familiarity with cultural otherness as a result of extended cultural contact in manifold contexts.

The participants shared a reoccurring feeling of being different in their various social relationships. For instance, their otherness was frequently disclosed because of their names, (multiple) language skills or nationality, which indicated that something was unusual about them. It often resulted in situations in which others interpreted them, their views or practices as 'different'. Speaking of his childhood in Bavaria, Raphael explained that he created 'a kind of novelty factor', which made him 'an unusual foreigner', who '[looked] different, [had] a different name but [spoke] German with a Bavarian accent'. The participants' experience of otherness in the sense of falling outside accepted categories is a norm rather than something surprising, and they chiefly consider it a positive feeling of individual distinction, albeit a little uncomfortable at times. For instance, John spoke of the opportunity to be had from the lack of belonging because the lack contributes to enlarging his horizons and freeing him from feelings of being bound by any nation. Instead of (re-)producing a notion of belonging exclusively to one actual place or social entity, the participants connected to multiple sites and groups, and the reoccurring feeling of otherness was a significant factor that helped to maintain their personal notion of multi-sited belonging.

The participants' early experience of diverse settings of cultural and social interactions provided a special context that contributed to the cultivation of a sense of non-conformity to familiar social structures. For instance, my brother Augustinas explained that for a long time he refused to regard himself as Swedish because of our parents' different ethnic origins, the multiple languages spoken in our family and his associations of foreignness in Swedish society. Yet

the older he became, the more he was aware that ethnic Swedes and others alike perceived him as a 'real' Swede and thus questioned his other affiliations. The development of a reflective sense of belonging did not call into question existing social structures but Augustinas and the other participants related differently to them.

The participants grew up with transnational bonds and new forms of social capital, which situated them in an ambivalent state of being neither in nor out. Indeed, both Raphael and John referred to themselves using the description of an 'outsider who is also an insider'. They were in a particular situation that enabled them to acquire insider knowledge about several distinct cultural codes and language use, and nevertheless feel detached from national frameworks. This approach is part of a complex mechanism that contributes to create a feeling of inclusion and emotional bonding, and directly relates to the participants' engagement in diverse networks for different reasons and at different times. The ability of the study's participants to change between the position of an outsider and insider according to the context assists them in perceiving their world from multiple perspectives and in constructing a sense of communality with others even if they do not share the required features of cultural and social conformity.

Feelings of otherness can help to reconcile different aspects of identity and belonging (Ahmed 1999, 336). Whereas some studies suggest that a sense of communality among strangers derives from sharing a non-native status abroad rather than sharing a common past (Moroșanu 2013, 2169; Ahmed 1999, 330–336), I argue that the continuous experience of cultural otherness rather than ethnicity or mobility is a key aspect of the participants' ability to create a sense of communality across boundaries. Recent studies on mobility emphasise the greater willingness of transnational people to engage with others who share the experience of living abroad rather than with co-nationals who have not moved (Favell 2003, 417; Moroșanu 2013, 2163), which suggests that transnational bonds transform individuals' relation to familiar social structures and allow for a denationalising experience of belonging (Ken-

nedy 2008, 120; Nanz 2009, 425; Favell & Recchi 2011, 70–1). However, the development of an increased sense of social distance and outsider perspective may challenge, but not dissolve, national affiliations and identities (Kennedy 2008, 120, 128).

The participants continue to appreciate the notion of cultural difference for its capacity to create distinct notions of outsider-/insider-ness, and use the concept of difference as a means of developing solidarity and communality (Nanz 2009, 426) with familiar sociocultural entities as well as with other individuals from different backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, culture and languages. **The participants do not perceive cultural difference as a tool of dividing places and entities**, but the mechanism of contrasting with others makes it possible to acknowledge the equality and comparability of distinct groups and settings (Eriksen 1995, 428, 434). The transcultural experiences of the study's participants cannot merely be seen in the context of migration, lifestyle choices or actual movement. Rather, they actively engage with various cultural experiences and exert 'cultural mobility' in a figurative sense that enhances affinity through the possession of multiple and distinct cultural bonds. Thus, the study's participants must be understood in terms of developing a socially constructed space across different boundaries as a result of the diverse social constraints they experience in cultural and social interactions (Favell 2003, 421).

