A Matter of Identity?
State legitimacy between space control and adhocratic governance

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Introduction

In the past few decades, the spread of identity politicisation has revitalised the debate over the nature and transformations of the State and its role in the international arena. This shift has also underscored the importance of identity assumed in international relations (IR) as it offers an alternative to the traditional realist-rationalist vocabulary (Dunne 1995; Wendt 1992; Bloom 1990). Scholars have explored the major role played by political identity in shaping states' priorities and security-seeking behaviours in response to internal and external threats, as well as crises of political legitimacy (Hintz 2018; Campbell 1998). This perspective considers identity as a causal factor that could explain states' actions concerning centralisation and decentralisation processes, branding, image and reputation management, transnational social movements, and responses to global crises (Bucher and Jasper 2017; Urrestarazu 2015; Peterson 1993). Contrary to what they describe as a "substantialist" approach to identity, Bucher and Jasper, among others, advocate for a shift from identity to identification processes. They argue that viewing identity as an essential object that explains actions fails to capture the constitutive relationship between actors' identities and the social contexts in which they emerge (Bucher and Jasper 2017:392-396). Consequently, the notion of individual or state identity as a foundation for actions is replaced by a process involving multiple acts of identification that occur in specific contexts and periods. In this framework, "political processes are continually characterised by competing bundles of identifications, which temporarily and incompletely acquire a privileged status in (foreign policy) decision-making" (Bucher and Jasper 2017:394). This perspective aligns closely with the literature on sectarianism, particularly the strand that examines the politicisation of sectarian identities as an instrument for executing specific state strategies at both domestic and international levels (Haddad 2020; Hinnebusch 2016). Acts of identification are empirically accessible, spatial and temporal relational processes that intertwine actors with society, past and future. How do identities, both as "identities in practice" and as given and abstract objects, influence states' domestic and foreign governance?

To answer this overarching question, this Special Issue draws on two interrelated notions of identity: as bundles of actions of identification that acquire temporarily

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privileged status in specific discourses and as a causal variable in IR that explains why states act in certain ways (Bucher and Jasper 2017:393). This dual analytical lens allows us to examine (1) the centrality of space and time in debates on how identity has contributed to redefining the role of the State domestically and its relationships in the international arena and (2) the extent and ways in which ad hoc measures at the micro-scale of identification processes influence the macro-level identity–legitimacy nexus. This framework aligns identity studies with the concept of "adhocracy", defined in bureaucracy and policy studies as either an intentional institutional setup or an unintentional outcome of policy implementation (Natter 2018; Miller 1986). The term "ad-hocratic governance", coined by Natter (2018) to analyse immigration policies, frames the growing reliance on flexibility, pragmatism and informality that characterises both the process of identification and states' identity-based policies. Ad-hocratic governance reflects measures taken at various levels when identity becomes temporarily dominant (or marginal) in political decision-making processes.

This collection combines macro, meso and micro levels of analysis with rigorous qualitative research, including ethnographic observations and in-depth interviews and conversations with experts. The resulting empirical data allows us to focus on how the interaction between local and global processes affects the role identity plays in the dynamic between space, society and mobility (Blanc, Szanton Basch and Glick Schiller 1992).

By focusing on these ongoing processes, the Special Issue contributes to academic debates on diasporas and transnationalism, emphasising how identity and identification processes shape how diasporas are built and governed (Gamlen 2014; Ragazzi 2009). It engages with literature that views identity as a reflection of political and social fractures beyond states' territorial borders (Adamson 2012; Bauböck 2010). In this discussion, we also examine how state, non-state and sub-state actors create and foster legal, socio-cultural, economic, and political connections with selected communities, abroad institutions aimed at building and strengthening links with the diaspora. In this vein, the Special Issue also addresses the literature on the politicization of sectarian identities – in particular, the instrumentalist strand (Valbjørn 2020; Haddad 2017). Furthermore, this collection intersects with scholarship that views foreign policy as an arena for identity contestation (Hintz 2018) and explores whether pressures on states' identities are primarily endogenous or exogenous (Zarakol 2010).

