

Chapter 6

The Trans-European Mobilization of “Generation Identity”



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6.1 Introduction

On October 20, 2012, 70 activists from the new right youth organization Generation Identity (*Génération Identitaire*, GI) rallied on the roof of a newly constructed mosque in the French town of Poitiers. Mobilizing near the historical grounds where Charles Martell’s army had fought off the Ottomans in 732, the activists evoked the imagery of a protracted conflict between Christian Europe and its Muslim other. In a similar register of battle, GI France’s YouTube video posted a few months prior, entitled “Declaration of War” (*Déclaration de Guerre*),¹ showed the French activists urgently describing the hardships of European youth, betrayed by the ideals of the generation of 1968 and its embrace of multiculturalism. The video quickly spread across Europe, and within a few months, GI Facebook groups appeared in several other European countries, where far-right activists adopted both the group’s logo and view of the world (Eckes 2016; Bruns et al. 2017).

At the time of writing, national GI groups exist in 12 European countries. Among these, the French, Austrian, and German groups are by far the most active in terms of street activism, strategy, and intra-organizational communication and integration (Bruns et al. 2017). On the transnational level, the GI network assembles under a set of overarching concepts, aiming at the preservation of a *European* identity against the threat of a foreign “invasion”. Within the common framework, however, the groups mobilize autonomously at the domestic level. Since the movement’s establishment in 2012, domestic activities have been combined with joint transnational events, including European campaigns, transnational demonstrations, the

¹ The video with English subtitles: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kqybsUqkOWs>

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annual Summer University in France² (with European participation since 2014), various cross-national seminars and exchanges, and most famously, the 2017 “Defend Europe” boats mission in the Mediterranean.

Despite different domestic grievances, constraints, identifications, and historical trajectories, the GI activists have managed to construct and maintain a common identity as members of a distinctly *European* community. This chapter explores GI at the level of transnational movement activism, using frame analysis to interpret how they achieve a common European identity through the attribution of protagonist and antagonist positions in the midst of the allegedly on-going “Great Replacement”. Transnational identity construction appears rather paradoxical in relation to far-right nationalists, making it a rarely explored far-right phenomenon (see Zúquete 2015). The chapter aims at closing this empirical gap, by explaining how the GI groups expand the borders of the “heartland” to the entire European continent (Taggart 2004), while simultaneously emphasizing their own national identities. At the same time, the chapter focuses on the GI groups’ expressions of anti-liberal sentiments during the “refugee crisis”, framed in the form of blame attributions regarding the mainstream politicians’ lack of protection of the European welfare and culture. The GI activists jointly construct a conservative and protectionist “us” in juxtaposition to a progressive and social-liberal “them,” with the hope of sowing public distrust in policies promoting multiculturalism, and, in the long term, claiming societal hegemony. To further this goal, they forge a transnational alliance around the safeguarding of the European culture, identity, and welfare provisions. Hence, the analysis will show that the various GI groups present themselves as the last bastion in the defense of Europe, fighting simultaneously against Muslim “others” and European proponents of liberalist ideals. While they present the prior as an “invading” force, they villainize the latter for permitting the pending societal rupture and combat them at the meta-political level.

6.1.1 *Framing Transnational Collective Identities*

In social movement studies, there is much debate about the conceptualization of “collective identity” (Flescher Fominaya 2010). Most scholars agree that some determining characteristics need to be present in order to foster a group’s cohesion and ability to act in unison (Melucci 1995). This creation of a collective sense of “we”-ness also forms a basis for collective action, and acts as a way to organize loyalties. Movement organizers must then create a group consciousness by constructing an identity around which the activists can unite (Tilly 2005). These shared attributes do not emerge naturally from movements. Instead, movement activists

²GI France and The Identitarians (*Les Identitaires*, BI’s new name since August 2016) organize the Summer University. It involves seminars around new right ideology, communication strategies, and combat training (for a detailed account, see Bouron 2014).

must strategically frame their understandings of self and of the “other”, in order to make them both communicable.