The possibility of simultaneously possessing multiple cultural and social attachments is not commonly recognised in Western national structures, which depend on well-defined social and political categories of differentiation (May 2011, 40), except, of course, for European citizenship, which promotes a distinctive European identification between citizens of different European countries, as opposed to non-Europeans (Schroedter et al. 2015, 188). The participants' interpretation of European-ness also creates a sense of community that has the capacity to transcend the frameworks of individual European nation states but is not exclusively restricted to European borders or incompatible with the possession of various other affiliations outside Europe, as particularly

Raphael and John emphasised in the interviews. The participants create an understanding of community based on their experience of cultural and national diversity that produces simultaneous notions of communality and demarcation from other European and non-European individuals alike. Their construction of a transcending European identity relates to their everyday experience that a multitude of exclusive bonds and loyalties are not contradictory to producing communality, but, on the contrary, make it possible to create multiple forms of social and cultural relationships that extend beyond familiar social structures of national frameworks.

(3) Geopolitical and post-national associations
The participants' identification with Europe offers the advantage of a different approach for asserting their multidimensional and partly contradictory bonds in terms of various national and cultural allegiances. For instance, Ivaras explained that his mixed cultural background made him different from most people he knew and that rigid national structures did not apply to him. He argued that his background required thinking outside of the box in relation to conventional perceptions of social belonging:

> I'm European. You know, for me it's not Swedish or Lithuanian, Estonian or German. For me it's a bit different. I haven't got such an identity because I know that I'm not really Swedish, I'm not really Lithuanian, Estonian or German. I'm not such a traditional type of person.

Ivaras's sense of multiple belonging was related to having numerous multidimensional attachments, such as the use of multiple languages, experiencing family bonds across national boundaries or the fact of being socialised into a different society than his parents, which set him apart from most people he had met. Rather than territory, ethnicity or actual experiences of mobility, the experience of social estrangement of (non-)belonging became a central aspect of his self-representation and related to his experience of multiple transnational and culturally distinctive attachments.

Specific places, landscapes or symbols are frequently more important for individuals' identification than a national territory (Urry 2000, 263). For instance, given that the notion of *terroir* has become a powerful tool for generating a European cultural identity in the global arena, in particular as far as its use in the production of European artisanal goods and viniculture is concerned, some studies suggest that a European identity has its roots in regional areas, which serve to establish a stronger connection with Europe (Scalise 2015, 605–6; Demoissier 2012, 124, 133). The participants, however, rejected this notion. For example, John remarked that, contrary to his French wife, who continued to identify with her place and region of origin in France, and subsequently with being French abroad, he lacked the notion of *terroir*. John argued that growing up with many languages made it impossible to single out one specific place or country of allegiance. He emphasised that he did not associate with Europe in terms of specific regional identifications, local resources or regional territories. Instead, he identified with the broader dimension of Europe's cultural and linguistic diversity, which corresponded to his personal experiences.

Although the participants were not indifferent to global cultural markers, they showed a preference for a European identification. Contrary to cosmopolitan concepts of being international or a global citizen, a European identity alludes to a geopolitical space that provides a personally and socially acceptable way of nationally, culturally and spatially defining oneself as a multicultural individual in social encounters. A European identification remains sufficiently vague to incorporate a variety of cultural differences and multiple allegiances without necessitating attachment to a specific territory other than the vague idea of Europe. At the same time, however, being European evokes familiarity and allows for the communication of a widely recognised descriptive category in terms of a geographical and cultural belonging. Some participants highlighted the practical advantage of introducing themselves as Europeans instead of referring to their complex life story over and

over again. Similarly to brands, being 'European' allowed for diverse associations that created immediate recognition.

