

# **The Representation of European Identity in Films Supported by the Council of Europe:**

*A Qualitative Analysis of The Representation of European Identity in Films in Receipt of  
Funding from The Council of Europe's 'Eurimages Cultural Support Fund' From 2020 to  
2022.*

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**Abstract**

The goal of this study was to examine how films which have received funding from European Institutions such as the European Union and the Council of Europe have represented the concept of European identity from 2020 – 2022. These institutions were established in the wake of the second world war as a mechanism to promote harmony and create a sense of unity between European states. They have notably mobilised this goal through the support and promotion of European cinema as a tool to bring European states closer together. The main focus of the study was the Eurimages cultural support fund, an initiative of the council of Europe which offers funding for films co-produced by its member states. A steady rise in Euroscepticism has spurred a crisis of identity within Europe over the last decade. Taking film as an important tool for measuring how societies reflect upon themselves, this study has sought to determine how European identity has been represented in films funded by these institutions to determine whether these funds can be considered a successful tool for promoting European unity.

The study was realised by conducting a qualitative thematic analysis of a sample of films which were in receipt of funding from the Eurimages cultural support fund. Three films were used as part of the sample and analysed through both their textual and visual content. Through the study European identity was represented through the following themes - (1) the character's navigation of the hegemonic social structures of European societies such as the issues surrounding gender and social class, (2.) The importance of the expression of identity, (3.) A preoccupation with conflict and suffering, (4.) interdependence and reliance on one and other. The findings showed that the films all essentially promoted the positive aspects of unity through their representations of European identity. It was ultimately concluded that European Identity is a highly complex multifaceted concept that will never have one clear definition but can rather be used as a tool to reflect on the contrasts and similarities different European cultures share, to reflect on anxieties and fears, and to express individual's identities.

KEYWORDS: *European Identity, Representation, Film Funding, Eurimages, Council of Europe*

## Preface

This thesis has been a challenging yet cathartic process. It has taught me many things both about the nature of Europe as well as the amount of work and effort that goes into producing an academic work of this scale. In this regard I would like to thank some of the people who have supported me during this process and made it that little bit easier.

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## 1. Introduction

Europe is a continent comprised of a multitude of independent sovereign states, each housing their own unique cultures, traditions, and identities. While European countries differ from one another, they are still very much united through a common history, cultural similarities, and a geographical proximity to one and other. The unification of Europe has largely been associated with the work of European institutions such as the European Union and the Council of Europe, who work towards the unification of its member states and promote harmony and co-operation between them (Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2022). In the last number of years, scepticism towards these European institutions from member states and their citizens has increased majorly. This increase in Euroscepticism has been marked by some major setbacks to the aims of these institutions, namely the United Kingdom's decision by referendum to leave the European Union in 2016 as well as the well-publicised global criticisms of the European Union's handling of the 2015 refugee crisis and the COVID-19 Pandemic. Indeed, many European states have exhibited concern that their continued involvement with these institutions increasingly compromises their national sovereignty (Baute, 2023). For many, these criticisms have warped perceptions of Europe and European institutions, raising serious questions about the need for their existence and most importantly for this study, the question of what exactly is meant by European identity (Katsanidou et al, 2022).

Europe was formally conceptualised as a unified territory after the second world war with the establishment of the European Union to promote unity and establish common ground between European countries (Triandafyllidou & Gropas, 2022). In 1949 The council of Europe was founded as a separate body to the European Union, with the intention of promoting human rights and democracy as well as protecting European culture and free speech. Both the European Union and the Council of Europe have emphasised the importance of art as a tool for achieving their goals of unification (Schabas, 2017). They have hence both established cultural support mechanisms which actively support the arts as a tool for promoting European unity. This has resulted in the output of many European audio-visual projects which aim to reflect the nature of what it means to be European and raise the question of how these representations have these shaped the perception of European identity. Film has been a deeply influential medium to the perception and expression of Identity (Halverson, 2010). The films produced by a nation are of great importance to how it is perceived by its citizens as well as outsiders. Many European countries have demonstrated the importance of this by establishing policies to support their own national film industries (Hill, 1992). A healthy

domestic film industry produces films that enforce and question what being from that country really means (Everett, 2005). With the increase in the number of EU citizens who identify as 'European' in public opinion polls over the last few decades (Fligstein, 2008; Gabel, 1998), can the same logic be applied to the European Film industry as a whole?

The signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991 marked a new focus on building a stronger and more united Europe, one that sought to promote the idea of a collective European identity (Schilde, 2014). Since then, the concept of establishing a unified European identity has been reflected in European institutions through policy and ethos (Cerutti, 2008), while scholars have continued to attempt to define what it really means to be European (Duchesne & Frogner, 1995). In fact, European identity is often framed as a parallel to national identity, where European institutions create affection in individual people through civic and cultural participation, promoting a sense of togetherness (Laffan, 2004; Parks, 1999). The most important cultural European institutions are the European Union and The Council of Europe who have both established funds for European audiovisual projects with the intent of supporting the concept of European unity through artistic expression and the sharing of national creative resources and infrastructure. The Council of Europe established the Eurimages Cultural Support Fund in 1989, a fund aiming to assist in supporting co-productions between multiple European countries with the intention of promoting free speech, human rights, and European unity. The European Union established the MEDIA programme in 1991, to financially support and stimulate the European audiovisual sector through financial aid and subsidies. These are currently the two most prominent funds available to European citizens. This study aims to examine representations of European identity in contemporary films which are in receipt of funding from European institutions with the aim of revealing both whether they achieve their aims as well as examining whether European identity as a concept can be communicated through the medium of film.

### **1.1 Academic and Societal relevance**

The study of film and audiovisual media has become increasingly important in academia in recent years, especially when examining how certain ideas and concepts are represented and framed (Zhang & Haller, 2013, Trebbe et al., 2017). Film is considered by academics as a highly powerful medium to observing how both individuals and nations shape their own sense of identity (Halverson, 2010). Academic researchers have hence shown an increased interest in the topic in recent years, with many of them calling for the development of tools and frameworks which will prompt new research and provide fresh insights on the highly complex concept of identity representation in audiovisual media (Lankshear & Knobel,

2003). Previous research on European cultural support funds have focused mainly on how they have aided the development of the European film industry and its financial impact (De Vinck, 2009; Romero-González & Palma-Martos, 2019). While this is an effective method to measure the success of these funds, this study aims to focus chiefly on the messages that the films in receipt of this funding convey, specifically the representation of European identity. This is with the intention of gaining insight into whether the aim of Eurimages to provide a cultural instrument for the freedom of expression is truly being realised in a contemporary context. The study ultimately aims to add fresh perspectives to the academic conversation around both the relevance of these funds as well as to measure if their goals have been realised in a contemporary context.

Societally, the study aims to provide insight into how European identity is represented through films intended to be viewed by member of European Societies. European institutions receive their budgets from contributions from its member states which largely come from the taxpayers of that country. Digital literacy and the comprehension of messages in film has become increasingly relevant to one's participation in contemporary society (Jenkins, 2007). Therefore, the study aims to examine how both messages reflecting European identity are coded and decoded by filmmakers, European institutions, and citizens of member states. By doing so it aims to gain insight into whether these funds are of societal value to all parties.

## **1.2 Research Question**

As outlined, the aim of this thesis is to gain new insight into how the concept of European identity is represented through films in receipt of funding from European institutions in a contemporary context. As justified in the methodological sections, the Council of Europe's 'Eurimages Cultural Support Fund' was the film funding tool by a European institution selected to focus on for this study. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

*How is European Identity represented through internationally co-produced films in receipt of the 'Eurimages Cultural Support Fund' between 2020 - 2022?*

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The following framework will provide some insight into some of the definitions used to frame the analysis. This will be achieved by outlining previous definitions on the nature of Identity, European identity, and the theories and prior research on these concepts.