Spatializing State legitimacy and identification processes

As mentioned above, a recent discussion on the correlation between State and identity involves the concept of space, which has been long overlooked in this debate, especially in IR, with some exceptions related to foreign policy and security issues (Hintz 2018; Liste 2016). It has been reconsidered as crucial after its integration with political geography and history (Meier 2018; Del Sarto 2017; Albert et al. 2001; van Houtum and van Naerssen 2002), a hybridization that has led to major transformations not only in how space affects politics and, more broadly, the study of power but also in how space and its relationship with the State have been conceptualised.

The framing and imagining of the State space (and its borders) have strongly challenged the traditional conception of the State itself. In the past 20 years, literature questioning the State's prerogatives of territorial control and sovereignty has been influenced by multiple factors: On the one hand, the emergence of non-state and sub-state actors has led scholars to focus on a plethora of actors that operate like the state, although they are not the state (Charountaki and Irrera 2022; Josseline and Wallace 2001; Arts, Noortmann and Reinalda 2001). On the other hand, state sovereignty has been challenged by transformations at borders, especially in certain areas of the world. This has led scholars to investigate not just borders as lines but also the borderlands – the networks of actors and activities that develop in these areas (Parker & Vaughan-Williams 2012; Schofield 2018). Following the rise of conflictual dynamics and neo-liberalization processes, which often involved the withdrawal of the State from its primary functions (Mastropaolo 2023; Bogaert 2013), in some contexts like the Middle East and Africa, the erosion of state sovereignty and the creation of what Risse (2012) calls "limited sovereignty zones" have been palpable. These areas become significant not only geographically but also because of the crucial social and political phenomena that develop within them over time.

The interesting aspect of this reflection concerns not the "spaces" *per se* but rather the relationships that the State maintains with the actors who live and occupy these spaces. If the State's obsession with sovereignty and the securitization of its territory is realised through the management of its own borders, then the existence of spaces that escape such sovereignty and control challenges the very idea of sovereignty and the State in its Weberian conception (Parker and Adler-Nissen 2012; Vaughan-Williams 2009).

From this point of view, spaces with limited State sovereignty have been variously defined as "interstitial spaces", "buffer zones", "no man's land", and "in-between areas" (for a review, see Meier 2020). These are crucial when considering the evolution of the debate on the transformation of the State in IR and, more broadly, in the international order. The creation of zones that escape state control and can host refugees, diasporic groups or minorities informs the so-called processes of "territorialisation" that occur at local and national levels (Antonsich 2017). Such zones, however, are not only physical territories but can also be imaginary spaces/places where non-state and sub-state actors, groups or communities organise themselves. Thus, it is relevant to assess how identification processes occur in these areas and, consequently, how identity in limited sovereignty zones affects states' foreign policy and international relations.

Rather than waging a struggle to reclaim territories and entering into conflict with (armed or not armed) non-state actors or groups in areas outside its control, the State has instrumentally used these situations by either manipulating them or exploiting their presence for security reasons to advance its strategic goals. Asymmetrical power dynamics that transcend borders shed new light on the very idea of the State and the role it plays in the international context (e.g. states with limited sovereignty, weak states, failed states). Moreover, they highlight the actors, their identities, their identification process and the relationships and networks they develop to trans-

form those spaces (Di Peri and Meier 2023; Brambilla 2015; Malksoo 2012). Usually considered marginal areas, these spaces are places where new ideas, practices and social and political experiments can emerge, stimulating a reconfiguration of the classical conception of the State, as well as of the groups' identities.

Thus, the territorialisation process is crucial to understanding transnational and/or diasporic practices and processes at varying levels of proximity from the State. Transnational movements help to shape the socio-political structures in which individuals belong to communities or are excluded from them. However, it is particularly in those marginal zones where state sovereignty is not fully exerted that identities form ways of belonging that transcend the state's territorial limits: Identities sometimes serve as the basis for the development of "strategic foreign policy narratives" that influence states' cultural diplomacy and other initiatives (Hudson 2014).

