2. Theoretical Discussion on National Identity and Belonging

In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the theoretical discussion on two social-scientific concepts essential for the following empirical analyses: *national identity* and *belonging*. I begin the theoretical discussion by introducing the concept of national identity. In this context, I will first explain the concept of *nation*, as the foundation of any national identity, secondly highlight the distinction between an *ethnic* and a *civic* understanding of identity, with which social scientists mirror the shift in the societal understanding of national identity, and lastly subject the concept to critical reflection. Subsequently, I introduce the concept of *belonging* which has been increasingly used in this study field. Against the background of growing criticism on the theoretical concept of national identity, we see a theoretical shift ›from identity to belonging in social research‹ as Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011) terms it pointedly. Finally, I elaborate on the *sociological paradigm of social constructivism,* whose central thesis of the social construction of the human world I share.

National Identity

Historically dating back as far as the sixteenth century, the *nation* underwent a reassessment around 1800 to become the political–social concept which determines current debates (cf. Stauber 2019). Today, the nation is generally defined as a political–legal community of people (cf. Langewiesche 2018: 340f). Nation membership can be defined either in the ethnic–genealogical or civic–territorial sense (cf. Tartakovsky 2011: 1850). The primordial, essentialist *ethnic* approach considers a nation to be a naturally

given entity based on descent in an ethnic sense and a vernacular culture of symbols, traditions and customs, historical memory as well as language (cf. Smith 2005: 179f, Verdugo and Milne 2016: 4).[3] In contrast, the *civic* approach is based on the idea of allegiance, leading to a juridical definition of membership, institutionalized in citizenship rather than commonalities (cf. Tartakovsky 2011: 1850). In this context, the relevance of legal equality, civil, legal, and socio-economic rights as well as political rights and duties (cf. Smith 2005: 179) and the nation's territorially demarcated and bounded historical ›homeland‹ (cf. ibid.: 177f) are also stressed as elements of a civic understanding of nation membership. The difference between the ethnic and civic understanding of ›nation‹ lies in the permeability of nation membership: Whereas people can belong to the same nation, although being different in their ethnic, religious, or other affiliations from the civic perspective, nation membership is exclusively linked to a single ethnicity from the theoretical perspective on ethnic identity.

Furthermore, we have to consider the *historic development from nation to nation-state*. The question of when nations and nation-states emerged is still debated in science. So far, the modern form of a nation-state, the institutionalization of the nation as a value idea, dates back to the late 18th century, more precisely, to the French and North American Revolutions (cf. Langewiesche 2018: 339). The ideas of nation and nation-state have been constituted throughout the world since then (cf. ibid.). When considering the variety of multinational states and stateless nations in the world, we see that not all nations successfully evolved into distinct, sovereign, and independent nation-states. Hence, the difference lies in a state being a sovereign political entity (cf. Tartakovsky 2011: 1850). In the case of Ukraine, which is the focus of this work, we are dealing with a nation which has become a nation-state (Ukrainians as the titular nation and majority of the population), while at the same time being (a) home(land) to vari-

3 Similarly to a nation, an *ethnic group* is based on common language, culture and ancestry, but in contrast to the nation, the ethnos has no »common territory, a shared economy, system of mass communication and legislation« (Tartakovsky 2011: 1850). As will be discussed at the end of the chapter, ›ethnicity‹ can also be seen as a social construct rather than an objectively given fact.

ous minorities.[4] On the one hand, Ukraine is home to Russians, Hungarians, Poles, etc., who have their own nation-states. On the other hand, it is home to minorities like the Crimean Tatars who do not have their own nation-state they could migrate to. The case of Jewish and Muslim Ukrainians demonstrates the problem of equating nationality with ethnicity.