### 2.1 Identity

To the individual, one's identity is an essential aspect of being a human being and the main thing differentiating oneself from others. Attempting to define what exactly is meant by identity is a difficult task as the term is by its nature ambiguous and can house many different potential interpretations. Indeed, many scholars have attempted to define it and its meaning has shifted as new approaches have been unveiled. We can however consider the term 'identity' as one that provides cover for a vast range of debates and discourses on matters concerning the 'individual', the 'subject', and the 'person' (Hadot, 2000). In the seventeenth century Rene Descartes developed the Cartesian theory which assumed that identity consisted of both the mind and matter as fundamentally detached mechanisms from one another (Descartes, 2012), meaning that the body and the mind existed independently of one another. The idea was contested by John Locke in his seminal essay *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) in which Locke theorises the idea of a 'tabula rasa' or an empty mind which is filled by experience, reflection, and sensation. He therefore theorises that consciousness is derived from the interactions the mind has with the external world. We can therefore consider Locke's conceptualisation of identity as one of psychological continuity, one based on his own conceptualisation of consciousness rather than what is contained in one's soul or body (Nimbalkar, 2011). Hall and du Gay (1996) argue that these conceptualisations of identity are simplistic and essentialist, ascertaining that this view disregards the complex nature of identity which is shaped more by ever fluctuating societal and cultural influences rather than a fixed internal force. Hall (1990) posits instead that the concept of identity and with it the idea of 'the self' or 'selves' are derived from a common history or experience between groups of people, suggesting that identity is formed from both lived experiences and one's relation to other people within a society.

On a metaphysical level, an individual human contains the innate desire to be a part of the larger world and hence consciously or subconsciously attempt to distinguish the aspects of themselves that differentiate them from others. It is this separation which comprises their identity (Albert, 1998). While this expression and individual conceptualisation of identity can be liberating and reaffirming for many individuals, its exhibition often fuels comparative

political rhetoric where the differences that define one's identity begin to play into ideologies around nationalism and racial conflict (Horowitz 1985; Smith 1991). Judith Butler (1990) suggests that identity is more of a social construct than previous scholars have indicated, arguing that the signifiers of identity are reinforced by the repetition of that performance in relation to how meaning has been ascribed to it. This can explain how collective identity is formed, through identification of the actions associated with what it means to be something and then the replication of this action as a means performance. On a localised scale this theory essentially accounts for the formation of national identity and explains how cultural signifiers are formed. Hayman (1971) outlines David Hume's argument that national identity or 'national character' is influenced by a myriad of factors including the geographical position and climate of a specific country or region as well as its political structures, history, and social institutions.

## **2.2 European Identity**

As illustrated by Higson (1989), "The search for a stable and coherent identity can be successful only at the expense of repressing internal differences, tensions, and contradictions" (p.43). This perhaps explains why scholars have been so conflicted in defining what exactly constitutes European identity. Identity is the foundation of any polity as it implies coherence, a common goal, and an expectation of solidarity, its absence often a reason for scepticism (White, 2012). While European institutions may not be individuals' main source of European identification, they have become an exclusive condition for it in scholarly research (Schilde, 2014) and are often used as an anchor in the rhetoric around European identity (Goddard et al., 1994). However, this can be a problematic framing of European Identity as a concept, for instance some countries consider themselves European while their cultural ideologies do not align with those of its institutions. Switzerland, for example have chosen not to align themselves with the European Union as they consider their neutrality a firm part of their national identity. Despite this, they remain as a highly significant figure on the European continent and share many traits with key European Union member states such as Germany and France (Morris & White, 2011). Ireland, by contrast is also a neutral country but for various reasons considers its membership in the European Union as of more importance than this facet of its identity (Avery, 2001). The disparity between the Swiss and Irish Approach in many ways highlights Schneeberger's idea that European identity is mediated through differences rather than similarities (2009), or as Cohen (1994) puts it, "you know who you are, only by knowing who you are not" (p.1).

The promotion of European identity has often been named as a method of distancing European institutions from their critics and to justify avoiding questions of their legitimacy (Shore 2013; Stråth, 2002). While Many scholars have given more concrete descriptions of European identity (Habermas,1990; Nicolaïdis, 2004), a lot of the attributes they describe lack cohesion and continuity when contrasted with those of individual countries of similar scale, namely United States and Australia but not limited too entire continents such as Africa (Palmberg, 2001). The similarities in European countries' traditional, religious, and cultural foundations have been cited as a contributor to European identity (Börzel and Risse, 2011; Green, 2007). This includes the idea that Europeans are those whose world views are based on Judaeo-Christian values, namely the importance of family, community, justice, equality, and monotheism (White, 2012). European states' geographical proximity to one and other along with their shared common history have also been said to unify them (Bojinovic, 2005). European identity is also often compared to the identities of similar western territories. The United States for instance is also highly concerned with class-conscious politics, one with significant and often militant ideological divides between the proletariat and the bourgeois (Lipset, 1964).

Definitions and explanations of European identity in academia have always carried contention, Krzyżanowski (2010) for instance notes that European identity is constructed by how European citizens create their own idea of Europe with which to identify. Malmberg & Stråth (2002) maintain that European identity is a term that has been colonized by elitist political narratives to further agendas. Stråth (2002) furtherly seeks to quantify European Identity to consolidate Europe's global power in the 1970s to combat their growing reliance on the value of the US dollar and of oil. These ideas about European identity offer merely a snapshot of the multitude of theories and ideas that surround the subject. For this study it is important to acknowledge these central ideas but also to recognise as Everett (2005) outlines, that there has never been and likely never will be a single definition of European identity as it encompasses so many factors and perspectives. This is essential to understand when analysing representations of European identity, the term's ambiguity does not limit the analysis but rather allows the researcher to observe how different filmmakers represent what it means to them and their societies. It will also demonstrate what representations of European identity European institutions deem worthy to fund in order to promote European unity.

## **2.3 Historical Context**

European history spans centuries of empires, civilisations, and developments that have largely been central to the development of the contemporary world (Mason, 2022). Anthony D. Smith (1993) outlines the notion of the paradox of interdependence between European countries, that on the one hand Europe has built a network between its countries based on industrialism, capitalism, and free trade, yet on the other hand has been increasingly divided by protest, social unrest, and war. This is an idea that continues to be proven true in contemporary times, demonstrated through both the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, but also through the steady rise of far right in contemporary Europe (Caiani & Weisskircher, 2022). Europe's extensive history has also been marked by some of global history's largest international conflicts and atrocities. World war I was fought mainly in Europe with Germany being the chief opposition to the rest of Europe. Its eventual defeat by western alliance's led to the pressure of reparations to rebuild a dishevelled Europe. The horrors of this war first spurred the call to develop a system of unification for Europe to prevent conflict of this scale occurring once again.

Richard Von Coudenhove-Kalergi first called for a federal European union in his 1923 book *Pan-Europa* (2019). This union sought to centre around France and Germany in order to discourage further European mass conflict. It also openly suggested the exclusion of the Soviet Union because of its communist system and Britain because of its imperialist agenda (Villanueva, 2005). *Pan-Europa* highlights Smith's paradox of interdependence even before World War II, that the exclusion of certain states due to ideological differences to the agenda of a unified Europe would counteract the very purpose of their introduction and ultimately create more conflict (Dinan, 2004). World War II perhaps highlighted this, with the rise of the Nazis in Germany and the slaughter of millions of Jewish people across Europe. The defeat of the Axis forces in 1945 brought with it a new sense of urgency in the attempt to unify Europe and ultimately led to the formation of the European Union as well as several other European institutions soon afterwards. These were all chiefly established to prevent the conflicts and genocides of a scale seen in World War II (Thody, 2002). Soysal (2000) indicates that Europe's historical associations with conflict and war has majorly affected European identity formation which is perhaps the reason for the preoccupation with war which is still present in many European societies today.

## **2.4 European Social structures**

Social structure is a term most applicable to sociology and anthropology and refers to the way in which human beings within a society have organised themselves in order to

interact with one another and to live their own individual lives within that society (Martin, J. 2009). This encompasses several factors with varying degrees of intersectionality which inform not only how individuals operate within a society but also how that society places value on that individual (Kuran et al., 2020). A full review of social structures would be incomplete without a review of the whole field of comparative institutions (Ginsberg, 2007). For simplicity's sake, social structure will be defined for the purposes of this study as a web of social forces which interact with one and other to create various modes of observing and thinking (Mannheim, 2013). Social structures and the influence of society has been shown to have a major influence on both individual identity and national identity, informing how one views themselves and others based a broad array of historical, cultural, and social aspects (David & Bar-Tal, 2009). It is important to note the complex intersectionality between the factors that comprise European social structures and that no one factor is dominant but rather connected in an infinite variety of complex ways. The following paragraphs will however discuss the most latent facets of European social structures, which the researcher found to be of most importance to conducting the analysis.

