

# Constructivism and identity: a dangerous liaison

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**Preferred abbreviated running head:** Constructivism and identity

## **Abstract**

Constructivism is regarded as increasingly important in International Relations. More often than not the approach is related to the issue of identity. Constructivism and identity are, however, in a dangerous liaison. This article argues that Alexander Wendt's constructivism needs identity as a central concept but that this very concept threatens to undermine the possibility of his constructivism. It is further suggested that this problem has some relevance to other constructivist approaches positioned in the middle ground between rationalist and reflectivist theorising. The argument is illustrated with a consideration of the debates around the redefinition of the role of the Federal Republic of Germany to include the possibility of German military involvement abroad.

**Key words:** constructivism, Germany, identity, military, subjectivity, via media

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* has been predicted to gain a status similar to that which Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* is thought to have enjoyed in the 1980s.<sup>2</sup> This is even before it has had a chance to make an impact on the discipline. If any further proof were needed for the continuing rise to fame of constructivism in International Relations, this would be it. Constructivism has been explained, applied, positioned. It has been celebrated by some and dismissed by others. Whatever one's view on the matter, constructivism has become increasingly difficult to avoid. Meanwhile, it is important to ask what we might need constructivism for. Given the intellectual diversity of work which has been labelled constructivist, it seems impossible to address this question adequately. Nevertheless it appears that more often than not constructivism is related to an exploration or at least appreciation of the issue of identity in international politics.<sup>3</sup> The significance of identity for constructivist arguments may be more problematic than it seems at first. For constructivism and identity are in a dangerous liaison. In this article, I argue that Wendt's constructivism needs identity as a central concept but that this very concept threatens to undermine the possibility of his constructivism. Although I do not explore this in as much detail, I suggest that the problematic of this dangerous liaison also has some relevance to other approaches which subscribe to the project of 'seizing the middle ground' (Adler, 1997).

In this article, I neither aim to propose an alternative approach to the study of identity nor do I seek to comprehensively review all aspects of Wendt's work. Rather I single out Wendt's conceptualisation of identity in order to demonstrate how Wendt's argument comes apart because of its own assumptions. On the one hand, the possibility of constructing different anarchies is fundamental to Wendt's approach as it is this which constitutes the departure from rationalist or 'mainstream' theory. Anarchy, as he put it in an early piece, is 'what states make of it'. This claim rests on the constructedness of identity as the character of anarchy depends on how identities and hence interests are defined. On the other hand,

Wendt proposes a 'scientific' theory of the international system. This makes it necessary, in Wendt's view, to take states as given. I will argue that within this approach identity is, and indeed due to its logic must be, conceptualised as circumscribable state identity. In other words, Wendt needs identity to be constructed but at the same time in some ways given. The necessary givenness can only be upheld by excluding dimensions of constructedness from view.

I relate this problematic to the redefinition of the role of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in international politics after the end of the Cold War to include the possibility of military involvement abroad. The upshot of this move is not to suggest better ways of analysing the case at hand or to show that Wendt's approach would work if only he had taken into account the aspects of the identity problematic explored here but to show why, in my view, Wendt's approach cannot work. As my argument involves engaging with both Wendt's claims and the redefinition of the FRG's role in international politics after the end of the Cold War in considerable detail, it may be useful to outline the key moves before embarking on the detailed analysis.

I start by showing the significance of identity to Wendt's approach. The conception of identity is crucial to both the constructivist move and the systemic character of Wendt's argument, even if it is not its declared focus. I neither doubt nor ignore Wendt's focus on the international system. The point, however, is to demonstrate that the structural move relies on identity, more specifically on a particular treatment of identity. In a second step, this problematic is related to a Wendtian reading of the redefinition of the role of the FRG in international politics after the end of the Cold War.<sup>4</sup> This analysis focuses on state interaction in which identities are defined and sustained or changed. Whilst the approach clearly addresses the problematic of the situation at hand, the illustration points up limitations. Hence, having demonstrated the centrality of identity, I move on to consider the problems of Wendt's conceptualisation of identity. Debates in Germany about military involvement abroad are explored to show that identities are more complex than a Wendtian account is able to acknowledge. This recontextualisation of the issue of identity is important to illustrate what

Wendt's approach excludes. It highlights the consequences of buying into Wendt's impossible theory, the price we pay, in other words, for his constructivism.

In the fourth section I elaborate the dilemma of identity in Wendt's constructivism. The unity of identity, which he needs for his approach, is imposed through exclusions. Wendt's exclusions are not innocent methodological choices. That which he excludes threatens the very possibility of his argument. If the self cannot be defined apart from context, if identities are inherently contradictory, if identities depend on concrete articulations for their existence, as is argued here, then Wendt's 'via media' might not be possible. If Wendt's 'via media' is in danger of coming apart because one of its key concepts is as necessary as it is impossible, then we may have worries about others attempting similar moves.

Of course, Wendt's constructivism is 'thin' (Wendt, 1999: 2) and 'thicker' constructivists may wish to disassociate themselves from his formulation. I certainly do not claim that all constructivist work is just like Wendt's.<sup>5</sup> However, the problematic of identity in Wendt's work can be seen as illustrating a fundamental tension within the kind of constructivism which aims to capture the middle ground. Thus, I conclude by suggesting that the tension in Wendt's work does not bode well for the move whereby constructivists situate themselves *between* rationalists and 'more radical interpretivists' (Adler, 1997).

## **The significance of identity**

### *The identity move*

Wendt set out some time ago to show that (Neo-)Realists are wrong: it is not an unchanging fact that the international realm is a self-help system. Rather, the international environment is created and recreated in processes of interaction. The key move in this argument, or so I claim, is that actors' identities are not given but are developed and sustained or transformed

in interaction (Wendt, 1996: 48; Wendt, 1992a; see also Wendt, 1999 and Hopf, 2000: 370). Briefly, a 'world in which identities and interests are learned and sustained by intersubjectively grounded practice, by what states think and do, is one in which "anarchy is what states make of it"' (Wendt, 1992b: 183). Wendt has much refined his argument since he published his influential 1992 article (see Wendt, 1999). Yet the claim that the way international relations are played out is not given but socially constructed remains central (Wendt, 1999: 70).

According to Wendt, it is the intersubjective, rather than material aspect of structures which influences behaviour. Intersubjective structures are constituted by collective meanings. Actors acquire identities, which Wendt defines as 'relatively stable, role-specific understandings and expectations about self' (Wendt, 1992a: 397; see also Wendt, 1999: 21), by participating in collective meanings. Identity is 'a property of international actors that generates motivational and behavioral dispositions' (Wendt, 1999: 224). Thus identities are significant because they provide the basis for interests. Interests, in turn, develop in the process of defining situations (Wendt, 1992a: 398; Wendt, 1999: 231 and 329f).<sup>6</sup> Identities are the basis for interests and therefore more fundamental (see Wendt, 1999: 231).

Wendt discusses how different kinds of anarchy are constructed in interaction between states (see esp. Wendt 1999: Ch. 6). What kind of anarchy prevails depends, according to this argument, on what kinds of conceptions of security actors have, on how they construe their identity in relation to others. Notions of security 'differ in the extent to which and the manner in which the self is identified cognitively with the other, and [...] it is upon this cognitive variation that the meaning of anarchy and the distribution of power depends' (Wendt, 1992a: 399f). Accordingly, positive identification with other states will lead to perceiving security threats not as a private matter for each state but as a responsibility of all. If the collective self is well developed security practices will be to some degree altruistic or prosocial (Wendt, 1992a: 400f). Wendt therefore discusses whether and under which conditions identities are more collective or more egoistic (Wendt, 1996; Wendt, 1999: esp. 336-369). Depending on where states fall on the continuum from positive to negative

identification with other states, they will be more or less willing to engage in collective security practices. Crucially, conceptions of self and other, and consequently security interests, develop only in interaction (Wendt 1992a: 401; see also Wendt, 1999: 36). Therefore identity is the key to the development of different security environments or cultures of anarchy.

This relationship between conception of self and other and the prevailing security environment puts identities at the core of the approach. The 'culture of anarchy' depends on how identity gets defined (Wendt, 1999: Ch. 6). *Social Theory of International Politics* may not be an investigation into identity formation (Wendt, 1999: 11; Wendt, 2000: 175) but the concept of identity is crucial to Wendt's argument. According to Wendt, the 'daily life of international politics is an on-going process of states taking identities in relation to Others, casting them into corresponding counter-identities, and playing out the result' (Wendt, 1999: 21). The international system would not be played out in different cultures of anarchy were it not for different conceptualisations of identity. Hence, identity matters not merely when we look at specific states. It is the key to Wendt's *systemic* argument.