The concept of framing refers to “an interpretive schemata that simplifies and condenses the ‘world out there’ by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions within one’s present or past environments” (Snow and Benford 1992, p. 137). Movement entrepreneurs frequently employ “collective action frames” as a means to garner support and “to demobilize antagonists” (Snow and Benford 1988, p. 198). These collective action frames perform three “core framing tasks”, a diagnostic (what is wrong), prognostic (what should be done about it), and motivational action (why people should act) (Snow and Benford 1988, p. 198).

Hunt et al. (1994) combine the concepts of framing and collective identity in the concept of “identity field”. Identity fields have three dimensions: protagonists, antagonists and audiences. The “protagonist” identity field consists of the “we” that advocates, sympathizes with, or benefits from the movement’s overall values, ambitions and strategies. It also involves claims about the movement and its actors, allies, and constituents. The antagonist field, on the other hand, is comprised of the “culpable agents” for a given problem, which “are viewed as having ‘caused’ or exacerbated the problem” and which are ascribed with “traits and motives” for these actions (Hunt et al. 1994, p. 191). Thus, protagonist and antagonist fields relate to the general diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames.

6.1.2 Data Collection

The chapter draws on material from GI groups in France (*Génération Identitaire*), Austria (*Identitäre Bewegung Österreich*), Germany (*Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland*), Italy (*Generazione Identitaria*), the Czech Republic (*Generace Identity*), Hungary (*Identitás Generáció*) and Slovenia (*Generacija Identitete*). These represent some of the most active GI groups in the period under scrutiny (2015–2017).³ The primary data consists of written materials from the individual groups’ webpages and Facebook accounts,⁴ produced in relation to protests against their political opponents.⁵ The relevant Facebook posts were identified via a key-word search of protest terms in the seven national GI groups’ Facebook posts in the

³ Even though GI Hungary and GI Slovenia both only started protest activities in 2016. For a closer look at GI Hungary, see Kondor and Littler, Chap. 8 in this volume.

⁴ In April 2018, when writing this chapter, the Facebook accounts of the GI groups were still accessible. However, in June 2018, Facebook decided to shut down all GI-related pages across Europe (for details, see Bailey 2018). This chapter will still refer to the date of the Facebook-posts cited. Please contact the author if you are interested in consulting the exact post-dataset (retrieved using NetVizz).

⁵ Please contact the author for more information about the protest event data.

period 2015–2017 (involving 6322 posts in total).⁶ The protest data was collected via the method of protest event analysis (see Hutter 2014 for more on this approach), and includes data on both regular protest events (such as demonstrations, banner-drops, campaigns, street theatre performances, solidarity actions, etc.) and transnational GI meetings and conferences. As the focus in this chapter is upon the *transnational* construction of identity, only the protest events with a transnational aspect have been included. For this chapter's purposes, this involves protest events or meetings involving the participation of several national GI groups, and events or activities that have diffused from one national GI group to more than two others. Secondary sources consisting of previous scholarly contributions on their activities, history, and viewpoints are also included, particularly in the first two sections, which focus on *Generation Identity* as a movement, and its conception of “identity”.⁷

6.2 Introducing Generation Identity: New Right Counter-Culture with Left-Wing Means

GI France was created as the youth branch of the French new right political association Identity Block (*Bloc Identitaire*, BI) (created in 2002), which has its antecedents in Radical Unity (*Unité Radicale*), a neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic organization disbanded by the French authorities (Winkler 2017). Identity Block is “known for its radical positions vis-à-vis immigration, Islam, and for its defense of the European civilization and the Europeans” (François 2009), a legacy GI has continued. Inspired by the work of left-wing intellectual Antonio Gramsci, both BI and GI aim to change the discourse in the pre-political and cultural space, in order to attain cultural hegemony (Eckes 2016). Consequently, GI utilizes a professional communication strategy, especially on social media, where the activists combine pop cultural symbolism with radical viewpoints (Weiß 2017). Heavily inspired by the Italian neo-Fascist movement *CasaPound*, GI's action repertoire also draws heavily on the activities of left-wing movements (Bruns et al. 2017), including meeting interruptions, banner-drops, and site occupations. This unconventional strategy of public space penetration requires only a small number of activists, while the choices of place, timing, and banner statements often still lead to high media coverage.