Marx (1867) defined class as one's relationship to the means of production, where The Bourgeoisie who own and control it were on top and the Proletariat or working class are forced to sell their labour to earn enough money to survive within a society. Although this is much more complex especially in contemporary times, these classifications compile the basic Socio-economic division of humans based on their social and economic status. This division is one of the central concerns of sociology and is the stem of many social issues (Argyle, 1994). These classifications are complex and multifaceted but boil down to two correlated factors, one's access to the means of production and how one organises themselves socially and culturally in a society in relation to this. The European union and other European institutions have sought to standardise class, seemingly in a bid to change the method of division Marx outlined. In 1999, Eurostat (the statistical arm of the European Union) produced a report which proposed the development of a common socio-economic classification for EU countries (Rose et al, 2001). This eventually led to the conceptualization and implementation of the European Socio-economic classification (ESeC) which is still in use by the European Union as a tool to measure class structures in Europe. This highlights European institutions awareness of the issues associated with class differences, but it has not yet been determined as to whether it has affected the contemporary European class system (Yfanti et al. 2001).

Gender is notably a primarily cultural frame for organizing societies and social relations (Ridgeway, 1997). Gender in this sense can be regarded as a collection of signifiers and social

codes and methods used in society for the organisation of meaning. Ridgeway affirms that gender is a form of human variation that is the most common cultural categorical system within a society (Ridgeway, 2007). The European Union's gender equality index has indicated that the development of gender equality in European countries still varies vastly from country to country (EIGE, 2017) making it difficult to recognise exactly how supranational gender ideologies can be made sense of in Europe. Davis and Greenstein (2009) describe gender ideology as an underlying concept, fundamental to the individual's level of support for a division of paid work and family responsibilities that is based on the notion of separated spheres. This is a useful tool to measuring conceptualisations of gender in the context of European social structures. Traditional gender roles in Europe often relate to this work-family balance where men are considered financially responsible and women are responsible for raising children and maintaining the household (Crespi and Lomazzi, 2018). In this respect, the attitudes both men and women have towards these gender roles, especially when coming from different European countries can be indicative to measuring attitudes towards gender equality in Europe (Bergh, 2006).

## **2.5 Representation of Identity in film**

Lacanian film theorists use Lacan's mirror stage theory as a basis to construct the idea of 'the gaze' (Birksted-Breen, 2014) which refers chiefly to the relationship between the characters and audience of a film. Film creates an illusion of reality, encouraging audiences to identify with characters and narratives, allowing filmmakers to manipulate this perception and hence construct a sense of identity that is absorbed by an audience (McGowan, 2012). This approach to film has informed many film scholars of how identity in film is constructed. This basis is therefore fundamental to establishing a framework for further research (Althusser, 2014). The idea is mediated by the disparity between a filmmaker's intended coding and how an audience receives it. Stuart Hall (1997) argues that audiences interpret meaning based on discursive resources such as life experience, gender, or race. Schank (1990) asserts that identity must not be considered as an abstract psychological concept but as something manifested through the narratives of our own lives. Creation and cohesion of these narratives can therefore be considered a fundamental aspect to how individuals make sense of their own lives and identities (Bamberg, 2004). This idea also accounts for the innate desire humans have for the creation and consumption of stories. In film, narratives are constructed through a combination of language (the script and performance) and the formal elements of film (the visual and auditory elements) which work in tandem to create meaning (Dyer, 1998). Language in film is studied because of its power to communicate meanings within society (Barker, 2008). By studying film, one can identify and understand the meanings they form within society

(During, 2005) and hence the role they have in the construction of identity. The formal elements of film such as Mise-en-scene, sound, editing, and cinematography also contribute heavily to the construction of identity as they are the main mechanisms for presenting the script's intended meanings to the audience (Burn & Parker, 2003). Siegfried Kracauer (2020) looks at film as an extension of photography, in that it exposes the visible world around us and is therefore a medium of representation with its own ability to capture realism through technology. These ideas are essential to this study as they offer an outline of the variety of methods in which identity can be constructed in film including both the formal elements of film as well as how notions of personal and national identity are performed within these parameters.

### **3. Method**

The following chapter outlines the research methodology applied to execute the analysis central to this study. It provides an explanation as to why the method of analysis was selected and also outlines why this was deemed to be the most suitable method to use in order to answer the research question at the core of this study. Section 3.1 defines qualitative thematic analysis and justifies why it was used as a research method. Section 3.2 describes the process of sampling, outlining the units of analysis and the process for selecting the final sample. Section 3.3 outlines how the key concepts of the study were operationalised in order to conduct the analysis and answer the research question. Section 3.4 provides a reflection on the validity and reliability of the entire research design.

#### **3.1 Research design**

The aim of the study was to gain insight into how European identity is represented in films in receipt of funding from the European Institutions. To be more specific, the study will focus on how European identity is represented in films in receipt of funding from the Council of Europe's Eurimages Cultural Support fund between the years 2020 – 2022. Therefore, the chief intention of the study was to answer the research question 'How is European Identity represented through internationally co-produced films in receipt of the 'Eurimages Cultural Support Fund' between 2020 – 2022?'. To achieve this, a qualitative method was deemed to be the most appropriate. Qualitative methodology permits a systemic and subjective approach which allows for the ascribing of meaning to different life experiences (Boeije, 2012). Further, qualitative research facilitates the examination of a variety of truths and meanings (Brennen, 2017) which is important for analysing films which incorporate different perspectives on the representation of European identity. The study therefore used films as data. To be more specific, full transcripts as well as a selection of screenshots from each film were used as units of data.

Film is a medium that centres on primary messages and is researched to find meanings of culturally mediated products (Neuendorf, 2017). The ideas and messages expressed in films are integral to detecting how identity is constructed within them, most often but not exclusively through its narrative (Halverson, 2010). Therefore, analysing the transcript of each selected film was integral to observing how meanings are made through language, scene descriptions / directions, and narrative. Many texts create meaning not only through language but also through other semiotic modes (Machin & Mayr, 2023). As film can be considered a multimodal medium, it is important to select a research method that can analyse not just

textual elements of the film, but also visual elements while allowing for the meaning created from their combination to be analysed (Reavey, 2021).

Qualitative thematic analysis is a method which allows the researcher to find meanings from data in the form of a message (Williamson et al., 2018). In this case the films are the data, and the message can be regarded as the various representations of European identity. Thematic analysis can be characterized by a systemic classification system in which groups of themes are revealed through identifying, analysing, and combining data (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015). These themes can reveal important features about the data which can be used to answer the research question (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Qualitative thematic analysis was therefore selected as it was deemed to be the most appropriate method for answering the research question. This is because it is highly suitable for large amounts of text such as dozens of pages of film scripts (Guest et al., 2014) and was selected for this reason. Thematic Analysis is also highly flexible in nature, allowing for the incorporation of a multitude of established theories to support insights found in the text (Guest et al., 2014).

As Deleuze (2000) notes “a work of art is a new syntax, one that is much more important than vocabulary and that excavates a foreign language in language” (p.370). This highlights the multifaceted layers of meaning making a film has the power to create. The semiotic aspects of film are as equally important to its script, both of which can be considered a language shaped by society (Machin & Mayr, 2012). The suitability of different aspects of the film’s visuals are informed by their cultural significance as well as its context within a larger text (Murray & Nash, 2017). This is to say that the researcher’s judgement as well as the cultural significance of each unit was a large factor in the process of selecting what aspects of the film to analyse. European cinema is often defined by its ambiguity as well its attempt to create meaning specific to each viewer (Everett, 2005). This means that the researchers own specific interpretation of messages within the films were based on their own personal and cultural understandings as well as their prior knowledge of film theory. The researcher’s interpretations of the films are therefore deemed equally as valid as any other individual interpretations of them, in other words, the researcher approached the data with the informed opinion that the texts do not contain objective truths but are designed to be interpretable by the viewer (Van Damme & Van Bauwel, 2012). This approach has been successfully incorporated into humanities and studies of audio-visual data to add nuance and to venture beyond fixed meanings (Larsen, 2002). For the purposes of this study, qualitative thematic analysis can therefore be considered an interpretative approach, allowing the researcher to describe the emerging themes and topics that are considered the most meaningful for the

research objectives at the core of the conducted study (Williamson et al., 2018). This was applied to both the film's transcripts as well as through the screenshots selected from the films.