What is important is that the concept of identity integrates several crucial moves. Identity relates to the intersubjective aspect of structures and, therefore, its significance establishes the move away from a materialist argument (see Wendt, 1999: 23f) and towards the claim that reality is constructed. The proposition that identities and not merely behaviour are shaped by structures or patterns of interaction is construed as setting the approach apart from rationalism (Wendt, 1995: 71f; see also Wendt, 1999: 27, 35 and 44). According to this argument, rationalists, such as game theorists, may admit that identities change but only prior to interaction, outside the realm of that which rationalists want to analyse (Wendt, 1999: 315f). Constructivists, on the other hand, are concerned to show that identities may change through interaction and that this matters. Moreover, the claim that definitions of identity, which are subject to change, influence security practices and ultimately the type of anarchy states find themselves in establishes that the self-help system, although ingrained at this time, is not a given, unchanging fact. Identity provides a category which may change but

which at the same time is 'relatively stable'. As Wendt puts it, 'identities may be hard to change, but they are not carved in stone' (Wendt, 1999: 21). Transforming definitions of self is more than altering behaviour and therefore a demanding process. It is important to explicate further how this complex issue is conceptualised.

*Identity change: showing that identity matters*

The key question is then how identities are constituted. After all, 'anarchy is what states make of it' because states' identities are made, not given. Wendt argues that conceptions of self and other come out of interaction between states. State agents, which always have an institutional legal order, the claim to a monopoly on the legitimate use of organised violence, sovereignty, a society and territory (Wendt, 1999: 202-214), exist prior to interaction.

Independent of social context, states have four 'national interests': to preserve and further their physical security, autonomy, economic well-being and collective self-esteem (Wendt, 1999: 235-237). Yet beyond this, reality develops through social interaction in which '[c]onceptions of self and interest tend to "mirror" the practices of significant others over time' (Wendt, 1992a: 404; also Wendt, 1999: 327 and 333f). In 'Anarchy is what states make of it' this process is illustrated in a story which is worth quoting at length:

Consider two actors - ego and alter - encountering each other for the first time. Each wants to survive and has certain material capabilities, but neither actor has biological or domestic imperatives for power, glory, or conquest [...], and there is no history of security or insecurity between the two. What should they do? [...]

In the beginning is ego's gesture, which may consist, for example, of an advance, a retreat, a brandishing of arms, a laying down of arms, or an attack. For ego, this gesture represents the basis on which it is prepared to respond to alter. This basis is unknown to alter, however, and so it must make an inference or 'attribution' about



ego's intentions and, in particular, given that this is anarchy, about whether ego is a threat. [...] Alter may make an attributional 'error' in its inference about ego's intent, but there is no reason for it to assume a priori - before the gesture - that ego is threatening, since it is only through a process of signaling and interpreting that the costs and probabilities of being wrong can be determined. Social threats are constructed, not natural (Wendt, 1992a: 404f; see also Wendt, 1999: 328-335).

Accordingly, whether a self-help situation ensues depends on social interaction. The story illustrates how social acts are conceptualised in Wendt's work. In *Social Theory* they are systematically broken down into four 'scenes'. Firstly, *ego*, based on his definition of the situation, engages in an act which signals to *alter* both which role *ego* is planning to take in the interaction and which corresponding role he envisages for *alter*. In the second scene, *alter* interprets the meaning of *ego*'s action in relation to his own perception of the situation. *Alter*, on the basis of his interpretation, which may have involved learning, now engages in an action of his own. This constitutes a signal to *ego* in the same way in which *ego*'s action had been one to *alter*. Finally, in the fourth scene, *ego* responds (Wendt, 1999: 330). Thus Wendt describes social acts as processes of signalling, interpreting and responding in which shared knowledge is created and social learning may occur (Wendt, 1999: 330f).<sup>7</sup>

Identities and interests are not only created in such interactions, they are also sustained that way (Wendt, 1999: 331). Through repeated interactive processes stable identities and expectations about each other are developed. Thereby actors create and maintain social structures (Wendt, 1992a: 405f), which subsequently constrain choices. Once structures of identity and interests have been created they are not easy to transform because the social system becomes an objective social fact to the actors. Actors may have a stake in maintaining stable identities (Wendt 1992a: 411), due to external factors such as the incentives induced by established institutions and internal constraints such as commitment to established identities (Wendt, 1999: 339f). In *Social Theory* Wendt speaks of the logic of the self-fulfilling prophecy which sustains the identities and interests created in interaction

(Wendt, 1999: 331; see also 184-189). Nevertheless, identity transformation is possible not only in first encounters, as the illustration may seem to suggest, but is, Wendt argues, also relevant when a shared culture already exists (Wendt, 1999: 328).<sup>8</sup>

If we use these conceptualisations to think about the issue of the FRG making military involvement abroad one of its practices after the end of the Cold War, we find that the FRG enters the stage as a unitary actor complete with intentions, beliefs and desires (Wendt, 1996: 59; Wendt, 1999: 197). The FRG enters the interaction as an individual. It knows that it is 'the FRG', a state actor (cf. Wendt, 1999: 225). Its existence as a state actor is independent of the international system and – before engaging in any interaction at all – it is equipped with the desire to survive. This is part of its 'corporate identity' which refers to the 'intrinsic qualities that constitute actor individuality' (Wendt, 1996: 50). In the case of state actors, this aspect of identity is based on domestic politics which Wendt considers 'ontologically prior to the states system' (Wendt, 1996: 50), 'exogenously given' (Wendt, 1999: 328). As they are part of corporate identity, state actors enter the interaction having some pre-existing ideas about who they are even beyond their awareness of their individuality and their ability to act. At the time of the Gulf War the FRG represented itself as a non-military actor in the international realm. In a government statement shortly before the end of the ultimatum against Iraq, Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor of the FRG, spoke of solidarity with the Americans, the British and the French who carried the main burden in defending law and liberty in this case and of the financial burden for the FRG (Deutscher Bundestag, 1991a: 22). This implies that participation in a military operation in the Gulf simply was not at issue for the FRG at this stage.<sup>9</sup> Such behaviour would have interfered with the conception of self. Being non-military was part of the FRG's articulated identity. Article 87a section 2 of the Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany (1995) was read to rule out the external use of military force for other than defensive purposes. Government statements and international treaties affirmed that 'only peace [would] emanate' from German soil (Genscher, 1990: 1201; Kohl, 1990:1227; 'Vertrag über die abschließende Regelung', 1993: Article 2). In the past, the FRG had not participated in any military

operations abroad and had explicitly rejected such a possibility at least in one case. In the 1980s, in the context of the Iran-Iraq war the Americans had repeatedly demanded that the Europeans participate in interventions outside the NATO area (Philippi, 1997: 60f; *DER SPIEGEL*, 30 November 1987: 19-21). At the time, the FRG refused to do more than deploy one destroyer, one frigate and one supply vessel to the Mediterranean where they took over positions the US Navy had to abandon because of redeployments to the Gulf region (*DER SPIEGEL*, 20 July 1990: 121-123; *FAZ*, 10 August 1990: 5; *SZ*, 11/12 August 1990).

However, corporate identity which is exogenous to international politics represents only one aspect of a state's identity. It is the 'site' or 'platform' for other identities (Wendt, 1999: 225). In *Social Theory* Wendt distinguishes three such other identities: type, role and collective (Wendt, 1999: 224-230).<sup>10</sup> What is important to my argument is the distinction between one pre-given corporate identity and other aspects of identity, made through the process of relating to other actors, which can take 'multiple forms simultaneously within the same actor' (Wendt, 1999: 230). Thus I recall Wendt's earlier conceptualisation where he opposed 'corporate identity' to 'social identity' which develops only through social interaction, a distinction which he supported by referring to the concepts of 'I' and 'me' in George Herbert Mead's work (Mead, 1965).<sup>11</sup> Briefly, the process whereby a state defines its interests precisely and goes about satisfying them depends partially on its notion of self in relation to others, that is, social identities or roles. These are 'sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others – that is, as a social object' (Wendt, 1996: 51). Actors have several social identities but only one corporate identity. Social identities can exist only in relation to others and thus provide a crucial connection for the mutually constitutive relationship between agents and structures. This type of identity is continuously (re)defined in processes of interaction. In some contexts social identities are relatively stable. This, however, is also a result of actors' practices, not a natural fact (Wendt, 1996: 51). Although interaction is usually aimed at satisfying interests, actors also try to sustain their conception of themselves and others (Wendt, 1999: Ch. 7). Sometimes identities are, however, transformed. Identity change requires social learning. Hence, the transformative

potential is mediated through the interaction between *ego* and *alter* in which social learning occurs (Wendt, 1999: 326-335).<sup>12</sup>

One of the concrete mechanisms of identity transformation which Wendt considers is based on conscious efforts to change identity. Actors, he argues, are able to engage in critical self-reflection and they can transform or transcend roles. *Ego* may decide to engage in new practices. As the new behaviour affects the partner in interaction, this involves getting *alter* to behave in a new way as well. This process is not just about changing behaviour but about changing identity. As *alter*'s identity mirrors *ego*'s practices, changing *ego*'s practices influences *alter*'s conception of self. When one partner in interaction presents the other with a new role definition, Wendt speaks of 'altercasting', that is, 'an attempt to induce alter to take on a new identity [...] by treating alter as if it already had that identity' (Wendt, 1992a: 421; see also Wendt, 1999: Ch. 7). This only produces the desired effect if the other reciprocates, in other words, if the other takes up the new role.