National identity is understood in this context as the collectively shared, unifying bond of a nation in the sense of feeling one is a member of a nation, which is based on the sense of commonality and connectedness among group members (cf. Bureiko and Moga 2019: 138). More concretely, it is understood as the citizens' perception of what constitutes a specific community, while differentiating it from others (cf. Shulman 2005: 59). According to Eugene Tartakovsky (2011: 1851), the concept of national identity can be understood as a set of cognitions and emotions which reflect an individual's connection to their nation. This is based on a range of characteristics (cf. ibid.):

(1) subjective conviction of belonging to a certain nation (self-identification),
(2) a strong sense of affiliation to a certain nation as part of one's individual identity,
(3) emotions about one's nation,
(4) national stereotypes distinguishing an individual from others or other nations,
(5) sense of commonality and connectedness among the group members,
(6) subjective opinion about one's nation, its aims and challenges and
(7) knowledge of one's national culture and values, the willingness to internalize this as well as to behave according to national values.

Similarly to the concept of nation, two main concepts of national identity exist within social sciences: The *ethnic* identity approach is based on the idea that people are united ethnically and culturally, by ethnicity or ancestry, culture, language, religion, traditions, values (cf. Shulman 2004:

4 The history of Ukrainian nation-building, which also affects its current population composition, is discussed in detail in the second chapter of this work.

35, 2005: 65) as well as common historical memory and myths (cf. Smith 2005: 181). On the contrary, the *civic* concept of national identity is based on the idea that people are united by a common territory, citizenship, and belief in common political principles, institutionalized as common legal and political rights and duties (cf. ibid.) and the »desire or consent to be part of the nation« (Shulman 2004: 35). Nevertheless, national identities are not considered to be clear-cut ethnically or civically but a specific combination of both dimensions, varying from country to country (cf. ibid.), as these concepts are theoretical ideal types (cf. Kappeler 2011b: 1).

At the same time, the evolvement of a national identity is considered to be a dual process of *inclusion* and *exclusion*: While ties between members of a nation are strengthened by emphasizing the commonalities within a population, negative demarcations to others are created by stressing differences between national groups (cf. Kuzio 2001: 343, İnaç and Ünal 2013: 224). Consequently, *inclusion* and *exclusion* lead to nation-building (cf. Kuzio 2001: 345). In extreme cases, the exclusionist character of a national identity (or belonging) can lead, among others, to hostility or humiliation of ›others‹ (cf. İnaç and Ünal 2013: 224).

The boom of using collective identity, like national identity, as an analytical tool, however, also evoked criticism which needs to be reflected on when deciding which analytical concepts and theories to work with. The concept of identity is mainly criticized for its essentialist nature as collective identity is defined as a natural, static and one-sided property of people (cf. Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011: 3). In this context, it is also criticized for its »homogenising notions of commonality [,] […] for endors[ing] methodological ethnicization […] by delineating clear-cut collective boundaries of the social« (ibid.) and for reinforcing social division (ibid.: 4). The criticism becomes apparent, for example, when questioning the idea of a single, strong national identity in the context of migration.

National belonging

To avoid the theoretical disadvantages and shortcomings behind the concept of national identity, social scientists, among others Floya Anthias or Nira Yuval-Davis, developed the theoretical concept of *belonging* to study social attachments between individuals (Harders and Schnicke 2022: 12),

of which national belonging is just one model, which vary across time and geopolitical context (cf. Anthias 2022: 333). The Oxford English Dictionary provides a trenchant definition, defining the verb to belong as »to be a member or affiliate of a particular group«, known since the 14th century (the latest) (cf. Harders and Schnicke 2022: 12). Belonging has both formal (e. g. membership) as well as informal and emotional elements (e. g. feeling of belonging, feeling at home, being accepted by others) (cf. Anthias 2022: 333, Yuval-Davis 2006). Belonging can be both an act of self-identification as well as of identification by others (cf. Yuval-Davis 2006: 199). Lastly, belonging is always dynamic, »not a reified fixity« (Yuval-Davis 2006: 199).