### **3.2 Sampling**

To answer the research question at the core of this study, a sample of suitable films was created. This sample was created by establishing a suitable criterion to ensure that the sample aligned with the research question as well as a variety of other factors which will be explained in the following section. As Qualitative methodology is highly flexible in nature, it allows for the incorporation and integration of multiple approaches to the analysis (Boeije, 2012). Therefore, both purposive and criterion-based sampling were used to select data for the research. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the data is selected based on the researcher's judgment of its suitability (Babbie, 2010). Criterion-based sampling involves selecting data that meets a certain set of criteria (Boeije, 2012). This was done by establishing a criterion which aligns with the framework and is most suitable to answering the research question. As purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique, it allowed the researcher to incorporate criterion-based sampling and to select a sample based on the set of criteria dictated by both the research question and the researcher's judgement of its relevance (Boeije, 2012).

Firstly, the researcher identified the two primary funds which are offered by European institutions (The European Union and The Council of Europe). The first fund offered is The MEDIA (measures to encourage the development of the audio-visual production industry) programme, which was established in 1991 by the European Union to support all European Audio-visual industries. It does so by providing financial aid to the development, production, distribution, and promotion stages of European audio-visual projects. MEDIA's primary concern is the stimulation and support of the European audio-visual industries (European Commission, n.d.). The second fund offered is The Eurimages Cultural support fund, which was established in 1988 by the Council of Europe to support European co-productions (Council of Europe, n.d.). As many countries were not yet ready to see the European Community deal with cultural matters, it was established by the council of Europe rather the European union (Hammett-Jamart, 2018). As the Council of Europe is an institution with the goal of protecting human rights in Europe, Eurimages is an instrument to aid the freedom of artistic expression of Europeans (Council of Europe, n.d.). This is achieved this by financially supporting filmmakers who wish to voice alternative messages and perspectives with the means to express themselves where private funding may not be easily attained (Hammett-

Jamart, 2018). Co-productions are emphasised for several reasons including cultural exchange between European countries, the pooling of financial and creative assets, and the sharing of cultural perspectives between European countries with the goal of solidifying and enriching the European film Industry (Hammett-Jamart, 2018). Eurimages has supported many films since its establishment. In 2021 it funded 110 films which received an average of 234.4 thousand euros each, totalling 25.8 million euros altogether (Council of Europe, n.d.).

Based on an evaluation of both funds, it was decided that films funded by the Eurimages cultural support fund would be a key criterion for the selection process of the sample and would hence be incorporated into the research question at the core of this study. This was because the study is concerned with the expression of European identity within films which aligns most closely with the aims of Eurimages. MEDIA focuses on all aspects of Audio-visual European culture, Eurimages focuses chiefly on films. MEDIA is also focused on stimulating the audio-visual industry's financial success while Eurimages aims to support freedom of speech by supporting films that may not have access, to funds as their chief goal may not be to generate profit but rather exhibit the expression of a minority voice or society (Eurimages, 2022). As former executive director of Eurimages Robert Olla phrases it in (Hammett-Jamart, 2018) "industry, economics and financials [are] embedded in the very name of the MEDIA programme, [While] Eurimages, from the very beginning, had a cultural role/remit" (p.244). For these reasons, the researcher determined that the Eurimages cultural support fund was most suitable fund for measuring the representation of European identity.

Co-productions have been established as being of major importance for European film funding. The European Convention on Cinematographic Co-production (1992) stresses this importance, citing co-production as "an instrument of creation and expression of cultural diversity on a European scale" (p.1). Co-production between European countries promotes the pooling of resources and talent from multiple countries who can learn from each other and in the process promote European unity and cultural diversity (COE, 1992). Co-production is an intrinsic part of filmmaking; filmmakers naturally crave diverse locations and unknown stories which cause many to enter co-productions without any further intention (Hammett-Jamart et al., 2018). It was clear from both the continued success of European co-production (De Vinck, 2009) and the fact that co-productions are almost the only category of film to be eligible for funding from European institutions, that they are the main tool for exhibiting European identity. This is because they naturally incorporate multiple European cultures and perspectives and were therefore found to be highly suitable to include as a feature of the criterion for the analysis.

The Geographic scope of the selection criteria was done in accordance with the Eurimages criteria, stating that at least two member states of Eurimages must be involved in the film's production (Council of Europe, n.d.). Attention was also given to the diversity of countries, so that films involving co-production from as many areas of Europe as possible were included in the sample. This is because the tendency to equate European cinema with central Europe is not an accurate portrayal of the whole European film industry (Everett, 2005). Eastern Europe's cinematic landscape for instance, is equally as relevant to the construction of European identity as countries more commonly associated with European Identity in film such as France or Italy (Everett, 2005). Attention was therefore be given to maintaining diversity of countries within the sample.

The films selected for the sample were released between the years 2020 – 2022, this is because the aim of the study is to focus on data from a recent period to keep the study relevant. Right before and during these years, many international events also took place which challenged the concept of Europe and European identity. The European Union's handling of the 2015 migrant crisis and the following investigations has led to a recent increase of Euroscepticism (Scipioni, 2017). The United Kingdom's vote to exit the European union in 2016 and subsequent departure in 2020 highlighted the emerging Euroscepticism sentiment across many European countries (Malloy et al., 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic and The European Union's handling of this has also been cited as a cause of increase for Euroscepticism (Samadashvili, 2020). These factors accumulate to indicate that the years selected are of importance to this study and will help to ensure that the analysis yields relevant results.

The criterion was used to generate a shortlist of appropriate films. The films were then preliminarily assessed by the researcher and observed for potential themes that may be appropriate to answering the research question. Through this process, three films were selected from the shortlist and deemed as most appropriate for the analysis. The three films were selected for the purposes as meeting the time constraints as well as to align with the methodological guidelines of the study. The primary source for locating films was the Eurimages website which contains a list of all the films they have funded, categorised by year (Eurimages). The following criterion was therefore used to select the data.

Overall, selected films for the sample must...

A) Be in receipt of the Eurimages Cultural support Fund.

- B) Be co-produced by at least 2 European countries which are member states of the Council of Europe.
- C) Have been released between the years of 2020 – 2022.
- D) Be set in Europe or explore themes of European identity.

A shortlist was generated with films meeting the criteria which was comprised of 283 films. The shortlist was refined to generate a sample of films for analysis based on the specificity of the research question as well as informed by the degree to which they met the criteria. The three selected films were studied and a nuanced justification for their selection is shown:

*Triangle of Sadness* (Ruben Östlund, 2022)

This film was selected for analysis as the number of countries involved with its production is noticeably broad compared to others (Sweden, Germany, France, United Kingdom, Mexico, Denmark, Greece, Switzerland, United States, Turkey). This is reflected in the film's plot which is highly international and features a broad array of European nationalities who interact with each other. It also features a contemporary setting which was deemed relevant to the currency of the study and contemporary notions of European Identity. The film also notably won the Palme d'Or award at the Cannes film festival in 2022.

*Titane* (Julia Ducournau, 2021)

This film was selected for analysis as it was co-produced by France and Belgium. France has long since held high esteem in European cinematic history. The Council of Europe is based in Strasbourg, France and the European Union is based in Brussels, Belgium. A film co-produced by such prominent countries in policymaking was an important perspective to observe. The film incorporates elements of surrealism which removes it from absolute reality. This provides a blank canvas on which representations of European identity can be observed. The film also notably won the Palme d'Or award at the Cannes film festival in 2021.

*February* (Kamern Kalev, 2020)

This Film was selected for analysis as it focuses on identity within Bulgaria, an Eastern European country. As previously outlined, Eastern European cinema is often neglected in conversations about European cinema and is therefore important to include. The film is also a co-production between Bulgaria and France, highlighting the representation of identity in two geographically diverse European countries. This relationship was deemed by the

researcher to be of major interest with the hope that it will add nuance to the study. The film was also officially selected for exhibition at the Cannes films festival in 2020.