As we have seen, at the time of the Gulf War the FRG displayed an identity which involved a definition of self as non-military, more precisely as a state which would use military force only for purposes of (collective) self-defence. However, this presentation of self became contested by others. As role definitions by significant others are important and because of the significance of interaction between actors developed above, contestations may influence the FRG's definition of identity. Who is a *significant* other depends on power and dependency relationships (Wendt, 1999: 327; also 331). Therefore, the US should have this role vis-à-vis the FRG but probably also those other entities which German politicians refer to when they speak of 'our friends and partners': the member states of NATO, the EU, the WEU and the UN.<sup>13</sup> In August 1990 the US requested military support for a possible intervention in the Gulf, at least the deployment of minesweepers to the Eastern Mediterranean in order to protect the Suez Canal. The FRG was also asked to participate in a potential WEU operation in the Persian Gulf (*DER SPIEGEL*, 20 August 1990: 121; Kaiser and Becher 1992: 14).<sup>14</sup> These requests implied a new representation of the FRG. They treated the FRG as if military intervention abroad was a type of behaviour which was

compatible with its identity, as if the country contributed to international military operations, even though it had never done this before. This can be read as an attempt at 'altercasting' (see Wendt, 1999: 329 and 331). In other words, the US and the WEU behaved towards the FRG as if it already had a new role in the hope that the FRG would do what this new role, rather than the old, demanded of it. The FRG did not, however, respond favourably to the attempt: it turned down the requests on constitutional grounds. The FRG merely sent several ships to the Mediterranean, in order to relieve the US of NATO duties there, but these vessels had to stay within the boundaries of NATO territory.<sup>15</sup> They could neither go to the Eastern Mediterranean to secure the Suez Canal nor to the Gulf region itself. The FRG also, reluctantly and on as low a level as possible, granted a request by NATO partner Turkey to deploy forces to its Southern border in order to deter a potential Iraqi attack (*DER SPIEGEL*, 7 January 1991: 20; *FAZ*, 5 January 1991: 2; *FAZ*, 19 January 1991: 5).

At the same time statements of German leaders suggested that the FRG *wanted* to take on the new role but considered it impossible to do so. Especially the Chancellor and the Foreign Minister repeatedly spoke of Germany's willingness to take on more international responsibility, including the participation in international military operations, but its inability due to constitutional restraints to do so for the time being.<sup>16</sup> Wendt acknowledges the significance of such 'rhetorical practice' (Wendt, 1996: 57) or verbal communication (Wendt, 1999: 346f). However, *behaviour* is construed as the key to identity change. The interaction between *ego* and *alter* Wendt describes is all about physical gestures. An advance, a retreat, a brandishing of arms, a laying down of arms or an attack are the examples Wendt gives for a gesture (Wendt, 1992a: 404; see also Wendt, 1999: 326-335). Two areas of political behaviour could be seen as communicating in this vein the willingness or otherwise of the FRG to take on the new role: participation in other international military operations abroad after the Gulf War and the restructuring of the armed forces to make such participation possible.<sup>17</sup>

The interaction between the FRG and its significant others did not end with the FRG rejecting the new role it was presented with. In 1992 the UN asked for a deployment of the

German army, the *Bundeswehr*, for its large peace-keeping operation in Cambodia. The request was for paramedic personnel with military training rather than for armed forces, so as 'not to embarrass the Germans' (*DER SPIEGEL*, 18 May 1992: 27). The FRG agreed to contribute to this operation which could be defined as a humanitarian mission and which therefore was not 'as military' as participating in the Gulf War would have been. In other words, the identity changes required for this operation were somewhat less ambitious. A series of requests for deployments of the *Bundeswehr* followed. By 1995 the German armed forces had participated in UN missions in Cambodia, Somalia, Iraq, Bahrain, Georgia, the Adriatic Sea, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Yugoslavia and contributed to airlifts to Rwanda, Sarajevo and East Bosnia (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 1998; also Mutz, 1993). Yet in many cases the FRG imposed some limitation on its involvement. In the monitoring of the embargo against the former Yugoslavia German ships were allowed only to monitor, not to stop and search (*DER SPIEGEL*, 27 July 1992).<sup>18</sup> German surveillance aircraft carried no weapons (*DER SPIEGEL*, 3 August 1992: 36; *SZ*, 16/17 July 1994: 1). In the UN mission to Somalia the Germans insisted on deploying the *Bundeswehr* only to a 'secure environment'.<sup>19</sup> *Luftwaffe* soldiers serving as part of AWACS crews were not allowed to enter Austrian or Hungarian airspace, that is, leave NATO airspace (*FAZ*, 20 November 1992: 1-2).<sup>20</sup> When the multinational crews operating AWACS reconnaissance aircraft as part of Operation Deny Flight were asked to pass on information to fighter aircraft in order to enforce the flight ban over Bosnia, a fierce debate ensued between the governing parties as to whether the German soldiers had to be withdrawn.<sup>21</sup> There were also restrictions, if gradually less, on direct involvement in the former Yugoslavia.

Although the FRG never fully embraced the role offered to it by its significant others, the overall drift of its responses seemed to be that it was willing to gradually move away from its former non-military role. This message was underpinned by aspects of its behaviour which related to the FRG's capacity to engage in military operations. In the early nineties the FRG started restructuring its armed forces. This was necessary because the soldiers of the East German army had to be integrated into the *Bundeswehr* and the overall number of troops

had to be reduced in order to comply with disarmament treaties. Moreover, and crucially in this context, it was argued that the armed forces had to prepare for new tasks. In talks about the future structure of the *Bundeswehr* in early 1991, the governing parties agreed to create an intervention force and the Defence Minister demanded the acquisition of weaponry which would increase the mobility of the armed forces (*DER SPIEGEL*, 25 March 1991: 93; *DER SPIEGEL*, 4 February 1991: 22; also *DER SPIEGEL*, 3 June 1991: 22f). In September 1992, the army, under Helge Hansen, was the first to restructure its forces so as to create crisis reaction forces (*DER SPIEGEL*, 7 September 1992: 23-24).

In November 1992 the Defence Minister finally issued new guidelines for defence policy. The armed forces now were not only to protect Germany and its citizens against external threats. They would also serve world peace and international security in accordance with the UN Charter and provide aid in emergency situations and support humanitarian missions (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 1992; Bundesminister der Verteidigung, 1993). As the 1993 Plan for the *Bundeswehr* and the 1994 White Paper show, the armed forces were to be restructured so as to make them far more mobile than before (Bundesminister der Verteidigung, 1993; Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 1994: esp. Ch. 5). The 1994 White Paper on security mentioned three capabilities which the armed forces had to develop: the capability to defend the FRG and the Alliance; the capability to participate in multinational efforts at crisis management in the framework of NATO and the WEU; and the capability to participate in UN and CSCE operations in an appropriate way (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 1994: 91, section 519). Accordingly, the establishment of rapid reaction forces as part of the overall structure of the *Bundeswehr* was planned (Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, 1994: 93, section 527). The creation of multinational forces was another aspect of planning which expressed the FRG's willingness to get more involved militarily. In October 1991 Kohl and Mitterrand proposed a European rapid reaction force. Europe was to have 50,000 troops based on the Franco-German Corps which already existed. All this was to be realised in the framework of the WEU (*DER SPIEGEL*, 21 October 1991: 18-20; *SZ*, 22 January 1993: 2). The initiative developed into setting up what was now

called the *Eurokorps*. The tasks of the *Eurokorps* included operations for the preservation and re-establishment of peace, also outside of NATO territory (*DER SPIEGEL*, 18 May 1992: 30; SZ, 13 May 1991: 2; SZ, 15 May 1992: 2; SZ, 22 May 1992: 1).