A European identity excludes neither national and local feelings nor notions of non-belonging or cosmopolitanism. Rather, it is part of the participants' complex construction of multiple identities with the aim of conceiving a coherent sense of belonging that also includes transnational and hybrid bonds. John explained that being European is 'like belonging somewhere [...] but you don't really belong completely anywhere', which precisely described his situation of possessing multiple, equally important bonds that connected him across diverse cultures, languages and places. Thus, the reference to Europe connects to the participants' individual identification processes and no longer confines the individuals to the national and cultural frameworks of a specific country. Although the construction of a **European identity neutralises** national attitudes and favours the emergence of an individualistic approach towards issues of belonging (Kennedy 2008, 127), the experience of multiple attachments nevertheless makes the participants aware of the existence of distinct norms and boundaries that connect to specific countries and settings.

Ivaras argued that a European identification offered him the necessary political and personal security in the sense of being a member of the EU but at the same time helped him to avoid the tiresome confrontations and discussions of what he was or was not in terms of his other allegiances. Despite the changes of social and cultural landscapes in the context of global transnational processes, nation states continue to be important for the construction of individuals' social identifications and sense of belonging (Ong 2005, 27). However, in the case of the participants, the representative functions usually assumed by the nation state were transferred to the geopolitical space of Europe, although **none of the participants** were able to state precisely where Europe started or stopped.

The participants themselves critically questioned the existence of 'the European thing', as John put it. They agreed that Europe as such did not have an identity and was difficult to grasp in precise terms. Despite acknowledging the importance of the EU's policies for their personal lives, the participants identified with neither the EU institutions nor Europe's economic and political integration. Rather, as John argued, being European was 'about the [cultural] differences still maintained and cherished', which he and the other participants associated with their experience of diverse cultural influences and ability to speak multiple languages. The participants associated their social identification as Europeans with the experience of a socially constructed site that is relational and changing in response to context and everyday social relationships. This particular site supports notions of difference and otherness as important aspects of constructing identities and acknowledges the significant impact of multiple cultural relationships on individuals with transnational bonds.

For the participants, Europe has grown into an entity with which they can identify and coordinate their ideas and values. The participants experienced an emotional connection with Europe in terms of an interactive, culturally and linguistically diverse space that is open for a multitude of different sociocultural encounters while acknowledging the boundaries that separate distinct cultures, languages and nations. Their identification with Europe connects to diverse processes of integration 'from below', which are essentially about issues of individual self-assertion and the space in which social interaction takes place. **It thereby fulfils a basic human** need of constructing a coherent and unchallenged notion of belonging (Medved 2000, 76). The participants talked about their European identity not as a stable outcome but rather as a process that offers the possibility of 'categorising' or 'relating' to them according to familiar social frameworks. Drawing on the concepts of cultural borderland and mobile mindset assists in understanding the participants' processes of constructing a European identity in terms of forming an expression of belonging that makes it possible to transcend diverse cultural and national boundaries, rather than constituting an actual identity.

Europe is a post-national space compared with the US, which remains a nationalised space despite its culturally diverse inhabitants (Favell 2008, 20). This is also the way in which the participants understand their European identification; it is connected with what they describe as their post-national identity. This particular understanding of being European contributes to the creation of a European connection that is associated with the participants' everyday experiences and practices and depicts a freely chosen identity rather than one politically imposed on them from above (Favell 2008, 21). Some participants, such as John, openly referred to their post-national identity. He did not consider himself as nationally attached but rather spoke of himself as a 'sort of cross-cultural, but not cross-national', rather 'supranational' individual. John claimed that he did not mind being European because of its comfortable label that allowed for 'be[ing] and not be[ing] Belgian, English or whatever' at the same time. Similarly to John, Fiona expressed a wish to be perceived as 'European, just European' and not in terms of her different national and cultural allegiances. To become European simplified the issue for the participants and allowed them to be both 'supranational' and culturally, ethnically and nationally distinct. Thus, their European identity corresponded with their sense of multicultural belonging and transnational experiences. It enabled the participants to perceive themselves in terms of 'both–and' rather than 'either–or'.