In terms of GI's ideology, the movement largely draws on the work of French, German and Italian “new right” actors, especially the German Conservative Revolution (*Konservative Revolution*) of the 1920s, and the French Research and Study Group for European Civilization (*Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne*, or GRECE), formed in 1968. The post-World War II new

⁶The 6322 posts are divided accordingly amongst the national GI groups: GI France (1508 posts); GI Austria (1186); GI Germany (1677); GI Italy (1241); GI Czech Republic (291); and GI Hungary (419). In the latter two cases, it was only possible to retrieve data from August 2016 and September 2016 respectively, while GI Slovenia's Facebook account was blocked at the time of data retrieval.

⁷The author has translated the quotes that were not originally in English.

right seeks respectability by strongly rejecting fascism and nationalism. It attempts to create a counter-discourse to the 1968 generation by appropriating exactly these actors’ strategies and claims to a right-wing discourse of ethnic homogeneity and “discrimination against all things ‘foreign’” (Minkenberg 2000, pp. 179–180). The political current has inspired several of today’s far-right parties (Minkenberg 2000). As the following section shows, the GI’s conception of “identity” draws heavily on the “new right” understandings of the term.

6.3 Identity: Regional, National and European-But Not Egalitarian

In order to understand GI’s protagonist and antagonist identity construction, one must first grasp how the transnational movement perceives the concept of “identity”. The GI activists see their identity and culture as consisting of three interdependent layers: the regional, national, and European, and use the image of a matryoshka to explain this view. You cannot be German without also being e.g. Bavarian and European, and you cannot be European without a corresponding national and regional identity. Yet, merely being a citizen of a European country is not sufficient to make you truly European (Robert in Weiß 2017, p. 105).

According to GI, the “pure” European identities are currently under threat from multiculturalism, egalitarianism, and individualism, leading to the autochthonous population experiencing an existential crisis (Willinger 2013). In GI’s interpretation, individualism has replaced social bonds and communitarian ties, creating autochthonous Europeans deprived of roots and identity, and thus suffering decline, loss and alienation. This reading is based on the new right understanding that humans are “lost and unsettled without community, fixed structures and hierarchies” (Bruns et al. 2017, p. 226). Against individualism, GI demands the return to a collective, communitarian, and heritage-based human “we” built on national ancestry. Accordingly, GI hopes for a societal return to the origins, as they “discovered that [they] have roots and ancestors—and thus a future” (Morgan 2013, p. 10). In this reading, the world should consist of separate, ethnically homogenous communities, clearing the way for a “bright future of the past” (Weiß 2017, p. 99). The GI activists thus wish to restore the “world as it ‘was’” (Taggart 2004, p. 274), by re-establishing the imaginary ethnically “pure” societies of the past, which have been corrupted by foreign influences, especially globalization, and third-country immigration. As the GI Manifesto states: “We are the rightful heirs to this continent, and we will not give up our inheritance” (Willinger 2013, p. 38).

GI’s wish to protect the European civilizational identity against “foreign” influences is based on the notion of “ethnopluralism”. Along similar lines as Huntington’s (1993) argument, the movement considers the world’s different civilizations too distinct to live side by side peacefully, and they are instead destined to wage war against each other. This forms the basis for GI’s statement that “We are the

generation of ethnic fracture, of the total failure of integration, the generation of forced crossbreeding” (Morgan 2013, p. 9). The argument draws on the French new right intellectual Alain de Benoist’s aforementioned term *ethnopluralism*. He argues that ethnically and culturally heterogeneous people are hierarchically equal, yet, they cannot coexist in the same geographical space, without this leading to ethnic conflict. At its core, the concept aims to strengthen natural borders, producing a global apartheid of ethnically segregated states, as the only way to ensure ethnic diversity is through the geographical segregation of cultures (Minkenberg 2000). GI in this way understands identity as ethnocultural and organic, as culture and identity are considered static, essentialist and nativist (Mense 2017). The argument is then only a linguistic turn away from explicit racism, as the term “race” solely has been replaced by “culture”, thereby upholding the differentialist racism (Eckes 2016) and totalitarian worldview of the past (Mense 2017). This ethnic distinction mainly targets one particular “other”, namely Islam and its adherents, who are considered the greatest visible threat currently facing the identity and culture of Europe’s autochthonous population.