These efforts at restructuring the armed forces make sense only if military intervention abroad was to become a practice which the FRG was willing to repeatedly engage in. At the same time there was increasing actual involvement in international operations. Both can be read as gestures signalling the FRG's willingness to reciprocate the attempts by its 'friends and partners' at 'altercasting' and gradually take on the new role. The Wendtian approach suggests that this reflects not merely a change in behaviour but one in identity (see Wendt, 1999: 26). An actor's social identity depends on relationships and indeed is thought to reflect the behaviour of others towards it. Thus the new way in which its significant others treated the FRG would influence its definition of self. The notion that the FRG was undergoing a transformation of identity seems reasonable as repeated military deployments abroad and acquiring an intervention capacity were bound to interfere with a conception of self which had been strongly non-military.

However, we get little sense of what exactly happens when identities, which Wendt after all considers to be 'relatively stable' (Wendt, 1992a: 397; Wendt, 1999: 21), change. Sujata Chakrabarti Pasic has pointed out that 'having no concrete conceptualization of identity formation that engages the actually social levels of states' sociality' (1996: 89) is a problem in Wendt's work. In my view, the centrality of physical gestures in Wendt's explication of social action renders it impossible to analyse identity transformation as a discursive process. The recognition of 'rhetorical practice' (Wendt, 1996: 57) or verbal communication (Wendt, 1999: 346f) as significant is a step in the right direction but it fails to address *how* discourse should be analysed.<sup>22</sup> This omission is crucial because the assumption that states are pre-given, unitary actors depends on it. As will be demonstrated in the next section, the competing identity narratives highlighted by an exploration of the discursive constitution of identity endanger this assumption and hence the possibility of Wendt's systemic theory.



Moreover, there is the problem of disentangling identity and behaviour because Wendt claims that it is not just behaviour but identity that changes. Yet it is unclear, with respect to an actual case such as the one considered here, what exactly sets apart identity transformation from a mere change in behaviour. Although Wendt's claim that the way in which others treat an actor will affect its conception of self rather than just the way it behaves seems plausible, it is hard to pin down the qualitative difference between the two. After all, in his approach we are forced to infer actors' self-understandings from nothing but their behaviour. If an identity matters only in its realisation in certain types of behaviour, then it is difficult to see what should justify calling it 'identity' rather than 'behaviour'. The idea that identities are relatively stable is certainly of no help as the possibility of identity transformation, of moving from one kind of anarchy to another, is crucial.

In order to detect any identity change, it must be possible to identify the identity an actor 'has' at any given point in time. *Ego* presents *alter* with a new identity which *alter* either takes up or refuses. Contestation over the identity takes place only between *alter* and *ego*. Although there may be a gradual adjustment of the ideas about self and other on both sides, it is a contestation over two alternative but clearly recognisable notions of identity. How either the actors or the ideas about self and other are constituted in the first place is not part of the account. This exclusion takes as given what are political constructions but it is necessary for Wendt's approach. Hence, identity is not only significant for Wendt's constructivism; it is also problematic.

### **The problem of identity**

#### *Telling identity*

If we look beyond Wendt's account we find that Germans engaged in fierce arguments about the limitations which their constitution and their history imposed on them. They accused each other of changing the nature of the FRG, militarising foreign policy and being irresponsible and short-sighted.<sup>23</sup> Engaging these debates about German identity in some detail provides the material with which to show, in the following section, that taking identity and its construction seriously has the potential to undermine Wendt's approach.

Articulations of 'German' identity often rely on contextualising what is considered German now with respect to the historical experience of the Third Reich. In his first statement after unification, the Federal Chancellor asserted, for instance, that future policies of the FRG would be guided by an awareness of 'German history in all its parts and of the responsibility which follows from it'. He reminded people that the creators of the Basic Law had been led by a double oath: 'Never again war! Never again dictatorship!' (Deutscher Bundestag, 1990a: 18019). This double commitment against war and against dictatorship was put forward as unproblematic. The two principles were presented as complementary. The 'Never again war'-principle was also invested into the Two-Plus-Four Treaty which states that 'only peace will emanate from German soil' ('Vertrag über die abschließende Regelung', 1993: Article 2). Accordingly, Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul of the Social Democrats considered the people's resistance against plans for military involvement an expression of 'that which has been collected in the tradition of military restraint in Germany in the decades after the war' (Deutscher Bundestag, 1993a: 11489f). Her fellow party member Peter Glotz argued that the 'Germans have led enough wars in this century. [They] are not available and pretty unsuited for the task of world policeman or assistant world policemen' (Deutscher Bundestag, 1993b: 12968). Germans had killed millions of people in this century and millions of Germans had been killed. Glotz claimed that therefore the Germans had a right to say that they would help financially, logistically and so on but that they wanted to be left alone with respect to war (Deutscher Bundestag, 1993b: 12969). Thus, both Wiczorek-Zeul and Glotz cited the 'Never again war'-principle as the reason for their opposition to military involvement abroad.

However, the commitment to a German state which was defined as a non-military international actor became increasingly difficult. This position was confronted with a new normative contradiction between 'Never again war' and 'Never again dictatorship'. As Alice H. Cooper observes,

Incipiently during the Gulf War and emphatically in Bosnia, parts of the left saw themselves confronted with a conflict between fundamental values that had been considered mutually reinforcing during the Cold War: between antifascism and pacifism; between internationalism and pacifism; and between collective security and antimilitarism (Cooper, 1997: 103).

The conflict between pacifism and antifascism was thrown into sharp light in the summer of 1995 when Joschka Fischer, the leader of the Alliance 90/The Greens parliamentary group, wrote a letter to his party entitled 'The catastrophe in Bosnia and the consequences for our party' (Fischer, 1995). A key question of the letter was: 'Can pacifists, can especially a position of non-violence just accept the victory of brute, naked violence in Bosnia?' (Fischer, 1995: 1148) Fischer argued that the line would have to be drawn somewhere because otherwise this fascism with its violent politics would not stop. The Bosnian war threw up basic questions and led to a fundamental conflict of three basic values of the Greens' political convictions: life and freedom were opposed to the principle of non-violence (Fischer, 1995: 1149). Fischer pointed out that both possible options with respect to the war in Bosnia – protecting the UN safe areas or withdrawing – touched upon the conflict between those basic values. Practical answers were necessary and they had to address the question of resistance and therefore violence (Fischer, 1995: 1152). In sum, although he almost hid it between the lines, Fischer backed the idea of military intervention.

In an interview following the publication of the letter, Fischer described the contradiction he saw himself confronted with: violence, on the one hand, always led to more violence but, on the other hand, survival sometimes depended on it. Merely watching the

success of the new fascism was damaging the moral substance of the left. Fischer said that the core of his political identity was based on two 'never again'-principles, 'never again war' and 'never again Auschwitz'. The big contradiction, which was impossible to resolve, was that it might not be possible to prevent Auschwitz without war. He recommended that his party stand up for this contradiction rather than aim to resolve it in one way or another (*DER SPIEGEL*, 21 August 1995: 28f). In 1999, now Foreign Minister of the FRG, Fischer supported and implemented *Bundeswehr* participation in Operation Allied Force in relation to Kosovo. He was convinced that only the last resort of violence had been possible in this case (*SZ*, 25 March 1999: 1).

The contradiction between the rejection of war and the opposition to oppression and barbarity was a problem not only for the left. The governing parties continuously referred to the traditionally important notion of military restraint. In the parliamentary debate about the ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court, which had removed most perceived constitutional restraints against military intervention abroad, the Foreign Minister, Klaus Kinkel, was at pains to make clear that the so-called 'culture of restraint' would remain. There would be no militarisation of German foreign policy (*Deutscher Bundestag*, 1994a: 21167; also Kinkel, 1994: 4). However, he argued that the increasingly widespread UN practice of peace-keeping and especially peace-making posed a new problem. Now, Germany was not in the position of a potential aggressor; rather, it was asked to use the military instrument to end wars others had started. Thus, the 'Never again war'-principle as it had traditionally been understood came under challenge. The context made it possible to re-articulate the principle and represent military involvement as not about waging war at all. On the contrary, as Wolfgang Schäuble put it, it was 'about securing the peace task of the *Bundeswehr* also for the future of our country, namely to avoid war at all costs' (*Deutscher Bundestag*, 1993b: 12934). The principle that Germans must not engage in war was then not at all applicable to the problem at hand, as military involvement abroad was about preventing war rather than engaging in it.

This brief illustration of representations of the 'Never again war'-principle shows that it was articulated in different ways. 'Never again war' could either mean what it had referred to traditionally, that is, that German soldiers should not engage in fighting. On the other hand, as the above shows, it could also mean that war had to be stopped, that is, that German soldiers had to fight in order to prevent war. It could also be overruled by the 'never again dictatorship'-principle. The move whereby the need to prevent dictatorship or fascism was represented as the reason why German military involvement was necessary can be seen in Kinkel's speech during the parliamentary debate about a German contribution to the protection and support of NATO's rapid reaction force in the former Yugoslavia on 30 June 1995.