According to Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011: 2), belonging is based on three elements: on the sense and performance of commonality, mutuality and (im)material attachments. *Commonality* stresses the idea of sharing certain aspects like (the myth of) a common descent, culture, language, religion, experiences, practices, or values which can be linked to any social group, among others, in a nation (cf. Anthias 2022: 331f.). Unlike national identity, the concept of belonging merges both the ethnic and civic notion of a common bond (cf. ibid.: 6). While descent and origin are »the most racialized and the least permeable« markers of belonging, culture, language, and to some degree religion are more open to voluntary and changing identification with a certain collective; this counts even more for values, such as human rights and democracy (Yuval-Davis 2006: 209). Commonality is thereby felt individually, while at the same time it is collectively negotiated as well as performed (cf. Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011: 3). Nevertheless, this concept does not hide the fact that forging commonality between migrants who do not (yet) share a certain national framework of cultural practices, values, norms, etc. and the autochthones is a difficult issue (cf. ibid.: 6). *Attachments* link people materially and immaterially to a certain community: for example, through spaces and sites (e. g. homeland), possessing or granting citizenship, and civil and political rights (cf. ibid.: 7), which at the same time evoke a sense of entitlement (ibid.: 2). Pfaff-Czarnecka (2011: 7) stresses that »it is difficult to forge attachments, but they can be created«. Thus, (creating) attachments play(s) an important role in creating (national) commonality between autochthons and allochthons (migrants).

Mutuality evokes and expects the »reciprocity, loyalty, and commitment« of community members (ibid.: 5). In the context of *national belonging*, this means, for example, enjoying civil rights, while at the same time having to fulfill civic duties, like paying taxes (cf. ibid.: 5). Hence, belonging has a price which people have to pay for due to mutuality—the price, however, varies when comparing community members and those without an official belonging status (yet). For example, citizens and migrants both have to pay taxes in all states, but migrants mostly have fewer civil rights and less or no space at all in which to perform other commonalities and attachments, e. g. a different religious affiliation.

According to Nira Yuval-Davis (2006), we should differentiate between three major analytical levels when considering the construction of belonging: social locations, individual and collective identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values. When discussing the affiliations of individuals, among others nationality, gender, race, class, we talk about *social locations* individuals occupy in society. Social locations are shaped by societal power relations so that they come with a specific positionality along a power axis (see also intersectionality approach) (cf. ibid.: 202). In addition, we need to take *individual and collective identifications and emotional attachments* into account which are *narrative* in form: »Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)« (ibid.).[5] Narratives can be both individual and collective, and the latter are passed on from generation to generation (cf. ibid.). Narratives demonstrate the dual process of »belonging and longing to belong« (ibid.). Furthermore, belonging is seen as *performative*: Social and cultural practices are considered to be essential for the construction and reproduction of narratives of belonging as well as of attachment (cf. ibid.: 203). However, not all belonging(s) is (are) important to people in the same way or extent, and they change under different circumstances (cf. ibid.: 202): Yuval-Davis also stresses that belonging has to be understood as dynamic and often as multiple

5 Interestingly, Yuval-Davis uses identity instead of belonging here. Identity is thereby understood in both: as one's individual and collective sense of being (cf. Yuval-Davis 2006: 202).

and contested (cf. ibid.). Lastly, the construction of individual and collective identification and emotional attachments is judged from the specific dominant *ethical and political values* of a group (cf. ibid.: 204).

Like national identity, belonging is based on *inclusion* and *exclusion* as two sides of the same coin. Both concepts underline the dual process of feeling a bond with others: stressing unique commonalities between community members, expressing belongingness through attachments and expecting mutuality within a community on the one hand and demarcation to others on the other. Hence, *inclusion* and *exclusion* lead to the development of national belonging (cf. ibid.: 204). Thus, the idea of inclusion needs to be questioned: what are the unifying criteria behind inclusion and who is participating in deciding on and defining these criteria (cf. Anthias 2022: 334)?