While GI maintains that there are regional and national distinctions between the autochthonous European populations, the activists consider all to belong to the same overarching cultural sphere. In the new right conception, the Europeans are bound by a “community of fate”, entailing a predestined need to defend the continent together (Bruns et al. 2017, p. 236). This makes the GI activists believe that a pan-European alliance is the best means to protect their identity and civilization. Yet, the further characterization of this “European civilization” is remarkably vague, as the description does not reach much beyond shared cultural and traditional traits. The three-layered identity-conception permits the groups to place their focus differently in terms of regionalism, nationalism and Europeanism. The Austrian and German GI groups for instance emphasize the *völkisch* nationalism, while the French and Italian groups mainly focus on the regions and Europe (Bruns et al. 2017).

Despite differences between the various GI groups, they unite around the assertion that the battle against mass-immigration and “Islamization” (i.e. the gradual take-over of Muslim law and culture in Europe) “is the battle of our generation” (GI Austria 2017). Consequently, while the GI groups also mobilize against other identity-related issues, such as LGBT and gender policies, Muslim immigration is the main object of their joint mobilization. As will be shown in the following frame analysis, this became particularly evident during the so-called refugee crisis, where all the groups united around the call of defending Europe against the third-country immigrants and refugees.

6.4 “Defend Europe”: GI and the European “Refugee Crisis”

All of the national GI groups under study increased their mobilization frequencies during the pan-European refugee (reception) crisis (2015–2017),⁸ albeit to varied extents, with GI Germany, GI Austria, and GI France by far organizing the most protest actions in their respective countries. Moreover, except for the larger focus on refugees and asylum seekers in the 2015–2017 period, the overarching collective action frames remained similar to the ones employed since the creation of GI France in 2012. GI France was already rather active on the streets from 2013 onwards, and especially GI Austria and GI Germany strongly increased their protest actions in the 2015–2017 period. GI Hungary and GI Slovenia, on the other hand, only began carrying out protest actions in 2016, while GI Czech Republic and GI Italy have struggled more to organize their own protest actions, mainly due to limited resources. In terms of protest forms, all GI groups mainly carried out demonstrative protests, most commonly in the form of banner-drops. Building occupations and disruptions of meetings have been recurring confrontational protest tactics, but before 2015, it was mainly GI France that employed confrontational protest forms to express its demands. Yet, from 2015 onwards, GI Austria and GI Germany also carried out numerous blockades of roads and entrances to buildings, such as refugee and migrant centers, and, in this way, radicalized their mobilization substantially.

Moreover, in the 2015–2017 period, Eastern and Western European groups joined forces at several transnational events, including numerous border protests, the 2016 “Summer of Resistance” demonstrations in Paris, Vienna, and Berlin, street theatre performances against terrorism and Islamist violence, and “solidarity actions” for the autochthonous European population. The following section goes through GI’s four diagnoses in relation to these protests, namely that the refugees and immigrants pose a threat in cultural, demographic, economic, and security terms.⁹ This analysis also examines the movement’s antagonist and protagonist identity constructions.

⁸While the refugee (reception) crisis was at its height in 2015–2016, many of the national and EU-responses to the situation were either only taking shape, or further developed during 2017, just as the migrant routes continued to be a topic of heated debate throughout that year.

⁹Other European radical and extreme right populist movements and parties also commonly voice these four frames (see Lazaridis and Campani 2017).

6.4.1 *Cultural Threat: Loss of “European Identity” Through Islamization*

Unsurprisingly, all GI groups strongly voice the frame of *cultural threat*. GI fears the erosion of a culturally and biologically based European identity through Muslim immigration and alleged Islamization, due to the conviction that the communitarian and homogenous “we” is in danger of disappearing through the mass-immigration of civilizational “others”. This view was expressed cohesively at GI’s 2016 “Summer of Resistance” demonstrations in Paris, Vienna, and Berlin. The French demonstration, “This is Our Home” (*On est chez nous*), was joined by German and Austrian GI activists, and it was organized to “show our determination to continue living on our land according to our laws, our values, in the respect of our identity”.¹⁰ Similarly, in Vienna, at the annual European GI protest, this time under the motto “Defend Europe”, GI Austria demanded the “unconditional protection of the European culture and tradition” (GI Austria 2016).