These identification processes are not solely linked to a territory: Functional, social and temporal aspects also play a crucial role. Spaces with limited sovereignty can be viewed as transnational spaces autonomously managed by groups and actors who initiate various identity processes. How communities also organise themselves by creating new narratives and discourses that transcend national ones is one of the most intriguing aspects. For instance, a branch of studies has examined the transformations of Islam and Muslim communities in diasporic contexts and how the discourses of these communities often ignore or overstep the national ones (Shams 2021; Albrecht 2016). Similarly, some scholars have analysed how forms of activism, including art, can create spaces of contestation and claims that challenge established political practices or particularly repressive regimes (Shaltout 2021; Borrillo 2020).

Timing identity processes and adhocratic decision making

In defining the relationships between identity and state behaviour, time also plays a crucial role (Drezner 2020; Berenskoetter 2011). In IR literature, time has been largely addressed in relation to the concept of ontological security, that is how states perform actions to underwrite their notions of 'who they are' (Bachleitner 2021; Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi 2020; Zarakol 2010:3). While temporal ontological security has been examined as a key feature determining states' identity (Bachleitner 2021), scholars' attention has been primarily devoted to how time affects identification processes and identity mobilisation and whether and how identity-based discourses and policies are framed in continuity (or discontinuity) with the past (Hintz 2018). States' identities, in terms of relationships with external others and inward-looking perspectives, have thus been depicted on a temporal line dotted with domestic watershed moments, collective memories and global historical junctions. Building on this perspective, critical approaches of the "temporal turn" in IR and foreign policy analysis have challenged a purely linear time and advocated for alternative and pluralistic concepts of time to include marginalised, oppressed and forgotten times of global politics (Solomon 2014).

Scholars have pointed out how timing, more than time itself, relies on activities and relations that inform about positionality. Based on practical, processual and political relations, timing allows us to go beyond the study of identity as actions of identifications performed by state actors and to critically expand how "people of a particular reference group undertake timing efforts that reflect their distinctive relationship to the wider world" (Hom 2018:73).

Time and temporality emerge as important features to examine those foundational events or socio-cultural elements that lie at the core of "nation brand" as a process (Anholt 2011). States' interest in enhancing, reversing, adapting or managing their international reputation in the international arena is expressed through references to a "glorious" past, atavistic pure traditions and noble intentions. In this respect, the notion of a "humanitarian state" exemplifies the intent to create a positive reputation for buffer states designed to contain migrants and asylum seekers (Keyman 2016). States' self-identifications such as "liberators of people oppressed by Western imperialism" and "protectors of Muslim communities in the West" are based on evolving narratives of belonging that extend beyond the diasporas to include communities with whom significant socio-linguistic and/or religious ties persist (Müller-Funk 2020; Anholt 2007; Laffey 2000). The former Ottoman Empire space is a prime example of how temporality affects state identity construction in terms of "othering" or "empathising" with neighbouring countries. However, not only is the past narrated by using identification frames defined by the dominant ideology but identification processes also both adapt to and are shaped by states' changing, punctuated and often conflicting interests, which manifest in a non-systemic and rather adhocratic form of governing.

What emerges are adhocratic forms of governing that are intentionally ambiguous, pragmatic and flexible in ways that could secure state power (Natter 2018). Over the past three decades, an extensive literature has examined the proliferation of ad hoc institutions, agencies, policies, cultural diplomacy and bureaucratic apparatuses through which nation-states maintain political, economic and identity ties with their respective communities abroad and control (or attempt to control) the marginalised zones and/or groups that inhabit them (Gamlen 2014; Varadarajan 2010). Such an increase in diaspora policies and institutions, as well as initiatives directed towards related communities, highlights the everyday practices of states' extraterritorial governance and sheds light on the multiple actors resorting to "creative forms" and "symbolic instruments" to shape legitimate coercive belongings (Fitzgerald 2008:34). As discussed in the previous paragraph, forms and techniques of governing aimed at maintaining links with diasporas and kin communities vary not only over time but also in terms of space. This is evident in liminal territories, located in border areas or de facto enclave zones inhabited by minority groups whose identity claims for autonomy are temporarily and instrumentally employed by nation-states eager to promote their foreign policy and security interests.