The need to contribute to the military force in Bosnia was based, in Kinkel's argument, on the need to show solidarity with those countries which had been carrying the burden of the loss of lives of their citizens in an effort to help other human beings, in particular France and Great Britain, and with those 'innocent' people who were dying cruel deaths in the former Yugoslavia (Deutscher Bundestag, 1995a: 3955f). Germany needed to show solidarity with its allies because Germany had received protection and solidarity with respect to security issues from its friends and partners during the Cold War. In order to justify the deployment, Kinkel proceeded to present his version of the meaning of history for the political decision at issue. During the Cold War, he argued, Germany, in view of its history and the division of the country, focused on territorial defence. This 'culture of restraint' had been good and accepted. Yet now Germany was expected 'to actively contribute towards the protection of the international order and of human rights, especially in Europe' (Deutscher Bundestag, 1995a: 3957). Kinkel argued, then, that Germany had 'a political and moral obligation to help, also and particularly in view of [...] history' (Deutscher Bundestag, 1995a: 3957). He noted that it had been the Allies who, *using military force*, had freed the Germans from Nazi dictatorship and had made a new democratic beginning possible (Deutscher Bundestag, 1995a: 3957). Thus he likened German military intervention in the former Yugoslavia to the Allied involvement in the Second World War and thereby created a new

historical contextualisation. The Germans are shifted, in this narrative, to the position of those who liberate, who constitute the hope for 'innocent' people living and dying in conditions of war and oppression. This move makes the *Bundeswehr* similar to the heroic liberators of the Second World War bringing peace and freedom rather than to *Wehrmacht* troops committing atrocities on the Balkans.

Those who wanted the peace-keepers to remain in Bosnia had to contribute to making this possible. According to Kinkel, this was not about lowering the threshold for German military involvement abroad. The decision under discussion was not about waging war but about preventing war. The claim that the German *Tornado* fighters would wage war, he argued, turned things on their head. In fact, they would only act in the event of an aggression against the troops of the rapid reaction force. Kinkel claimed not to understand the policy of the opposition who were in favour of the UN remaining in Bosnia but refused to deploy *Tornado* fighters. He implied that this policy amounted to supporting that UNPROFOR remain in Bosnia to the last Frenchman or Briton (Deutscher Bundestag, 1995a: 3957f). Kinkel finished his speech by asking the members of parliament, also of the opposition, to show solidarity with 'our allies, our soldiers, but in particular with the people in a truly sorely afflicted country!' (Deutscher Bundestag, 1995a: 3959)

In his case for deploying soldiers to the former Yugoslavia Kinkel thus re-contextualised the 'Never again war'-principle in two ways. The FRG had to deploy troops in order to show solidarity with its Western partners and in order to help fellow human beings who are suffering. As Kinkel stressed, the FRG would not even exist had it not been for the intervention of the Allies in the Second World War. The creation of the FRG was made possible through a military intervention which put an end to the barbarity of the Nazi regime; therefore such intervention is at least sometimes good. Indeed, the use of force can be necessary in order to prevent war and further suffering. It does not in itself constitute war, which, of course, the government does not want to get involved in. This move entails a further re-contextualisation. The kind of military operation envisaged is removed from the 'war' category. As a result, the 'Never again war'-principle has clearly been re-articulated. It

now refers to preventing other people's wars rather than German wars. This representation of the principle is inherently contradictory, however. It relies both on the notion that the violence of military force, that is, war, will produce good results in the given circumstances and on the idea that the use of military force at issue does not constitute the violence we call war. Yet, this contradiction did not hinder this new narrative from becoming an accepted way of telling identity.

These debates could in some way be read to confirm what Wendt argues. In the contestation over German identity the boundaries of the self seemed to matter. It is possible to argue that in order to have many of these discussions the people on whose behalf the military was to intervene had in some way to be seen as worthy of the effort, as human, and therefore in some way as part of the self. In that sense, they were made part of a collective identity. The Western partners were also treated as part of the self when the Foreign Minister argued that the FRG could not support a policy which in effect amounted to fighting to the last Frenchman. Something similar might be said about *Bundeswehr* participation in Operation Allied Force in relation to Kosovo which was, according to Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, undertaken to protect others (Deutscher Bundestag, 1999: 2571) and in which NATO was represented as the key actor.<sup>24</sup> Germany only played a role insofar as it was part of NATO. Yet these debates are fundamentally in tension with Wendt's conceptualisation of identity. Whether the FRG should value avoiding war over fighting fascism or vice versa cannot really be explicated in terms of the boundary of the self. Both 'Never again war' and 'Never again fascism' are principles which take into account the needs of others. They do not represent a competition between a more egoistic and a more collective definition of identity. The debates were also very much about who the self *should* be, a dimension which Wendt does not mention very much. A number of different representations of identity were articulated *within* the FRG. Hence, the question of what identity is to be attached to the notion of 'German' or 'Germany' was a contested issue not only between the FRG and its significant others.

Yet the important point is not as such that Wendt 'brackets' the domestic and excludes the normative but the significance of this move for his approach.<sup>25</sup> Structural change, and thus a key focus of systemic theorising, supervenes identity change (Wendt, 1999: 338). Thus identity transformation is significant, even if not a focus of the theory as such. However, the exploration of German contestations over identity provides the material with which to demonstrate that Wendt's bracketing of domestic politics and his related failure to take the discursive production of identity seriously is not an innocent methodological choice but a necessary move if identity is not to immediately threaten his constructivist project.

### *The identity of identity*

The contestations over German identity show a complexity which is not admissible within Wendt's framework. In other words, they suggest that that which Wendt excludes threatens the very possibility of his argument. Wendt's conceptualisation of identity assumes it to be a bounded category and, more importantly, needs it to be so. It is an identity without difference. This unity of identity is imposed through multiple exclusions which concern the genesis and type of the actor and, most fundamentally maybe, the kind of project Wendt's approach is supposed to be. It is precisely the possibility of the latter which is, however, threatened by the dangerous liaison with identity.

Wendt asks us to assume two actors, *ego* and *alter*, who then come to interact only after we have imagined them on their own. This starting point, he tells us, is an 'interactionist convention' (Wendt, 1999: 328). Analogously, we have to imagine states as prior to and independent from social context in order to follow his argument. Wendt seems to have no problem with this move, which was already criticised by Pasic in relation to his earlier work (1996: 86-90).<sup>26</sup> Wendt even knows what the actors are like before they come to be part of a context. He defends an anthropomorphic conception of the state (Wendt 1992a: 397, fn. 21;



Wendt, 1999: 10 and 215). What I want to draw attention to here is that the assumption of unity which goes along with this anthropomorphic conception of the state leads to a specific understanding of identity which seems problematic in relation to the issues raised by the debates on German military involvement abroad.<sup>27</sup> It makes it impossible to acknowledge the complexity of identity and ultimately restricts identity to a question of boundaries.

The logic of the 'Never again war'-narrative and its re-articulation relies on equating 'the FRG', 'Germany' and 'the Germans'. This betrays a specific understanding of identity. The notion that the FRG must not engage in war because of historical lessons is based on the idea that the FRG is somehow the contemporary expression of that entity which was the Third Reich from 1933 until 1945. The FRG represents itself and is represented by others as the successor of the Nazi state. In a conceptualisation which takes states as given it cannot be otherwise. On the other hand, the FRG is at the same time portrayed in many ways as the negation of the Nazi state. The FRG is constitutionally committed to the equality of men and women from all backgrounds, for instance. One of the defining characteristics of the FRG as *different* from the Third Reich used to be its renunciation of the use of military force other than for (collective) self-defence. Art. 87a (2) Basic Law, which was thought to rule out military operations beyond defence, had been portrayed as the product of the lessons of the Second World War. Government statements and international treaties affirmed that 'only peace [would] emanate' from German soil (Genscher, 1990: 1201; Kohl, 1990: 1227, 'Vertrag über die abschließende Regelung', 1993: Article 2). Hence the equation of 'Germany' and 'the FRG' is more problematic than it would at first seem. At the same time, the rejection of armed force makes sense only in the context of the history of the Third Reich and thus relies on this very equation. In the debates on military involvement abroad it was never contested that the Germans and the FRG had to define their identity in relationship to the Nazi state. However, the concrete expression of this relationship, and therefore of German identity, was very much at issue.