To curb the cultural threat, GI suggests closing the borders, and promotes a process of remigration. The call for so-called “remigration” of third-country immigrants is a term GI France has adopted from BI, referring to the (forced) returning of third-country immigrants to their home countries. As argued by Aftenberger (2017), this is merely a rewriting of the neo-Nazi calls for “Foreigners out” (*Ausländer raus*). At the protest events, the “remigration” demand is mainly directed towards “illegal” and “criminal” immigrants, as well as “economic refugees”. Yet, in reality, it relates to all third-country immigrants, as, in the words of GI Germany, there should be “a demographic tendency change towards remigration” (GI Germany n.d.-b).

6.4.2 *Demographic Threat: Fearing the Great Replacement*

The *demographic threat* frame revolves around the conviction that Europe is currently undergoing a *Great Replacement* process. Adopting Renaud Camus¹¹ concept, GI argues that the European autochthonous population is gradually being “repressed and replaced” by non-European immigrants, due to the combination of falling birth rates, and the “growth of Islamic parallel societies and mass-immigration” (GI Germany n.d.-a). Particularly in Western Europe, activists fear becoming minorities in their own country within a few decades, and in this way turning into “the Indians of Europe” (Morgan 2013, p. 33). In reference to Eastern Europe, activists argue that once the West is “full”, the East will follow.¹² This

¹⁰ GI France Facebook post 15.5.2016. Accessed 25 Apr 2018.

¹¹ He published the book *The Replacement of People (Le Changement de peuple)* in 2013, outlining what he argued to be the ongoing Europe-wide “phenomenon”.

¹² Speech by Jean-David Cattin, delivered at a GI Czech Republic meeting in 2014: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEdfEHCCpRo>. Accessed 25 Apr 2018.

diagnosis is closely interlinked with the cultural threat outlined above, and it led the GI national groups to organize numerous protest events, such as the “Stop the Great Replacement” demonstration in Vienna in June 2015, which included GI activists from across Europe.¹³ Moreover, as part of the 2016 “Summer of Resistance” protests, GI Germany organized an “Uprising against the Injustice” (*Aufstand gegen das Unrecht*), stating that “We are in the frontline against the self-abolition¹⁴ and the Great Replacement” (GI Germany 2016c). Here, particularly GI Germany’s word-choice of “self-abolition” points to the existential threat that the non-European immigrants pose, and which should motivate people to act.

6.4.3 *Economic Threat: Welfare for “Our Own People First”*

Considering the economic threat, GI aligns with the welfare chauvinist frame shared by several radical right parties (see: Cinpoş and Norocel, Chap. 4; Hellström and Tawat, Chap. 2 in the present volume) and considers third-country immigrants detrimental to the various European social systems (Morgan 2013). Yet, very similar to neo-fascist parties and organizations, such as *Golden Dawn* (Greece), *Hogar Social* (Spain) and *CasaPound* (Italy), the majority of the national GI groups take this welfare-protectionist stance to a further extreme through their so-called “Generation Solidarity”, or “Patriotic Solidarity” actions. They are based on the same claims as those of the radical right—that the migrants are offered better social benefits than the socially vulnerable autochthonous Europeans, who are considered “left behind” by the national governments and civil society organizations. Yet, by adhering to a sort of “ethnicized socialism” (François 2009), GI frames these direct social actions (cf. Castelli Gattinara and Froio 2016) as an instance of explicit anti-national racism (e.g. anti-French, anti-Italian), and carries out acts of resistance. Activists have, for instance, organized charity and assistance drives exclusively targeting “autochthonous” groups of socioeconomically vulnerable individuals. In France, some of the local groups give donations and serve pork soup to the homeless every winter with the slogan “Ours before the others”. GI Austria similarly helps the people “who are let down by politics”, by providing the homeless with goulash soup (thus containing pork).¹⁵ GI Italy and GI Czech Republic, on the other hand, collect donations for national citizens, while GI Hungary and GI Germany distribute food to the poor.

¹³ GI Austria Facebook post 6.6.2015. Accessed 25 Apr 2018.

¹⁴ A reference to the 2010 book *Germany Abolishes Itself* (*Deutschland schafft sich ab*) by Thilo Sarrazin, a previous member of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD).