Therefore, it is important to investigate the transnational mobilisation activities conducted by political entrepreneurs engaged in strategic social identity construc-

tion (Adamson 2012:25). This includes a plethora of non-state actors, such as transnational religious movements and diaspora-originated organisations, which occupy that grey zone between diaspora and foreign policy.

Structure of the Special Issue

The contributions in this Special Issue draw on empirical and theoretically informed interdisciplinary research focusing on Europe and its Mediterranean neighbourhood. The varied disciplinary approaches, ranging from political science to international relations, history, geography and political sociology, enable us to explore the multiple layers that shape identity both as a strategic instrument of state governance in society and as the result of acts of identification in relation to something or someone else.

Centred around the concept of adhocratic governance and its impact on states' strategic processes and the identification activities of non-state actors, minorities or diasporic groups, the four contributions in this Special Issue illustrate the diverse ways in which adhocracy functions and operates, as well as the various levels and layers of analysis it encompasses. The papers offer a wide range of methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks and case studies that collectively propose a new and original use of the analytical lens of adhocracy.

Daniel Meier's paper on a regime of fears in Lebanon analyses the narratives of fear produced by both the Lebanese State and the non-state actor Hezbollah concerning the borderland areas, as well as the relationships and activities that different actors develop in these marginal zones. Meier argues that the propagation of different narratives about conflicts, threats and national issues by various actors influences identification processes both within and outside the State.

As Meier points out, this has fuelled a process of mutual influence among national actors and those operating in the borderland areas, significantly affecting the identification processes of the borderland communities. He intriguingly illustrates how the perception of these regimes of fear has affected the identification process in both space and time: the process of identity building in Lebanon has often been reduced to a primordial reading of the sectarian identities, which has tended to "essentialise" the analysis of the Lebanese social and political fabric. The fact that institutions may use a politics of fear as a framework to provide security serves as a clear example of adhocratic governance, which, in this specific case, proves to be a useful tool not only for the State but also for a non-state actor. Adopting this perspective, Meier's paper offers an innovative view of Lebanon's borderland areas and the activities that the actors promote there. At the same time, the paper challenges the traditional idea of conflicting relations between state and non-state groups, showing how the weakness of the Lebanese State and the difficulties in exerting full sovereignty and control over its territory lead to a situation where actors cooperate rather than conflict to ensure security despite promoting different "regimes of fear".

Based on extensive fieldwork on three Lebanese borderlands (North, East and South), the paper shows how social, symbolic, institutional and ritual processes are

powerful mechanisms through which fear is shaped in time and space by a ruling power. This approach aligns with the Special Issue's theoretical framework and the concept of adhocratic governance that strategically uses narratives, mythical facts and perceptions to involve, control and govern collectivities. In this context, the production of regimes of fear emerges as a very useful and original tool to promote an adhocratic form of governance.

Daniela Huber's paper offers a contrapuntal analysis of the EU identity, Europeanness, using the EU–Aegean borderland as a case study. The author argues that the transformation of the EU into a "geopolitical EU" represents a rupture that seems irreconcilable with the identity previously promoted by the EU. In particular, the idea of the EU as a civilian power, a universal model spreading multilateralism and a liberal, rules-based order in international politics, seems to be waning, especially when examining the EU's approach to the migration crisis. Adhocratic strategies adopted by the EU in this domain have played a crucial role in (re)defining narratives and perceptions of the EU and its identity. Daniela Huber convincingly explains how the process of identity formation currently unfolds in the EU and which "bundles of identifications" are becoming temporarily stabilised in a contested political discourse and enacted vis-à-vis others.