The issue was further complicated by the substantive disagreement over the implications of that relationship. Defining the identity of the FRG as following on from but at

the same time fundamentally different from the Third Reich could mean to reject participation in war altogether. Traditionally, 'Never again war' had referred to just that. However, it could also mean opposition to fascism and the human suffering caused by it. Ideally, it would have meant both but as the two came to be seen to contradict each other subscribing to either principle led to differing notions of identity. One stressed the non-military character of the FRG, the other the responsibility to end oppression. These competing definitions of identity were experienced as a genuine normative contradiction which could not easily be resolved. In this situation another move of equating two entities provided the space for a new narrative. The Foreign Minister likened the *Bundeswehr* to Allied troops liberating the Germans and others from dictatorship and oppression (Deutscher Bundestag, 1995a: 3957). This made possible prioritising the 'Never again fascism'-principle because, as the example of the Allied intervention in the Second World War and the subsequent foundation of the FRG showed, wars of liberation potentially had very good consequences. Moreover, the old 'Never again war'-logic was not applicable to the situation at hand as German military involvement would be about avoiding or ending wars rather than waging war. UN operations were, in other words, not really war. Thus, participating in UN operations could, in the new articulation of the 'Never again war'-principle, again constitute an active opposition to both war and dictatorship.

Thus, German military involvement abroad was construed as *both* problematic *and* necessary because of the history of the Third Reich. The *problematic* aspect becomes obvious in the claim that the *Bundeswehr* should not go where the *Wehrmacht* had caused havoc during the Second World War.<sup>28</sup> It is also implicit in the fear that any *Bundeswehr* deployment abroad would lead to a remilitarisation of German foreign policy.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the idea that participation in international operations was *necessary* to live up to the historical responsibility<sup>30</sup> was also at least partially based on Germany's responsibility for the Second World War and the Holocaust. The difference from the Nazi past was as fundamental to this argument as the identity with the Nazi state. This representation of identity thus always already involved a 'difference *with itself*' (Derrida, 1992: 9f). If the

relationship between the Nazi state and the FRG had been one of identity *only*, the idea of sending its troops abroad would certainly not have found the support of European neighbours.

The difference of the FRG with Germany's past – whilst at the same time representing the FRG as 'Germany' and therefore as identical with its past – was established not only through its non-military character but crucially also the integration with the West. The acceptance of Western values through integration into Western institutions is represented as the key difference between the dark Germanies of the past and the enlightened, responsible Germany of today (Habermas, 1993: 43f). In his speech justifying the deployment of German troops to support NATO's rapid reaction forces in the former Yugoslavia Foreign Minister Kinkel puts this decision into the context of a series of historical decisions which, with the exception of *Ostpolitik*, were all represented as instances where the seriousness of the FRG's commitment to Western integration was seen to be at issue: rearmament, joining NATO, the renunciation of nuclear weapons and the implementation of NATO's twin-track decision (Deutscher Bundestag, 1995a: 3955). Part of the problem was then that the contradiction between the commitment to military abstention and the commitment to Western integration which both establish the desirable difference from that other, darker Germany are in tension. For the partners in NATO demanded a military contribution and military integration worked to involve the *Bundeswehr* in international operations more or less automatically.<sup>31</sup> It is important to note that even once this tension is resolved in favour of discarding military abstention, the narrative on identity, though presented as referring to a coherent entity, still relies on both the special responsibility derived from the FRG's identity with the Nazi state and its ability to deliver a better future to the people in the former Yugoslavia through military intervention which relies on the FRG's difference from the Nazi state.

My 'Wendtian' reading excluded these intriguing aspects of identity representation. Clearly, the problem is not that Wendt's framework fails to address the specifics of German identity construction. It is more fundamental. Wendt's anthropomorphic concept of the state cannot cope with identities which are unstable in themselves. Identity change is merely about

shifting from one relatively stable identity to another. States are unitary actors with minds, desires and intentions. Wendt's recognition that domestic politics influence state behaviour and state identity fails to address the complexity of the issue at hand (Wendt, 1999: 264 and 364). The exclusion of the process of the construction of the state as a bearer of identity and of domestic processes of articulation of state identity are part of the problem. This reduces identity to something negotiable between states. It is not surprising, given this starting point, that Wendt is mainly concerned with the *boundaries* rather than the content of theories about the self (Wendt, 1999: 229, 241f, 243, 305 and 317).<sup>32</sup> Wendt addresses identity as the question of who is considered part of the self. If other states are considered part of the notion of self, in other words, if the boundary of the self gets pushed outward beyond the boundary of the state, Wendt argues that there exists a collective rather than egoistic definition of identity (Wendt, 1996: 52f; Wendt, 1999: 229). He informs us that the 'constructivist model is saying that the boundaries of the Self are at stake in and therefore may change in interaction, so that in cooperating states can form a collective identity' (Wendt, 1999: 317). The question of who is considered part of the self is certainly an important one. Yet the particular way in which it is posed excludes consideration of the significant process of constructing 'Germany' or any other state as a subject and the relevant agent in the first place.

The necessary multiplicity of origins referred to in telling identity puts into question the naturalness of the succession of German states – Third Reich, old FRG, new FRG - which is used as the basis for claiming a special responsibility. This seemingly natural narrative of identity also denies the history of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Foreign Minister Kinkel argued that the Allies had liberated the Germans and made a democratic beginning possible (Deutscher Bundestag, 1995a: 3957). Moreover, 'Germany' had been protected by the Western Allies during the Cold War and therefore they could now legitimately expect solidarity from the Germans (Deutscher Bundestag, 1995a: 3956). This erases the existence of the other Germany which was anything but protected by those Western allies and claims the solidarity of those Germans who did not enjoy this protection but now, as citizens of the

FRG, have become part of the collective telling of identity. The slippage between 'Germany', 'the FRG' and 'the Germans', sometimes even when reference is clearly made only to the old FRG, works to obscure the making of identity through discourse. The equation of the FRG with Germany and earlier German states seems to be in accordance with common sense. Recognising that any representation of the FRG involves incorporating a number of different sources of identity, even if one is ostensibly prioritised over the other, exposes the non-natural character of the identity which provided the basis for the justification of German military involvement abroad. Things were much less clear than some wanted to claim. The Nazi past meant both that the FRG should use the military and that it could not use it. Moreover, the FRG had to militarily intervene abroad to prove its membership of the Western community but its interventions were good only because it was already considered part of the West.

The contingency and even inherently contradictory character of these expressions of identity is, I argue, not only invisible through Wendt's framework but in tension with his conceptualisation of identity. The illustration suggests that it is impossible to circumscribe 'the identity' the FRG 'has' or to list the characteristics which 'having' a certain identity entails. Identities depend on concrete articulations. Whether the FRG is thought to be different or like the Third Reich in any given situation is not clear *a priori*. In Wendt's framework, however, just that identity of both is assumed. When, in his theoretical argument for the constructedness of anarchy, Wendt asks us to think of two actors, *ego* and *alter*, this starting point is presented as innocent, as relatively free of prior assumptions (Wendt, 1992a: 404f; Wendt, 1999: 328)<sup>33</sup> and indeed as necessary. Actors, according to Wendt, have to be identified '[b]efore we can be constructivist about anything' (Wendt, 1999: 7). For a systemic theory of international politics, more specifically, states must be treated as given (Wendt, 1999: 244). This 'essentialist' (Wendt, 1999: 198) claim seems problematic for a 'constructivist' theory (see also Doty, 2000: 138 and Kratochwil, 2000: 75 and 91). Taking state actors as given presupposes the identity between 'the FRG' and 'Germany'. It is therefore impossible for this approach to appreciate the ambiguity involved in construing the

identity of 'the FRG' with 'Germany' and therefore 'the Third Reich'. This identity is taken as given, presumably on the basis of (limited) spatial continuity.

Wendt informs us that '[w]hat makes [...] Germany "Germany" is primarily the discourse and agency of those who call themselves Germans, not the agency and discourse of outsiders' (Wendt, 1999: 74). The identity of the state as Germany is therefore not created in social interaction. It is, as corporate identity (Wendt, 1999: 328), prior to international politics. Wendt's starting point obscures that this representation is neither necessary nor innocent. The identity between different German polities, as far as it exists, is an accomplishment of discourse. The argument that solidarity with the West is necessary as a repayment of protection during the Cold War makes sense only if 'Germany' can be construed as being identical with 'the FRG', excluding the GDR. The shift towards using the military abroad relied on this problematic equation. The exclusion of the consideration of the relevant self which is reflected in Wendt's approach to the analysis of international politics is a political move in that it establishes a non-natural relationship as given and unchangeable. Wendt defends at length his belief that state agents have essential properties (Wendt, 1999: 198-214). These are meant to set them apart from 'dogs, trees, football teams, universities, and so on' (Wendt, 1999: 213f). Wendt does not consider the constitution of states as subjects in the first place.<sup>34</sup> Thus, viewed in the context of Wendt's framework the issue considered here must be construed around *a state with an identifiable identity*, what is denoted by 'Germany'. The insecurity of the German state's identity can thus at best be considered a curiosity. Although Wendt claims that '[h]istory matters' (Wendt, 1999: 109), multiple histories do not. 'Germany' only makes an appearance as a unified entity. Considering identity, in this setting, does not make thinking more problematic. There is no space for contemplating Jacques Derrida's claim that 'self-difference, difference to itself [*différence à soi*], that which differs and diverges from itself, of itself' is always part of cultural identity (Derrida, 1992: 10). Rather, as David Campbell points out, "'identity" is rendered in essentialist ways as a variable that can be inserted into already existing theoretical commitments' (Campbell, 1998: 218).