¹⁵ GI Austria Facebook post 8.10.2015. Accessed 25 Apr 2018.

6.4.4 *Security Threat: Terrorists, Islamists and Criminal Immigrants*

The *security threat* frame is based on the ethnopluralist premise that culturally distinct people cannot live in the same geographical place without this leading to ethnic strife, conflicts, and violence (instigated by the non-autochthonous residents). GI France has expressed this since 2012, carrying out several campaigns against criminal immigrants (the so-called “riff-raff”), who they accuse of acting violently against the autochthonous population, and GI Austria and GI Italy have conducted similar actions. During the refugee crisis, GI France’s blockade of the entrance to Calais in March 2016 (Dearden 2016), and GI Austria and GI Germany’s second border protest in Freilassing in January 2016 both highlighted the violent nature of refugees and immigrants. Referring to the events on New Year’s Eve in Cologne, GI Germany even referred to the “hundreds of thousands of criminals”, which the open borders had “flushed” into the country (GI Germany 2016a).

The rise in Islamist terrorist attacks on European soil in the period of 2015–2016 added to the saliency of the security frame. One of the more explicit ways of demonstrating the dangerous nature of Islamist terrorists was through public performances of imitated terrorist attacks and/or ISIS killings. This particular type of protest event began in Austria in December 2015,¹⁶ and spread over to Prague (GI Germany 2016b), several German cities (see GI Germany 2017), and Budapest (GI Hungary 2017a). Some of the numerous border protests that took place in the period from June 2015–March 2016 also revolved around the protection against Islamist terrorists and/or criminal immigrants. Moreover, in both February 2016 and November 2017, GI France planned to organize a transnational demonstration against terrorism, the first in Molenbeek, in Brussels region (entitled “Expulsion of the terrorists”), and the second in Paris (“Facing Terrorists: Defend Europe!”). However, both of these demonstrations were forbidden by the authorities, due to fears of violence erupting between GI activists and counter-demonstrators. The most commonly voiced prognosis for the terrorist threat is again the return of the Muslim immigrants to their countries of origin (“remigration”), and the reinforcement of the national and/or EU borders.

As has become visible from the analysis above, GI’s transnational protest activities during the refugee crisis were largely framed around the matter of safeguarding the European civilizational identity against non-European refugees and immigrants. The over-arching diagnostic frame identified by the various GI groups was that *Muslim mass-immigration poses a threat to the European autochthonous population*, which is further divisible into cultural, demographic, economic, and security threat dimensions. While there are of course differences between the frames employed by the various GI groups, all of these frames are intrinsically linked. Moreover, at their core, they all lead to the same conclusion: Due to the existential

¹⁶ ISIS-Enthauptung mitten in WIEN | Mariahilfer Straße 21.12.2015 (YouTube). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwRV2bYGa5E>. Accessed 25 Apr 2018.

threat that Muslim immigrants pose to the European autochthonous population, there should be no Muslim immigrants or refugees in Europe.

6.5 Protagonist Identity: A Fighting Community in the Defense of European Civilization

At its foundation in 2013, GI presented itself as a “fighting community” on its website (Morgan 2013, p. 12). The GI groups preserve this sentiment in their frequent references to masculine warriors and portrayals of themselves as heroic knights, who will come to the rescue of Europe (Weiß 2017). While women should preferably play the role of “traditional homemakers”, the movement maintains a masculinity ideal based on classical conceptions of the heterosexual, strong, warrior-like men (Blum 2017, p. 329). This, for instance, becomes visible in the frequent depictions of, and participation in, combat sports, as both the male and female activists are offered combat skills training, for instance at GI camps or conferences (cf. Blum 2017; Bruns et al. 2017). At the annual Summer Universities in France, the participants even wear the same clothes, symbolizing uniformity and order (Dupin 2017). The use of these symbols, practices, and frames should be seen in relation with GI France’s ambition “to prevent the civil war” in Europe (GI France leader, Pierre Larti cited in Dupin 2017, p. 45). The movement furthers this aim through its self-presentation as “the barricade upon which our youth are mounting in order to fight for their identity” (Morgan 2013, p. 12). GI thereby conjures an apocalyptic sentiment, portraying itself as the last bastion in the defense of the autochthonous ethnically “pure” European population, fighting against egalitarianism, Islam, and mass immigration.