This argument is elucidated by examining two different strands of the literature: namely, those on identity and identification and those emerging from post-colonial studies, particularly from Edward Said's elaborations. This interrelation is particularly fruitful in providing a vantage point to examine both how the identification process is carried out in and outside the EU and how subaltern voices at the margins of the EU perceive and narrate this process. At the same time, Huber proposes an innovative approach from a methodological perspective, illuminating the EU identity formation process from below and giving voice and agency to marginalised groups and minorities. This approach is original and presents a very different view of EU identity: marginalised groups, such as refugees, experience the EU more as a deterrent, less as a beacon of humanitarian compassion and scarcely as a proponent of liberal, rules-based governance. This, of course, has had an impact on EU identity formation and perception, providing new and alternative articulations. Ultimately, this serves as a way to counter EU adhocratic strategies on migration, giving agency and voice, across time and space, to the borderland regions.

Davide Grasso's paper explores the effects on identity of the military invasions and the demographic engineering perpetrated by the Republic of Turkey in the Syrian Arab Republic from 2016 to 2023. How and to what extent civil wars impact on identity construction? What identification factors are most relevant to understand the stances of insurrectional movements and civilians vis-à-vis occupation policies and demographic engineering processes?

Grounded on a fieldwork conducted in the region as well as on secondary and primary sources, Davide Grasso's analysis sheds light over an understudied issue, both theoretically and geographically, framing the study in space and time. This clearly speaks to the Special Issue theoretical framework not only because it high-

lights how spaces (especially borders) re-define identification processes, but also to what extent time plays a crucial role in this trajectory. More broadly the paper assesses, on the basis of the gathered empirical evidence, what identification bundles are central to define axes of political contrast between sub-state proxies and non-state movements.

While the "ethnic" identification layer refers to commonalities and sense of belonging in terms of language, customs and religious beliefs, the "political" one displays an adhocratic governance of identities through which programs and narratives capable of attributing meanings to ancestral legacies, are used to demarcate the boundaries between the "self" and the "other. In this vein, the case study innovates the knowledge of a conflict that, too simplistically, has been defined as ethnic. On the contrary, Davide Grasso's paper shows how identification processes are grounded in adhocratic practices that transcend the ethnic ethos.

Finally, Rosita Di Peri and Chiara Maritato's paper offers an example of transnational adhocratic practices by focusing on a specific region and group in Lebanon. The authors explore adhocratic governance through the case study of the Turkmen community in Lebanon with a dual objective: on the one hand, to analyse how Turkey's and Lebanon's governance of Turkmen communities has evolved over the past decades, and on the other hand, to explore what this reveals about how Turkmens' transnational identities operate in practice. The paper contends that over the past few decades, Turkey have implemented ad hoc strategies towards Turkmen communities and that these practices have influenced Turkmen communities' transnational identification practices. While Lebanon has disengaged from the management of a population living in marginal yet strategically relevant areas, Turkey has framed its foreign policy in terms of cultural-religious kinship and pragmatism. Both political processes are continually characterised by competing bundles of identifications, which temporarily and incompletely acquire a privileged status in (foreign policy) decision-making. Analysing a marginal and apparently insignificant group (especially from a demographic point of view), such as the Turkmens of Lebanon, sheds new light not only on Lebanon's liminal, deprived and undeveloped areas but also, paradoxically, on how this marginality becomes central when viewed in the transnational dimension of adhocratic governance. The paper speaks to the literature on adhocracy and the transnational governance of diasporic groups and minorities, thus contributing to a better understanding of the processes of transnational identification, as well as the role that "identity in practice" can and could play in IR debates. At the same time, it innovates the literature on adhocratic governance, which has rarely been applied to transnational identities. Finally, the extensive fieldwork conducted by the authors in both Lebanon and Turkey represents a strong contribution and adds value to an overlooked topic.

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