In this context, the sub-concept of the *politics of belonging* stresses that belonging is subject to negation between an individual and society, leading to regular dispute and conflict (cf. Harders and Schnicke 2022: 12). This includes political projects aimed at creating belonging between individuals, separating between ›us‹ and ›others‹ (cf. Schnicke 2022: 233), pointing to the last subject of this chapter, Social Constructivism. Although belonging involves boundary-making, it also potentially involves boundary-breaking when moving beyond the essentialist understanding of ethnicity as the unifying bond within a community (cf. Anthias 2022: 334). The German discourse on whether Islam belongs to Germany illustrates this: Since the German President Christian Wulff publicly confirmed Islam belonged to Germany in a speech in 2010, this question has been highly debated in German society. In addition, the belonging approach also highlights unbelonging and non-belonging (cf. Harders and Schnicke 2022: 16). The sub-concept of *unbelonging* illustrates when people are officially deprived of (parts of) their formal belonging status (e. g. of their citizenship or entitlement to rights) (cf. Anthias 2022: 319, 321), while *non-belonging* points to instances when individuals feel less belonging or none at all despite having the formal status of belonging (e. g. citizenship) (cf. Healy 2020). The sub-concept of non-belonging thereby emphasizes the individual agency with belonging as opposed to unbelonging. Racism plays an essential role in belonging, unbelonging and non-belonging. Politics of belonging are best visible in the societal discussion on who is entitled

to get citizenship (so-called naturalization of migrants or refugees). An example of unbelonging is the societal discussion on whether the state should deprive individuals with a migrant biography of certain rights as punishment for their criminal acts, while not discussing this issue in relation to cases of criminal autochthones. Non-belonging is expressed, for example, in the debate on how citizens with a migrant biography can feel belonging to their country while experiencing racism daily.

National Identity versus National Belonging

Both concepts share similarities and, therefore, are widely used interchangeable. Although, it »is not possible to make a definitional distinction between [both concepts] […] in a way which resolves any questions about their analytical or political use« (Anthias 2022: 329), the concept of belonging offers a more open view of social bonding than the concept of collective identity. First of all, the belonging approach carries less theoretical baggage and is therefore a more open concept (cf. Harders and Schnicke 2022: 17, Anthias 2022: 329), which is in line with the methodological background of Grounded Theory Methodology chosen for this work (see chapter 4.2): Unlike the concept of national identity, belonging stresses the diversity, variability, and situatedness of social bonding (cf. Harders and Schnicke 2022: 17, Anthias 2022: 329). For example, humans are considered to share more than one sense of belonging in their life (e. g. national and religious affiliations concurrently) or to change their belonging(s) throughout life, which is often the case for migrants (cf. Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011: 2, 10). Furthermore, the concept of belonging allows for a praxeological perspective on what makes people feel attached to others by linking the analysis of the micro (e. g. practices), meso (e. g. institutions) as well as macro levels (e. g. discourses, narratives). In addition, belonging is less a definitional, but a heuristic concept (cf. Anthias 2022: 329). Nevertheless, Anthias (2022: 330) stresses that the belonging concept is not »necessarily free of the essentializing and totalizing assumptions found in the notion of identity« either.

However, the definition of social phenomena such as nation, ethnicity, national identity as well as belonging and in particular their analysis remains difficult. These analytical concepts are criticized in science for

not always being precise and discrete but ill-defined due to their fashionability (cf. Anderson 2005: 13, Brubaker 2009: 27, Verdugo and Milne 2016: 1f, Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011: 4, Harders and Schnicke 2022: 12). Therefore, I use the concepts presented primarily as heuristic categories which are intended to stimulate the analysis because the aim of working with Grounded Theory is not to embed the analysis in theoretical concepts but in the data itself (see chapter 4.2). Although I follow the theoretical shift ›from identity to belonging in social research‹ (cf. Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011), I do not rule out the term ›identity‹ from my research as it remains an important everyday term for individuals outside scientists' debates (cf. Anthias 2022: 329). Concurrently, I use the term ›identity‹ whenever I refer to the work of other scholars who use this term.