Besides the attributes outlined above, much of the group’s identity work revolves around historical war references, starting with the movement’s logo, the Greek letter *Lambda*, which refers to the shields of the outnumbered Spartan soldiers as depicted in the movie *300*. As stated by a member of GI Czech Republic, the *Lambda* should be seen as “a symbol of determination and resilience” (GI Czech Republic 2015). This aligns with the frequent references to the shared history of battling Islam as a joint European venture. Through the “embellishment and reconstitution of relevant aspects of the past” (Hunt et al. 1994, p. 195), GI employs the glorification of the European past for a dual purpose. The movement provides a pan-European narrative for the ongoing battle against the culturally foreign oppressor, but also grounds this narrative in actual historical occurrences. GI France’s frequent mention of Charles Martel and his Poitiers victory is one example among many others, as each GI group refers to its own country’s historical figures and events. Historical battles are also discussed at the transnational GI level, for instance at the 2016 Summer University, which was entitled “From Covadonga to Calais”, in reference to the site of the first Christian victory over the Islamic Umayyad Caliphate on the Iberian Peninsula in 722 AD.

The symbolic “battle frame” also becomes visible through demonstrations, processions, and other protest events commemorating historical European victories over the Ottomans. As examples, GI Hungary and GI Austria respectively organized a commemorative procession in the autumn of 2017, with participation by GI activists from abroad. Both marches referred to battles, where armies of European soldiers had fought off the Ottomans (Battle of Buda in 1686, and Battle of Vienna in 1683 respectively) (GI Hungary 2017b; GI Austria 2017). GI’s highlighting of these battles can be considered allusions to a European “mythical Golden Age”, where the continent “allegedly experienced unity and glory, fullness and greatness” (Forchtner 2016, p. 275), a period to which Europe should return.

Moreover, as the victories in these battles not only led to the liberation of the country in which the clash took place, but also several other states, the defense of Europe is not only a national matter. Rather, it becomes a pan-European project, as “if one state falls, the next ones will follow”. As mentioned earlier, GI also employs this way of framing the situation when explaining the Eastern European GI group’s strong mobilization against Islam, despite the comparatively low numbers of Muslim residents in that part of Europe.¹⁷ These pan-European framings of battling Islam should be seen in connection with GI’s call for a so-called Reconquista of Europe, i.e. the reconquering of the continent from the Muslim “invaders”,¹⁸ either to be perceived “metaphorically or more concrete...” (Les Identitaires n.d.). While the concrete is rather self-explanatory, the metaphorical sense refers to the battle for cultural hegemony, where GI is up against the proponents of today’s prevalent left-liberal societal discourse.

6.6 Antagonist Identities: The European Political Leadership, Pro-migrant Actors, and Muslim Immigrants

While GI frames immigrants as the most acute threat to the maintenance of European identity, the movement identifies national, and in some cases European, governments and the left-wing elite as the main culprits. The main antagonists, in other words, are those actors who, in their appeals to pluralism and egalitarianism, do not counter third-country immigration to Europe. They thus come in conflict with GI’s cause of preserving, or returning to, a Europe that is homogeneously ‘pure’. Particularly the *economic threat* diagnosis is very strongly blamed on the national politicians and pro-migrant and -minority organizations—proponents of pluralism

¹⁷ See for instance the video of Jean-David Cattin’s speech at a GI Czech Republic meeting in 2014: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEdfEHCCpRo>. Accessed 25 Apr 2018.

¹⁸ In 2001, Faye introduced the term “Reconquista” in his call for a defense against the Muslim “colonization of Europe” (Weiß 2017). It derives from Spanish and Portuguese and refers to the reconquering of the Muslim kingdoms by the Christians on the Iberian Peninsula.

and human rights. GI portrays these actors as lacking compassion for the autochthonous population, who they see as being sidelined in favor of the foreign “other”. Moreover, GI also very clearly villainized pro-migrant and pro-refugee actors during the so-called “Defend Europe” mission in the Mediterranean in 2017. The “mission” consisted of GI activists from Italy, France, Austria, and Germany, who set out in a boat to monitor the rescue missions at sea to ensure that they complied with the regulations. This was targeted at pro-migrant NGOs, which were accused of “human trafficking” and endangering the lives of the refugees (for an account of the “mission”, see Oppenheim 2017). Reversely, the GI activists attempted to frame themselves as the *true* humanitarians, unlike the NGOs, which were acting “under the guise of humanitarian rescue operations” (GI Germany n.d.-c).