Transcripts for films were gathered and constructed by the researcher in a variety of manners based on their availability. The transcript for *Triangle of Sadness* was extracted from the Internet movie script database [imsdb.com](https://www.imsdb.com) in its entirety. *Titane* was transcribed by the researcher using the subtitle file (SRT) which was extracted from a Blue-ray disk copy of the film. The researcher watched the film and annotated each point of action until a transcript was formed. The researcher contacted the director of *February*, Kamen Kalev who was happy to share a copy of the film online which contained subtitles with which the researcher was able to annotate in order to create a transcript which was deemed to be usable for the study. Film transcripts were coded using a combination of Atlas TI and Microsoft excel. Screenshots from the film were selected based on what the researcher deemed most relevant to demonstrating thematic features of the film. A full overview of the three films is included in Appendix A.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The analysis took both an inductive and deductive approach to identifying signs of European identity, meaning that the researcher both generated themes and patterns from the analysis itself as well as leaving the analysis process open to revealing other possible concepts and ideas to emerge preconceived ideas or theories about the images (Boeije, 2012; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman, 2012). Thematic analysis was hence used to analyse all selected scripts and accompanying screenshots in order to identify and interpret meanings at both latent and manifest levels. Through this analysis, codes were created using inductive coding to generate themes based on the data. The nature of the codes varied on a case-to-case basis, sometimes representing theoretical or analytical concepts, practical elements, descriptions, or simply that which was of interest to the researcher (Boeije, 2012). The scripts were read multiple times by the researcher and films were also watched alongside this. Open coding was used to identify fragments and determine why each fragment is meaningful to the film to establish themes. Next Axial coding was used to furtherly identify patterns evident from initial codes that will be grouped together and merged to create axial codes. Codes were integrated and discarded based on their relevance to the research question. Selective coding was then used to establish the most significant and relevant themes and patterns identified in the previous stages of the analysis. These themes were used as evidence and examples of how European identity is constructed in each script.

As data units in this case were not limited to just words but could also include, images and stills from the films, the researcher gathered screenshots from the films using purposeful sampling in tandem with the coding of the film's script. This Meant that the screenshots were deemed by the researcher to be of relevance to potential meanings. Attention was given to the salience of these images as outlined by Machin and Mayr (2012) with particular focus on identifying potential cultural symbols that reflect European identity. Instruments used for film analysis were used to analyse the screenshots and their relationship to the script. For instance, aspects of t Mise-en-scene of the screenshots were considered in the analysis such as the character's appearance (costume, hairstyle, body language etc), use of props and location / set, and in camera aspects such as composition of the frame, camera angles, choice of lenses, and focus. These all combine to create messages and meaning within a film. Coding was therefore inclusive of both textual aspects of the film, visual aspects of the film, and their relationship. This included identifying aspects that either: complimented each other, contradicted each other, where one aspect changed the meaning of the other because of either its presence or lack thereof, or otherwise interacted to suggest or support a potential theme to the researcher (Trombeta & Cox, 2022). the researcher hence aimed to make the best educated guess or explored the most likely and relevant interpretation of the text.

### **3.3 Operationalization**

The inclusion of operationalisation in the methodological guidelines aims to offer the reader insight into how certain concepts have been defined and then measured within the study which will later be come across in the results and discussion section (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996). This also adds to the transparency of the research and can allow readers to trace the efficiency of the analysis from the establishment of concepts, the employment of them as a measurement tool, and how they ultimately lead to a conclusion that sufficiently answers the research question. The concept of European identity was operationalised through "signifiers of European identity" which were measured using the following concepts. Firstly, through the frequency of occurrence and signifiers of European culture, traditions, and religion (Börzel and Risse, 2011). This took the form of cultural and geographically specific symbols, references, images, and language. They were measured based on their similarities, differences, and relationships to one another. To demonstrate this through an example, open codes related to 'food' were grouped through axial coding as cultural signifiers when placed in the context of visually and textual significance to the expression of culture. This process varied majorly in practice, specific coding logic varied on a case-by-case basis and throughout the analysis many nuances were found to inform the final

themes. These consisted of but were limited to, visual identity, traditions, morals, and philosophies. Attention was given to the meaning behind the signifier and what tools were used to embed this message within the film (visual, textual, multimodal etc). The main tools used included the language used by characters, scene directions, mise-en-scene, location, set choice, use of props, and costume. The researcher comprised the methods of representation during the coding phase and arranged them in order of frequency in order to establish patterns and to answer the research question.

### **3.4 Quality in qualitative research: Validity, reliability, and reflexivity**

Reliability refers to the degree in which the study's findings are independent of accidental circumstances involved in their production (Hammersley, 1992). This is mainly for the purposes of reproduction of the study but can often affect results. Some limitations exist within qualitative research such as the lack of ability to generalize amongst a larger population as can be done with quantitative research. This is because qualitative methods use a smaller sample size to reach conclusions (Atieno, 2009). Qualitative research is also more prone to be influenced by the biases of the researcher which can affect the subjectivity of the research. In the case of analysing representations of European identity, the researcher may be influenced by factors such as their own individual biography (Broom et al, 2009) and the Nuances of some specific aspects of European identity. Certain aspects of cultural identity may be overlooked due to the researchers lack of knowledge about these cultures. In this case the researcher came from Ireland, a member state of The European Union and The Council of Europe, yet one that is slightly more isolated from central European based rhetoric. As outlined in the research design, European cinema is characterised by its ambiguity and lack of fixed meanings (Everett, 2005), and therefore one researcher's interpretation of meanings may vary vastly from another's. This does not expressly affect validity or reliability but may create significant disparity in any replications of this study. Variables that may affect this may also include, Knowledge of film theory and practice, independent biases against certain countries, and personal level of Euroscepticism. To minimize potential biases, the researcher employed theoretical transparency to the best of their abilities using the framework of (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006) by describing the research strategy and methodology in a detailed manner and highlighting how interpretations were made in as much detail as possible.

## 4. Results and Discussion

The Following section presents and discusses the results found from the study by exploring the four themes found from the analysis of the films from the sample. These themes aimed to both conceptualisation and measure how European identity was represented in these films. The first and most dominant theme explored in the films was the Representation of European Social Structures. This related chiefly to the depiction of European socioeconomic and class-based divisions and Gender. This theme was mainly observed through each film's representation of how these structures shape individual's own lives and experiences and demonstrated the extent to which their adherence and subversion to these structures change how they do so. The second theme found was the representation of the expression of identity, on both personal and national levels. This mainly relates to how different European identities express and engage with their own identities. The third theme found was the representation of conflict and suffering. This theme mainly related to a noticeable preoccupation with aspects of European history such as war and division as an intrinsic part of its identity. The fourth theme found was the representation of European interdependence. This theme relates to the representation of European citizens are reliance on one another. The following section outlines both the results of the analysis in detail and discusses the results with the intention of exploring the representations of European identity found in the films to answer the research question.

### 4.1 Representation of European social structures

The theme of European social structures was represented in several ways throughout the analysis. All of the films highlighted how an individual's position within different European social structures affects both their own and others' perception of identity. This theme was mainly expressed within the films to both criticise the injustices within these social structures but also to reflect on the ways that they inform European identity. The following subchapters focus on how different aspects of European social structures are represented in the films and how these factors affect the representation of European identity.

#### 4.1.1 Class

The analysis confirmed as outlined in the framework, that European identity is often represented as being majorly affected by ones' social class within their respective societies (Lipset, 1964). This concept was most noticeably showcased in *Triangle of Sadness* and *February*, both of which use this idea to criticise how this system operates within European societies, often highlight the injustices of class division. The contrast between different social

classes was shown to be a prominent way of exploring the general theme of class throughout the analysis, revealing that one's social class was often represented as being a major part of their identity. *Triangle of Sadness* highlights this idea most prominently through the representation of members of different social classes on the luxury cruise ship which is the setting of the second act of the film. The cruise ship is used as a metaphor for how societies are divided by class, highlighting how the theme of class division arises prominently within the ship. The three Screenshots (Figure 1 – 3) highlight how the theme of class division has been visually represented by the film using the lens of Marx's concept of class structures (1867). In Figure 3 we see the cleaners and maintenance crew sitting in basic fluorescent light, they have darker skin and wear dark uniforms, and look up as the service crew above bang on the floors. Figure 2 shows the service crew who are celebrating in a primal chant at the prospect of getting a massive tip from the cruise guests, as demonstrated in the following extract from the transcript:

Chief Stewardess Paula: Yes! I know, I know what it is to work for service. I know all the challenges you're facing, but at these times, I ask of you to keep that chin up. Stay strong and try to remind yourself that if everything goes well at the end of the cruise...