Excluding consideration of the genesis of the actor is not the only problem. Wendt argues that what he calls 'ideas' have both constitutive and causal effects (Wendt, 1998; Wendt, 1999: Ch. 3). Although he is more concerned to make a case for the significance of constitution, based on his commitment to scientific realism he also considers identity a causal category which helps explain international politics (Wendt, 1998: 107; Wendt, 1999: 93 and 229).<sup>35</sup> Wendt insists that 'the basic realist idea that scientific explanation consists in the identification of underlying causal mechanisms [...] does apply to the social sciences' (Wendt, 1987: 355; see also Wendt, 1999: 77) and explicitly 'endorses a scientific approach to social inquiry' (Wendt, 1999: 1).

This creates further problems. The illustration in this article shows that identities as they are defined in discourse fail to be logically bounded entities. Identities are continuously articulated, re-articulated and contested, which makes them hard to pin down as explanatory categories. The stories we tell about ourselves are, as the re-articulation of the 'Never again war'-principle shows, not necessarily coherent. If identity is to 'cause' anything, however, it must be an antecedent condition for a subsequent effect and as such distinguishable from that which it is causing (Wendt, 1998: 105; Wendt, 1999: 25, 79 and 167). At one point, Wendt tells us that, as part of his argument, he is advancing 'a simple causal theory of collective identity formation' (Wendt, 1999: 317). On the other hand, structure is supposed to have causal effects on identity (Wendt, 1999: 144). Here, identity is effect rather than cause but the requirement of clear separation remains.<sup>36</sup> Wendt's treatment of identity as something which is attached to and negotiated between pre-existing anthropomorphic actors and which *explains* (or is explained) requires conceptualising identity as a unitary, circumscribable concept. It makes necessary the identity of identity.

Although Wendt argues that the world is constructed, there are certain aspects of the world which, based on a defence of scientific realism (esp. Shapiro and Wendt, 1992; Wendt, 1999: Ch. 2), he takes as given. What is particularly surprising is that it is precisely with respect to the key move of identity (trans)formation that Wendt evades the implications of the argument that that which we call reality is constructed rather than given. Acknowledging that

identities do not exist apart from articulation and contextualisation, have no clear bounds and fail to be logically coherent, as the illustration suggests, would threaten the premises of the approach.

The threat is fundamental as it endangers the project. Wendt tells us that he is seeking a “via media” through the Third Debate’ (Wendt, 1999: 40 and 47). This via media entails addressing social construction, or what Wendt calls ‘an idealist and holist ontology’, whilst ‘maintaining a commitment to science’ (Wendt, 1999: 47).<sup>37</sup> Wendt discusses the philosophical grounding which he claims for this middle way in great detail in Chapter 2 of *Social Theory*. In terms of International Relations what he is claiming is a departure from rationalism (Wendt, 1995: 71f; Wendt, 1999: 27 and 35) which does not force him to give up science as he understands it, which does not, in other words, force him to subscribe to ‘postmodernism’. The claim that ‘anarchy is what states make of it’ revolves around the idea that identities are socially constructed and may be changed, even if such identity transformation is not easy. This is what distinguishes Wendt’s approach from rationalist thinking in International Relations. It is thus crucial to establishing constructivism as something fundamentally different from ‘mainstream’ theorising. Although Wendt, in his recent work, argues that ‘there is no contradiction between rationalist and constructivist models of the social process’ (Wendt, 1999: 366f), he does uphold a difference in analytical focus between the two. Constructivist models will be most useful, he tells us, when we have reason to think that identities and interests will change (Wendt, 1999: 367). Thus, as before, the possibility of identity change establishes the difference between rationalism and constructivism. Yet, at the same time, identity must not be as malleable, contingent and elusive as the illustration in this article suggests. For acknowledging that identity is ‘never given, received or attained’ (Derrida, 1998: 28) would entail a move in a direction which Wendt seems to fancy even less than the rationalism of the ‘mainstream’. In a collection of ‘constructivist’ contributions to the study of national security, the authors of the chapter explicating the analytical framework, one of whom was Wendt, felt it necessary to point out that their usage of the term ‘identity’ did not signal a ‘commitment to some exotic



(presumably Parisian) social theory' (Jepperson et al., 1996: 34). This may have been a flippant remark. However, if thinking through the claim that identity is constructed leads us to recognise that the subjects themselves do not exist apart from context, then Wendt, and some other constructivists, have a problem with the space which they are attempting to carve out for themselves. The 'via media' (Wendt, 1999: 40 and 47) or 'middle ground' (Adler, 1997), where Wendt and some other constructivists clearly aim to locate their approaches, may just not be as stable a place as they think.

## **Conclusion**

Wendt's departure from the traditional conceptualisations of international politics lies in his claim that the situation we find ourselves in is not an expression of natural necessity but a construction. This claim, I argued, relies on conceiving of state identity as at the same time changeable and relatively stable. Hence, I contend that identity is a key concept in Wendt's work but at the same time in a dangerous liaison with his constructivism. Wendt insists that he is not interested in identity formation, that his analytical focus is the state system (Wendt, 1999: 11; Wendt, 2000: 175; but see Wendt, 1999: 318-336).<sup>38</sup> I do not dispute either of these claims. What I argue is that his theory hinges on a conception of identity which is deeply problematic. Therefore, I first showed the significance of the concept of identity in Wendt's work. I then related it to the reconstruction of Germany's identity as an international actor after the end of the Cold War in a twofold way. On the one hand I showed where a Wendtian reading of identity in this situation might lead us. On the other hand I demonstrated how taking the construction of identity seriously destabilises the possibility of a Wendtian analysis. The approach comes apart when we consider how identity and subjectivity come to be. In order to clarify this point I showed that Wendt's approach implied the possibility of identifying actors' identities as circumscribable entities at any given point in time and that this failed to take account of the complexity of the phenomenon of identity. The point is thus not

that Wendt ought to take account of domestic discourse or normative issues. It is more fundamental. Wendt's argument cannot be saved through the introduction of a more sophisticated conceptualisation of identity. It needs the very notion of identity which makes it fall apart. Wendt's constructivism does not work.

If my argument holds, this poses a serious problem for Wendt's approach. However, whilst this may be of interest to Wendt and those looking for a reason not to read the many pages of *Social Theory of International Politics*, it is so far merely implicit how this argument might be of wider relevance, how it is, as my title suggests, an argument about 'constructivism'. Given not only the intellectual diversity of constructivist work but also my argument about the impossibility to clearly delineate identity I will make no attempt, in explicating this relevance, to circumscribe the identity of constructivism. In other words, I do not offer a definition of constructivism. Instead I will explore what we are told we need constructivism for.

The point of constructivism is often thought to be its ability to address the social construction of the world without abandoning the idea of scientific explanation as it is commonly construed in International Relations. This is why constructivism is frequently portrayed as situated in the middle of a split between rationalistic and reflective international relations theories or as mediating between the two.<sup>39</sup> Even Nicholas Onuf's approach, which otherwise appears rather different from Wendt's work, has been described as possibly 'a third way in the third debate' (Kubálková et al., 1998: 20). Emanuel Adler's description of the constructivist project in terms of 'seizing the middle ground' between 'rationalist and relativist interpretive approaches' (Adler, 1997: 322) perhaps comes closest to Wendt's idea of a 'via media'. Adler is concerned, amongst other things, to demonstrate 'constructivism's scientific basis' (Adler, 1997: 320). Constructivism explains (Adler, 1997: 328-330). The 'constructivist dependent variable' may be, Adler argues, the transformation of identities and interests (Adler, 1997: 344; see also Ruggie, 1998: 4). If Adler adequately represents the constructivist project, it would seem that worries similar to the ones I have established in relation to Wendt's specific formulation apply. The concern with causality and explanation

certainly can be found in a variety of constructivist work.<sup>40</sup> I have shown, however, that the notion that identities or their transformation can be treated as variables within a causal explanation is problematic.