At the same time, the national governments of particularly the Western European GI groups’ states were heavily criticized for their way of dealing with the refugee (reception) crisis, especially in terms of policy responses to the “open borders”. Each of the border protests for instance targeted the national, or European, politicians for their irresponsible conduct, their lacking response, or their total loss of control of the refugee situation. Particularly the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, was blamed for her decision to keep the borders open, while especially Viktor Orbán was highlighted as the “good example” for devising policies to restrict further immigration, and in this way became “widely admired in all of Western Europe” for his patriotic conduct (Sellner 2017).

This strategy of blaming the politicians or pro-migrant actors has several purposes. For one, it allows GI “to construct migrants, refugees or Muslims as problems, without explicitly naming them as such” (Lehner 2017, p. 150). Yet, more importantly, the villainization of the liberal actors’ responses is in reality an adoption of the “decade-old” extreme right motif of constructing “a left-wing, anti-national hegemony” (Aftenberger 2017, p. 218). Hence, by drawing attention to its “unpatriotic” political opponents, who allegedly act against the will of the people, GI attempts to further its own ambition of reclaiming the cultural hegemony of society.

Finally, the third-country immigrants and refugees are also strongly antagonized, albeit not always directly. Besides the allegations of Muslims “Islamizing” European societies, and generally being predisposed to violence, the GI activists also villainized the immigrants and refugees in more implicit ways. One of these was by continuously employing terms questioning the refugees and immigrants’ claims for residence in Europe. This delegitimization was done by putting inverted commas around the term refugee (i.e. “refugee”), by referring to them as “economic refugees” (*Wirtschaftsflüchlinge*), or generally as “illegal” or “clandestine”. The strategy strongly antagonizes the refugees, as they are attributed with the immoral agenda of false residence claims. Moreover, this discourse strongly objectifies the immigrants, as the actual agency primarily is given to the political elites of European society.

6.7 Conclusions

This chapter analyzed the European new right youth movement *Generation Identity*'s construction of a pan-European collective identity. The analysis revealed that despite the national contextual and organizational differences between the various GI groups, they still agree upon, and jointly mobilize around, a shared conception of "identity", based on ethno-pluralist principles. The movement thus hopes for a future return to an imagined past, where Europe will consist of ethnically homogeneous communities, all belonging to the European cultural sphere. In order to begin attaining this goal, the GI activists develop a two-tiered transnational collective identity based on both a civilizational adherence (European) and type of movement (self-ascribed "fighting community"), making them able to carry out transnational protest events together. They thus portray themselves as the last protectors of Europe, heroically coming to the defense of the European autochthonous population, whose communitarian identity is endangered by egalitarianism and liberal values.

GI considers the national governments and the proponents of pluralist policies the main antagonists. The organization expresses this by pointing to the faulty, or lacking, policy proposals and actions carried out by these actors, plus their unfair treatment of the European autochthonous populations. This is not only a means to gain support for GI's immediate cause of curbing third-country immigration to Europe, but also for its main ambition of reclaiming the cultural hegemony within society. It is thus the Muslim "others", who are framed as the main threat, and around which most of the mobilization takes place, while the blame is mainly attributed to the European elites. The Muslim immigrants are depicted as culturally foreign, criminal "invaders", whose presence in Europe is to the detriment of especially the most vulnerable European autochthonous citizens, and who do not have a legal basis for their residence claims. To combat this threat, the GI activists symbolically defend the European borders (through border protests and blockades), but also attempt to give the European populations violent wake-up calls about the dangerous nature of the Muslim immigrants and draw attention to the age-old history of Europe battling Islam. In this way, the "othering" of the Muslim immigrants serves the dual purpose of creating discursive barriers between the homogenous European "us" and the foreign "other", while also acting as an instrument to target the liberal elite.

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