*The people at one of the tables start doing a drum roll with their hands on the table...*

Crew: Money, money, money

Chief Stewardess Paula: A very generous tip...

Crew: Money! Money! Money! Money!

*The staff cheers.*

(Östlund, 2022)

The crew are placed in a space with slightly more lavish lighting than the cleaners and maintenance staff. They wear white formal uniforms and are shown to be delighted at the prospect of gaining additional wealth. In figure 1 we see Carl and Yaya, the guests of the ship who are at the very top floor in a considerably more luxurious room than the others. They lay in bed without any clothes on, luxurious curtains flanking the open windows which projects natural light onto their bodies. The sequence from which these three images are taken from was interpreted by the researcher as a visual representation of meaning in line with Burn & Parker's outline (2003).

Figure 1. Screenshot from *Triangle of Sadness* (2022) depicting Carl and Yaya asleep in their lush room at the top level of the cruise ship.



Figure 2. Screenshot from *Triangle of Sadness* (2022) depicting the service staff in the middle level of the ship, celebrating the prospect of a large tip by dancing and chanting.



Figure 3. Screenshot from *Triangle of Sadness* (2022) depicting the cleaning and maintenance staff at the lowest level of the cruise ship, wearing dark uniforms, and looking up at the banging from the service staff above.



The theme of the of the class as a European social structure is shown in *February* through the protagonist, Petar's experiences of his Military service in the Bulgarian Naval services. This is chiefly demonstrated though Petar's interactions with members of different Bulgarian social classes during this time. For instance, The Lieutenant constantly belittles

Petar for being of a lower class than him through insults about his hometown and his rural upbringing, calling the people from his hometown primitives:

Lieutenant: Are you all such primitives there in Elhovo?  
(Kalev, 2020)

He eventually offers Petar an officer's rank with the promise of a good salary and benefits, assuring him that he needn't return to his home in Elhovo. Petar however, embraces the prospect of the return to his life as a shepherd, his grandfather is shown to have informed the values Petar has tied to this, which the higher classed Lieutenant does not understand, calling him a peasant:

Petar: My grandfather was a shepherd, my father too, and I am going to be a Shepherd.

Lieutenant: So, you're going to be a shepherd? What are you mumbling, you pussy! I'm offering you a rank and you want to be a Shepherd! Grandfather, bullshit! Get out of here! You peasant! Get out!  
(Kalev, 2020)

The representation of class as a concern of European identity is furtherly demonstrated *Triangle of Sadness* by the rich guests who constantly exploit the working-class employees and show an utter unawareness that that they are even doing so. The cleaning and maintenance staff as well as the service staff are all shown to hate the rich guests yet are also submissive to them because of their reliance on them. The rich guests demonstrate their feelings of entitlement over the lower classes on the cruise ship and are unable to see how their perspectives differ due to their class and financial position. Wealth is often represented in the film as a tool used by the upper classes to control the lower classes, reflecting Marx's (1867) theory of class divisions. This is demonstrated when Vera, a Russian Billionaire forces the pool assistant Alicia to go into the jacuzzi in her clothes:

Vera: Let's reverse roles.

Alicia: Sorry?

Vera: Just change roles. You relax in the jacuzzi, and I'll get the captain. Come on! Just be in the moment, like I was. Please!

(Östlund, 2022)

Vera is aware that Alicia will do as she commands for fear of losing her job and the knowledge of this power over her gives her pleasure. Indeed, the exploitation of the working class by the upper class is a reoccurring theme within the film. Yaya and Carl romanticize the working-class during sex, Carl plays the role of a pool boy who is being exploited by Yaya's father and showing how despite draining their whole life to support their luxurious lifestyles, they are still not even granted the slightest respect from them. This as an illustration of Marxist theory is heavily supported by the ship's Captain's constant references Marx. Although he is the highest-ranking member of the ship, he doesn't engage in the tormenting of the crew as the guests do, instead he locks himself away in his cabin and drinks alcohol, but still ultimately ignores the injustices he preaches. Dimitry, The Russian Billionaire constantly references the fact that he made his fortune by selling shit (fertilizer), indicating that although he is aware of the inherent exploitation he has partaken in, he has become numb to it after becoming too used to the comfort that money that it grants him. The ideologies of the socialist figures such as Marx and Lenin are used to highlight how the exploitation of the working class relates to their own identities and by proxy, their own position withing the system of social hierarchy.

Overall, the rich and upper classes were generally represented as ignorant to the nuances of the world as they use their wealth as social protection and often merely to pass the time. Working classes were shown as more morally pure yet more vulnerable being used as a tool to the upper classes. European class structures are shown through the pecking order on the ship with the guests being the upper class, the primary ship crew being the middle classes and the cleaning staff acting as the proletariat or working class. Their interaction aboard the ship not only showcases how these different forms of class operate, but how each constructs their own identity based on their understanding of one another (Hayman, 1971). The analysis ultimately showed a strong disparity between the creation of wealth and labour as well as how personal and societal value are dictated by financial position and career (Kuran et al., 2020). The representation of labour is shown as important to European identities and is often linked to fulfilment in contrast to those who have inherited wealth without effort. This is tied to European values of work ethic and community which are key to shaping the understanding of how career and wealth affects identity (White, 2012).

#### **4.1.2 Gender**

Coincidentally, the analysis affirmed that gender was represented as having a large impact on one's identity within European cultures, suggesting that one's gender as well as family are often indicative to perceptions of their own identity. Women's identities were often represented as being confined to the being the subject of the male gaze and defined by

male desire. This was represented in *Titane* through the representation of the journey to escape, which was linked to female European identity. For instance, Alexia, the female protagonist is at the beginning of the film, coded with signifiers of tradition female identity. Figure 4 shows Alexia working at a strip club, showing how the director chooses to represent her in comparison to how she viewed by her male patrons. This is achieved by visually highlighting her similarities to the car. This both highlights Alexia's objectification as a woman in European society and establishes Alexia's link to cars which is used a motif throughout the film to express this objectification. This comparison is highlighted furtherly by the colour similarity of the car and Alexia's lingerie.

*Figure 4: Screenshot from Titane (2021) portraying Alexia dancing atop a car in a strip club highlighting how she is objectified by the male patrons.*



Indeed, *Titane's* plot focuses chiefly on Alexia's attempt to escape her identity after the murders she has committed catch up with her and she is wanted by the police. While on the run, she disguises herself as the missing son of Vincent. Alexia strips herself of the signifiers of her femininity, cutting her hair short and binding her breasts and pregnant belly with binding tape. This reveals how long hair is considered a signifier of female identity in European societies. Figure 5 depicts Alexia's transformation into a man by ridding herself of such female signifiers. It also demonstrates how *Titane* uses the mirror as a visual metaphor for the reflection of one's own identity which reoccurs throughout the film to explore characters relationships with their own identity.

Figure 5: Screenshot from *Titane* (2021) showing Alexia transforming herself into a man.



Alexia becomes more confident and secure in her own identity when she takes on the role of Vincent' son which is enforced by those around her treating her like they would a man. She becomes more in tune with her own identity because she is less effected by how she is treated by others which affects how she views her own identity. At one point Alexia attempts to run away from this new identity but is reminded of how European society and particularly men treat women as objects of desire. Alexia boards a bus with the intention of fleeing Vincent. She sits across from another woman who begins to be harassed by a group of men:

First man: Chill. Just wanna talk to you, we won't hurt you!

Second man: Forget talking, Be direct, bruh. I'd turn her around and shove it in her ass.

Alexia and the woman turn to glance at each other.

Third man: Pussy, mouth, wherever she wants! Even in her ear, bruh

Second man: Hey, slut! We say two words and they think we wanna gang bang.

Third man: We're talking to you! Turn around!

First man: She thinks she's a star.

(Ducournau, 2021)

This scene highlights the representation of the treatment of women in contemporary European societies, demonstrating the idea of the journey that a women must go through to earn approval for her identity in comparison to men who are much more easily accepted.

The theme of gender is represented through the contrast between traditional European Gender role and modern gender roles. It was shown through the analysis that both men and women are represented as having different viewpoints on gender roles as they are

affected by them differently. This is exhibited in *Triangle of Sadness* through Carl and Yaya's turbulent relationship which is represented as an embodiment of the dichotomy between traditional European gender roles and the new models of gender roles which lean towards equality and are at the least more flexible than traditional ones. Carl wants their relationship to be more equal and is annoyed that he is constantly required to pay for their meals, even though Yaya makes more money than him:

Yaya: it's just not sexy to talk about money.