Conclusion

The study's participants maintain transcultural contacts that contribute towards forming their self-ascription as individuals with multifaceted perspectives. Although in terms of social identification their construction of belonging is shaped by notions of cultural boundaries and national structures, they do not relate to notions of difference merely in terms of a socio-political and cultural divide. Instead, the study's participants also use difference as a means for engaging in intercultural processes across these boundaries and for creating communality with others.

Although transnational spaces are frequently discussed in terms of mobility, the study's participants do not necessarily draw on actual experiences of movement in their creation of integrating social spaces across national borders. Rather, their **experience of different areas of cultural contact and ability of changing perspectives** affect their negotiations between socio-political categories and personal ways of identification. The study's individuals' transcultural practices and social relationships necessitate a concept that describes the symbolic competence of shifting around in zones where difference is used as tool to create a sense of communality.

The concept of cultural borderland pays closer attention to individuals' own assertion of status in terms of cultural and civic affiliations, social relationships and the different choices individuals make when integrating multiple and contradictory bonds. Although the experience of diverse cultural bonds results in the participants' possession of a detached attitude towards nation states, they do not call into question the existence of national structures when creating a sense of multiple social and cultural belonging. Rather, the concept of cultural borderland extends to the construction of symbolic competence and cultural capital in terms of the capacity of seeing oneself and the world from multiple perspectives, which is not only temporarily restricted to the moment of cultural encounter.

The study's multicultural individuals do not only identify in terms of ethnic, multilingual or post-national identity but, given their diverse cultural attachments, they also face other processes that relate to their ability of being 'culturally mobile'. This ability is connected with the development of a specific mobile mindset that draws on the experience of cultural otherness and embraces non-conformity and a positive acknowledgment of cultural diversity and differentiation, without requiring personally experienced mobility. Drawing on the concept of mobile mindset makes it possible to deconstruct and renegotiate national and cultural boundaries and to explore practices and emo-

tional bonds associated with places and cultural encounters between individuals and communities (Medved 2000, 76), which favours the emergence of additional alternatives to binary conceptions of (non-)belonging.

The construction of a European identity should not be viewed in terms of constructing an exclusive identification that detaches individuals from any local or national identities. Rather, it relates to an individual, collective and spatial dimension of conceiving a sense of belonging within familiar social structures but *across* national frameworks, in which ethnicity, territory and experience of mobility become less crucial for the participants' self-representation. The use of the concepts of mobile mindset and cultural borderland offers the possibility of viewing and discussing transnational experiences not merely in the context of ethnic migration and elite mobility, or in terms of privileged lifestyle choices. The study's multicultural individuals experience diverse processes of identification and, as a result, create a socially situated site that connects with their specific social resources and with various social, familial and cultural aspects (Castro-Martin & Cortina 2015, 116), which enhance their trans-European social ties and sense of emotional connection with Europe as a socially constructed site.

The participants actively engage in the creation of this imagined socially constructed space that allows for the development of a denationalised concept of belonging. Provided that multiple allegiances are acknowledged as a resource for society – and not only as a danger to cohesion as witnessed in recent debates about the arrival of a considerable number of non-European refugees to Europe since late summer of 2015 and in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in the European heartland (in Paris on 13 November 2015 and in Brussels on 22 March 2016) – notions of otherness have the potential to produce a tolerant and inclusive understanding of belonging and communality.

Acknowledgement

NOTES

1   The use of close family members was not a premeditated approach; rather, it developed in the course of the research process. I have discussed this specific approach and the associated methodological and ethical concerns with insider research in greater detail in my thesis (Čeginskas 2015, 43–51).
2   The majority of the participants listed in this paper were very secular and except for one Jewish participant did not attach a significant role to religion in their everyday lives. With regard to their looks (in different "shades of white"), the participants did not stand out from the majority of the European population. Although these aspects certainly facilitated both their identification and acceptance as Europeans, they do not diminish the arguments put forth in the following discussion of the participants' practices of constructing a sense of multiple belonging vis-à-vis the social and cultural constraints encountered in national frameworks.

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KEYWORDS