The social construction of national belonging

As a last point, I briefly introduce the sociological paradigm of *Social Constructivism,* which is rooted in the work of Peter L. Berger Thomas Luckmann. In contrast to the essentialist paradigm, which perceives social phenomena as inherently natural and objectively given, this theoretical paradigm emphasizes the collaborative construction of the surrounding world by human beings, particularly through the use of language. Therefore, it focuses on how humans collectively create elements of social order, and how this is institutionalized and passed on to subsequent generations. Consequently, it stresses the variability of social order.

In this light, nation, nationality, ethnicity, and thus national identity and belonging are not regarded as natural–cultural artefacts (cf. Anderson 2005b: 48), but as invented and continuously reproduced, maintained and altered by humans themselves (cf. Brubaker 2009: 34). To illustrate that, we can think exemplarily about the census as European colonizers invented a categorization system for the indigenous population of their new colonies, which is partly still alive in contemporary nations' names (cf. Anderson 2005b: 164–171).

The social-constructivist perspective on national belonging is well illustrated by Benedict Anderson's conception of the nation as an ›*imagined community*‹ as he highlights that people develop a sense of belonging, which creates a deep feeling of comradeship and fraternity even in

the absence of personal acquaintanceship (cf. Anderson 2005a: 15ff).[6] Language as well as cultural symbols are means with which to establish and maintain the imagined bonds between individuals (cf. ibid.: 8). Anderson explains the emergence of nation(state)s, for example in Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries, as a consequence of growing popular nationalist movements among the population, which the sovereigns of that time sought to handle by implementing a form of so-called ›official nationalism‹ in their realms (cf. ibid.: 88–93, 113f, 140, 159).[7] The Russification assimilation politics in the Russian Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union are considered examples of official nationalism (cf. ibid.).[8]

If we take history into account, the emergence of nations is closely linked to war in many cases, in particular to separatism, and is thus grounded in the collectively shared experience of suffering and sacrifices (cf. Langewiesche 2018: 342ff). When belonging is contested or even threatened, it becomes even more central to people so that in extreme cases »people are willing to sacrifice their—and the lives of others« (Yuval-Davis 2006: 202) for their community, especially their nation.

By focusing on how nations are socially constructed, social constructivists do not argue that nations are constructed arbitrarily so that, for example, ethnic and cultural elements are invented completely from scratch. On the contrary, nation-building is based on a stock of cultural traditions

6 Anderson defines the nation as being an *imagined*, *limited,* and *sovereign political community* of people. Besides the aspect of them being *imagined political communities*, nations are (imagined as) *limited* with the result that humankind is divided into a variety of nations and are also (imagined as) *sovereign*, referring to the roots of this idea in a time of enlightenment and revolution (cf. Anderson 2005a: 16f).

7 ›Official nationalism‹ is only one of Anderson's models of how the idea of the nation arose and was constituted in the form of nation-states, besides the ›Creole‹, ›linguistic‹, and ›colonial‹ models of nationalism (cf. Anderson 2005a).

8 The term Russification refers to imperial Russian as well as Soviet assimilation politics which aimed to russify the non-ethnic Russian population. This included the promotion of Russian as the statewide language, particularly in education, administration, and public life, as well as of Russian customs and traditions, whereas the language and culture of other (ethnic) groups were suppressed. Considering Ukraine's past history under Russian and Soviet rule, this exemplarily demonstrates the social-constructivist perspective on nations. This aspect will be further elaborated on in the second chapter.

and customs and historical memory which accumulated over the previous years. Nonetheless, it is argued that nations and national identities as well as their components (e. g. culture) are not objectively given facts, but that they evolve out of a long-lasting, continuous process. At the same time, this process is characterized by the participation of human beings as constructors of their own reality. The constructivist perspective also unfolds, for example, when considering the variety behind the foundation of nations and national identities (cf. Kappeler 2011b: 4f).