Carl: Well, you don't think it's because it's so tied to gender roles? The menu in the restaurant didn't even have prices for you.

Yaya: That's not fair, Carl. I'm always paying.

Carl: Let's take you out of it and just talk about women in general.

(Östlund, 2022)

Carl's desire to not conform to traditional gender roles is shown to be informed by his feelings of emasculation. This is caused by the fact that Yaya earns more money than him, which adds further dimension to the sub-theme of traditional gender rolls and gives insight into why traditional gender roles are still followed within European society. This is furtherly demonstrated when Yaya confirms that she does hold a lot of value on these roles:

YAYA: What if I fall pregnant and I can't go on working... I need to know that the person I'm with intends to take care of me. Otherwise, I'm wasting my time.

(Östlund, 22)

This demonstrates that these gender roles operate within European societies for factors related not only to tradition but also for practical and biological reasons.

The results of the analysis revealed that that gender as a social structure is represented in European film as having a multitude of effects on identity including. This highlights how these factors affect the understanding and expression of one's own identity as well as how the societal pressures of performing gender roles shapes the understanding and expression of one's own identity.

#### **4.2 Representation of the expression of European Identity**

Throughout the analysis there was a reoccurring theme relating to the different modes of which the expression of identity is represented by the films within the sample. This falls

mainly into two sub-themes: The way in which personal identity is represented and the way in which national identity is represented. The following subchapters will outline the two facets of these findings.

#### 4.2.1 personal Identity

The expression of personal identity was revealed to be of interest of the films in the analysis. The representation of how individuals manage their emotions was shown to be a major way in which individuals expressed their own identities. Different European cultures have different societal expectations which allow for different degrees of emotional expression. The way individuals navigate these expressions and their level of adherence to them is indicative of their own identities. The analysis found for example that In France, while the expression of emotion is valued, maintaining a strong personal image within social spheres is valued above this. In *Titane* Vincent is portrayed as a man who tries to conform to the hegemonic model of masculinity. He acts reserved and in control of his emotions in public spheres such as when working in the Fire service. This is demonstrated in the change of speech and demeanour in different social settings when expressing his emotions, for instance the way he expresses his anger at one the officer's who questions the legitimacy of Alexia as his son:

VINCENT: A little advice, take it or leave it, Fireman Legrand is my son. And who am I to you? I'm God. Which makes him Jesus.

(Ducournau, 2022)

By contrast when Vincent is with Alexia or alone, he is much more emotionally expressive, several instances were found of Vincent crying during these moments. This demonstrates how men specifically are shown to be looked down upon in European societies for expressing their emotions in public. Similarly in *Triangle of Sadness*, social image is shown as being considered more important than social image by Europeans. Lewis, a fashion director categorises emotional expression through different fashion brands, associating high fashion with emotional repression (the apex model) and emotional expression such as showing happiness as discount brands such as H&M (inferior). This can be observed in the following extract from the transcript:

*Carl and the other models go back to a disdainful scowl.*

Lewis (Cont'd) "We are strong and tough and unapproachable!" Show me that Balenciaga look! Oh, I'm sorry, I think it's back to H&M again!

*The models laugh, grin, shift around.*

(Östlund, 2022)

The analysis also identified the reoccurring theme of music and dance as expression of personal identity and found that it generally was shown to provide some sort of relief to those involved with it. In *February*, Petar when faced with a night stuck in the harsh snow, decides simply to dance, move his body, in an indication that there is not much else to do but expressing himself physically will at least make things a bit better (Figure).

Figure 6. A screenshot from *February* (Kalev 2020) depicting the dance Petar does when he realises, he will be stuck in the snow overnight.



In a similar way, dance and music are depicted as a form of remedy in *Titane*. The firemen distract themselves from the suffering they see in their work by dancing and listening to music in the station. This can also be seen in Vincent and Alexia who use music to defuse their arguments, often leading to them dancing together which is shown to have the ability to reconcile their arguments without words. This highlights the importance of music and dance to both the expression of European identity.

#### 4.2.2 National identity

The analysis showed that the expression of national identity was an important factor when representing European identity. As stated previously, European countries often share a host of similarities, and are in fact often defined by their differences (Schneeberger, 2009). Europeans were often represented in the films from the sample as highly nationalistic, often

wanting to demonstrate their own differences when in the company of other European nationalities. This was best illustrated in *Triangle of Sadness* as it features a broad mixture of European nationalities in interaction with one another. Dimitry talks of not much else but of Russia and Eastern Europe, constantly comparing it to Western Europe. He however represents himself as outside that sphere due to his disagreement with communism and Marxism as he considers himself a staunch capitalist which he ties to the identity of the West. This highlights how one's political and economic ideologies can be used as a signifier of their identity. Deferral from these stereotypical perceptions of national ideologies can hence be considered as an important nuance when examining the representation of identity on a national and supranational level. Many of the guests on the cruise also use their nationality to introduce themselves, suggesting that by knowing one's nationality, one can gain a better sense of their own identity. This is demonstrated when Clementine introduces herself as British directly after stating her name:

Clementine: My name is Clementine. And this is my husband, Winston. We're from Great Britain.

(Östlund, 2022)

National identity was also represented through depictions of various European culture. This emerged in the form of cultural codes such as food and drink. Food preparation was shown as major cultural signifier of national identity and not purely to nourish the individual but also as an expression of one's cultural identity. The rituals associated with food consumption were shown to be associated with those of the Judeo-Christian values, aligning with the concept of 'breaking bread', and the cultural significance of preparing and eating foods with members of your family or society. *February* demonstrates this through the images of food it displays in the various points of Petar's life. The film ties the depiction of preparing and consuming food to the portrait of routine it paints of rural Bulgarian life. Alcohol consumption similarly emerged as a representation of European identity to national identity among European countries with types of alcohol varying across European nationalities. A country's relationship with alcohol and national alcohol of choice was sometimes shown as an expression of their national identity. Eastern Europeans such as Dimitry in *Triangle of sadness* were shown to favour hard liquor such as vodka while Western Europe favoured wine and beer.

### 4.3 Representation of Conflict and suffering

The theme of War as a preoccupation of European identity was found to be represented in all three films, often manifesting through the depiction of war as something that has disrupted and reconfigured identity on both a personal and national level. Petar's life as a shepherd in Rural Bulgaria is disrupted when he is conscripted to join the Bulgarian naval service during the second world war, highlighting how war has disrupted so many lives in Europe. Kalev uses the structure of his film to highlight this, sandwiching Petar's military service between two depictions of Petar's chosen life at young and old age. This demonstrates how this part of Petar's identity has been disrupted by his involvement in war. Petar is essentially forced to do so by both his government, by the societal pressures around him as well as his own feeling of nationalism. This is furtherly demonstrated when Petar's Lieutenant requests for him to stay in the naval forces after his service is over. Petar opens up about his own identity, affirming that he is a shepherd and although he is servicing his military service for the good of his country, he ultimately wishes to return to who is he really is. Another facet of the preoccupation of war is depicted through the British couple Winston and Clementine in *Triangle of Sadness* who have earned their vast fortune by manufacturing and selling explosive devices:

CARL: What do you manufacture?

WINSTON: Well, our products have been employed in upholding democracy all over the world ... Basically, our bestselling product is the hand grenade.

(Östlund, 2022)

This highlights how war is still ever-present in European societies and is a key indicator of contemporary European identities.

Another facet of this preoccupation with war and conflict emerges through the sub-theme of suffering as a preoccupation of European identity, which was also revealed through the analysis, mainly manifested in two main ways. Firstly, through the representations of suffering as a condition for the search for identity. This idea is demonstrated in *Titane* through Alexia's search for identity. Alexia's pregnancy is used as a signifier of her ties to the female gender, which she spends the course of the film attempting to escape. Alexia constantly binds her pregnant belly and breasts to hide this part of herself which leads to depictions of extreme physical pain but also the emotional pain it causes her to be attached to this:

*Alexia stands in the shower, feeling her pregnant belly, it is now very large, as she touches it a portion of it moves and a black substance leak from it, her body is shown to be covered in scars, She cries out in pain but takes out tape and binds her belly once again.*

(Ducournau, 2021)

Despite Alexia's clear agony at her afflictions, as well as the implicated health repercussions of her actions, Alexia continues to prioritise the hiding of her identity and gender.