Yet much is being made of precisely this aspect of constructivism. Constructivists, in contrast to so-called postmodernists, respect the established procedures and methodologies of social science and engage in debate with rationalists (Katzenstein et al., 1998: 677; see also Copeland, 2000: 196), or so the argument goes. Hence, Adler's 'primary goal' is to distinguish between 'postmodern, poststructuralist, critical theory and (postmodern) feminist' approaches on the one hand, and constructivism on the other (Adler, 1997: 332; see also Hopf, 1998: 171). The point is then, in Guzzini's somewhat ironic words, that constructivism 'does not succumb to the sirens of poststructuralism' (2000: 148). However, in conforming to such procedures and methodologies constructivism is in danger of missing something crucial, namely the politics of representing and constructing social worlds. The contingent, elusive and even contradictory character of German identity, as it was represented in the debates, must be excluded if the supposedly scientific standards are to be upheld. The fascinating, subtle creation of the subject in the process of telling history, and thus identity, is not part of an analysis which starts by postulating subjects. Hence, political questions, for instance about how subjects come to be in the first place, are ignored. Therefore, constructivism and identity may be in a dangerous liaison not only because identity is both necessary for and a danger to the approach. The liaison also endangers the possibility of considering the political implications of constructing and representing identity. As a result, constructivists may just miss the politics in international relations.

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- <sup>2</sup> 'Forum on *Social Theory of International Politics*' (2000: 123); Alker (2000: 141); Smith (2000: 151). Note also Friedrich Kratochwil's worry that Wendt's approach might become the new orthodoxy (2000: 74f).
- <sup>3</sup> See Jepperson et al. (1996); Adler (1997: 344 and 348); Checkel (1998: 325); Hopf (1998: 172); Katzenstein et al. (1998: 682); Price/Reus-Smit (1998: 259); Ruggie (1998: 4); Guzzini (2000: 149).
- <sup>4</sup> Note that I do not claim that Alexander Wendt would read the situation in this way.
- <sup>5</sup> See Zehfuß (1998) and Zehfuss (forthcoming).
- <sup>6</sup> For more on this see Wendt (1999: Ch. 5 and 6).
- <sup>7</sup> On the limitations of this conceptualisation of social acts see also Zehfuß (1998).
- <sup>8</sup> For a critique of the notion of first encounter in Wendt (1992a) see Inayatullah and Blaney (1996). Wendt now acknowledges that even actors encountering 'the Other' for the first time will already have ideas about Self and Other. Wendt (1999: 141).
- <sup>9</sup> Witness the parliamentary debates on 14, 17 and 30 January 1991 (Deutscher Bundestag 1991a, b and c). There was however a brief debate in August 1990 about a potential contribution to UN forces in the Gulf region and the possibility of sending minesweepers to the Gulf. The government decided that this would be unconstitutional. See SZ, 10/08/90, 2; FAZ, 16/08/90, 2; SZ, 16/08/90, 1; FAZ, 18/08/90, 4; SZ, 21/08/90, 2; FAZ, 21/08/90; SZ, 22/08/90, 4 and 8.
- <sup>10</sup> Wendt claims that the latter is a distinct combination of the two former (Wendt, 1999: 229) and is, due to their fuzziness, himself unsure how to distinguish between the different categories (Wendt, 1999: 224).

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- <sup>11</sup> I do not consider here whether this is in itself a problematic move. For such a critique see Polan (2000: 591f)
- <sup>12</sup> See also Wendt's earlier explication of 'strategic practice' (Wendt, 1996: 56-58).
- <sup>13</sup> For references to Germany's 'friends and allies' or 'friends and partners' see, for example, Geiger (CDU/CSU) in Deutscher Bundestag (1990b: 18848); Helmut Kohl (Chancellor) in Deutscher Bundestag (1991c: 68 and 70) and in Deutscher Bundestag (1995b: 6632); Volker Rühle (Defence Minister) in Deutscher Bundestag (1993a: 11485); Bundesministerium der Verteidigung (1994: 43, section 312); Klaus Kinkel (Foreign Minister) in Deutscher Bundestag (1994a: 21169) and in Deutscher Bundestag (1995a: 3956). For Wendt on friendship in international politics see Wendt (1999: 298f).
- <sup>14</sup> *DER SPIEGEL* lists a whole series of NATO demands (11 February 1991: 19).
- <sup>15</sup> See *SZ* (11/12 August 1990: 1); *DER SPIEGEL* (4 February 1991: 18-22); *DER SPIEGEL* (21 January 1991: 20); see also *FAZ* (11 August 1990: 2) which, however, cites the German government as claiming that the vessels were 'supplements' rather than replacements for NATO units redeployed to the Gulf region. See also note 6.
- <sup>16</sup> For example, at the meeting of the Council of Ministers of the WEU on 21 August 1990, at a NATO conference on 10 September 1990 and during the visit of US Foreign Secretary James Baker in the FRG. See Kaiser and Becher (1992: 85f).
- <sup>17</sup> One might also want to consider changing the constitution as a symbolic act signalling the willingness to take on the new role. However, it is unclear how domestic norms could figure in Wendt's approach.
- <sup>18</sup> This limitation was lifted in July 1994 (*SZ*, 23/24 July 1994: 1 and 2).
- <sup>19</sup> See *SZ* (16 April 1993: 2); *DER SPIEGEL* (19 April 1993: 21f); *DER SPIEGEL* (26 April 1993: 18); *FAZ* (20 April 1993: 1-2).
- <sup>20</sup> This limitation was lifted in July 1994 (*SZ*, 23/24 July 1994: 1 and 2).
- <sup>21</sup> See *DER SPIEGEL* (18 January 1993: 18-20); *DER SPIEGEL* (5 April 1993: 18-22); *SZ* (3/4 April 1993: 1); *FAZ* (3 April 1993: 1-2)

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- <sup>22</sup> Kratochwil's insistence on the significance of descriptions seems to point in a similar direction (2000: 95).
- <sup>23</sup> See for example Günter Verheugen (SPD) in Deutscher Bundestag (1993a: 11480); Andrea Lederer (PDS/Linke Liste) in Deutscher Bundestag (1993b: 12942); Rudolf Scharping (SPD) in Deutscher Bundestag (1995a: 3960); Hermann-Otto Solms (F.D.P.) in Deutscher Bundestag (1994a: 21180).
- <sup>24</sup> See Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's statement on the occasion of NATO's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary (Schröder, 1999: 193).
- <sup>25</sup> Ted Hopf makes a number of similar observations about Wendt's ambiguous attitude towards the domestic and its implications without, however, drawing my conclusions (2000: 372f).
- <sup>26</sup> Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney also make a number of similar observations in their critique of Wendt's 'Anarchy is what states make of it' (1996: esp. 72-75).
- <sup>27</sup> On the assumption of unity and the consequence of identity see also Pasic (1996: 100).
- <sup>28</sup> This has been termed the Kohl doctrine (Joffe, 1994) but the point was also subscribed to by others. See, for example, Kinkel (1994: 7) and Joschka Fischer (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN) in Deutscher Bundestag (1995a: 3975).
- <sup>29</sup> For example Peter Glotz (SPD) in Deutscher Bundestag (1993b: 12970).
- <sup>30</sup> Klaus Kinkel (Foreign Minister) in Deutscher Bundestag (1994a: 21166).
- <sup>31</sup> Note specifically the controversy around the AWACS mission in 1993.
- <sup>32</sup> It could be argued that the discussion of 'type' and 'role' identities addresses issues of content (Wendt, 1999: 225-228).
- <sup>33</sup> David Campbell also takes issue with this (1996: 12f; 1998: 219-222). From a different perspective, Inayatullah and Blaney (1996: 73) and Pasic (1996: 87-90) raise this point as problematic as well.
- <sup>34</sup> Campbell points this out as well. See Campbell (1998: 220f).

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- <sup>35</sup> Steve Smith claims that Wendt's constitutive theory is basically a form of causal theory (Smith, 2000: 157). On Wendt's commitment to scientific realism and its problems see also Kratochwil (2000).
- <sup>36</sup> Roxanne Lynn Doty also comments on the need to clearly categorise, define and distinguish for what Wendt wants to do and the impossibility of this task (Doty, 2000: 137f).
- <sup>37</sup> On the problematic of the *via media* and science see also Kratochwil (2000) and Smith (2000). See also Wendt (2000).
- <sup>38</sup> Hopf also points out that, despite Wendt's claim that his main goal is not explaining identities and interests, he nevertheless 'goes on to treat the issue for the next 400 pages' (2000: 370).
- <sup>39</sup> Wendt (1992a: 394); Wendt (1999: 40 and 47); Adler (1997); Hopf (1998: 199); Smith (1997: 183-187). For a critical analysis of the consequences of this move for Wendt's *Social Theory* see Kratochwil (2000).
- <sup>40</sup> See, for example, Finnemore (1996: 14-28) and most of the contributors to Katzenstein (1996); see also Jepperson et al. (1996: 52-65); Wæver (1997: 24) and Checkel (1998: 327).