This theme of conflict and suffering was an effective way to measure the extent to which The Council of Europe's aim's for Eurimages were met as it concerns their chief intentions of promoting unity and preventing further conflict from occurring. In this regard unity is the inverse of conflict and is exactly what they promote through funds such as the Eurimages Cultural support fund, MEDIA, as well as through various other initiatives. By supporting films that actively engage with the representation of how the preoccupation of war still effects Europe and its citizens, the promotion of European unity is exhibited to European audiences and framed as something in place to heal this trauma. While Europe is often defined by its differences as well as its diversity, the inherent conflict tied to contrasting perspectives means that while unity is possible, conflict will always be present in European societies and will always have a key role in shaping European identities. European History is marked by among other things, the conflicts and suffering of thousands of years of history, Europe was the primary setting of two world wars and has been the setting of many conflicts on a variety of scales from its inception to contemporary times. The analysis of the films found that European identity was represented by a preoccupation with conflict and suffering. This was found to be largely constructed through codes relating to cultural anxieties caused by war, violence, and pain.

#### **4.5 Representation of Interdependence**

Europe is a collection of sovereign states which are united by an array of both visible and invisible forces. These includes by the harmonizing forces of European Institutions which aim to unify European states and demonstrate the importance of co-operation between all citizens. European countries are highly independent on one another for trade, pooling of assets and cultural support. Along with this it was found through the analysis of the films from the sample that people from an array of European cultures show a strong reliance on interdependence between one and other. This mainly manifested on a human-to-human level and highlighted community as a feature of European identity. The analysis showed that the films from the sample highlighted the importance of emotional and social support from fellow

humans which is also reflected in the dependence European countries have on one another. This concept is reflected not only in the ethos of the Eurimages cultural support fund which highlights the importance of co-productions for international harmony but also as one of the bases for the existence of the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Despite analysis showing major themes of conflict, societal divides, and corruption, all of the films from the sample were unified by their representation of the universality of the human condition. This highlighted the theme of interdependence, revealing that it was central to European identity. Despite the innate difference between European cultures, they are all unified by the universal human desire for love, compassion and understanding. *Titane* for instance, represents the body as an instrument to demonstrate the universality of human nature, tying it to its character's desire to be loved as well as innate human weaknesses. Alexia is portrayed as a half human and half machine which highlights her cold personality caused by her parent's emotional neglect. This trauma is shown to have led her to the bottling up of her emotions and has made her convince herself that she doesn't need anyone else to be happy. This manifests in Alexia murdering anyone who she feels has gotten too close to her. In the following extract this is demonstrated when Alexia kills Justine after she reveals that she has feelings for her:

*Alexia and Justine make out intimately on the sofa.*

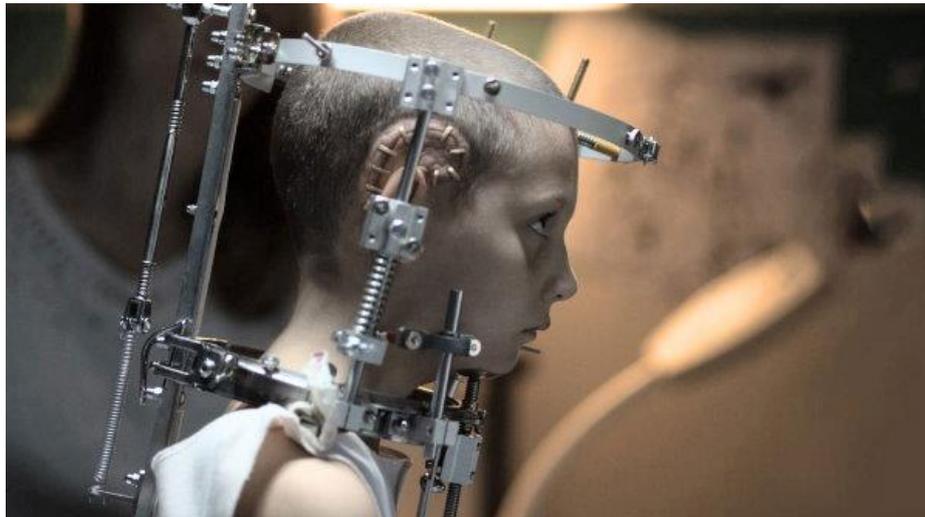
Justine: Crazy you didn't feel it sooner.

*Alexia pauses, grabs Justine's hair, takes out the chopstick and stabs her in the forehead.*

(Ducournau, 2021)

The film constantly draws visual comparisons between Alexia's body and a machine. This can be seen in Figure 7 through the scar she received in a car accident, through the depiction of Alexia's fusion with metal through her continued sexual attraction to vehicles, as well as the way the film frames her as devoid of emotion, mechanical, and cold. The film however suggests that this is ultimately a result of a lack of support from her parents and the society with which she was raised. Alexia is both framed as visually more human when she is shown support, love, and compassion from Vincent which leads her to stop her violent ways and realise the true nature of her identity.

Figure 7. Screenshot from *Titane* (2021) demonstrating Alexia's visual comparison to a machine, highlighting her coldness and separation from the desire for human company.



Alexia's neglect is shown by the filmmaker to be a negative feature which is remedied when she is introduced to Vincent who provides her with love and introduces her to a community with which she can express and nurture her own identity.

Vincent is contrastingly aware of his need for human compassion which he does not receive because of the loss of his son, thematically and visually this is represented by his association with Fire and heat. This is demonstrated through his career as a fire fighter, his smoking habit, the way he is constantly portrayed as physically red and hot (figure 8). Vincent on one occasion, purposefully sets himself on fire seemingly as a substitution for human interaction.

Figure 8. Screenshot from *Titane* (2021) highlighting Vincent's visual relationship to heat.



The film ultimately concludes by affirming the theme interdependence and its importance to European identities. Alexia dies in Vincent's arms in childbirth as she finally realises the importance of her need for community and humans. Vincent has lost Alexia but has now

received a replacement for his son which the journey of the film has brought him towards. In the last scene of the film, Vincent hold Alexia as she dies in childbirth:

Vincent: I'm here, Stay with me.

*He approaches her face and stands very close to it.*

Vincent: Alexia?

*Alexia stops moving, Vincent starts to compress her chests as before He blows air into her mouth.*

Vincent: I'm here.

*His mouth leaves hers and the strings of their saliva connect.*

*He kisses her as he pulls away.*

*(Ducournau, 2021)*

The theme of interdependence is furtherly demonstrated in *Triangle of sadness* through its contrasting representations of the rich charcters who are shown to place more reliance on their wealth than on fellow humans. This can be seen specifically in Jarmo, the Finnish businessman who uses his money to try to buy human interaction in in attempt to distract himself from his loneliness. This is demonstrated in the following extract when he attempts to buy Yaya's attention, emphasising his wealth for social capital:

JARMO (CONT'D): I would like to do something generous for you. They have Rolex watches in the reception. We can go down there now, and I will buy you Rolex watches!

Yaya: No, it's okay, thank you!

JARMO: It may sound strange, but I'm... What you just did there, it meant so much to me. So, I can... I'm very rich. Yes, let's not beat around the bush. I'm very rich.

*(Östlund, 2022)*

This extract highlights the representation of how fragile relying on wealth as an alternative to human relationships can be. The film portrayed the reliance on other people is as more valuable to the reliance on material objects and money.

It was shown that Eastern European culture places more focus on the importance of work than human relationships which is informed by the values taught as children. In *February*, Petar's relationship with human interdependence is informed by his upbringing. During the first part of the film, His grandfather constantly denies him the opportunity to visit the rest of his family as he maintains that the upkeep of the farm is more important:

Petar: Grandpa, when are we going back down to the village?

Grandpa: I told you, when the harvest is over.

Petar: Can't my brother come up here and I go down?

Grandpa: Your dad wants you to help over here. C'mon.

(Kalev, 2020)

This is shown to have a strong impact on his identity and relationship with human interdependence which frames his understanding of the world around him and his relationship with other humans. When Petar is an old man, he is in the same position that his grandfather was when he was a boy. Petar adopts the same mindset that work is more important despite his sister insisting that in his old age he should learn to value human relationships:

SISTER: It's going to snow they say, you should stay at the village. Get dressed and go to the coffeeshop with the other old men.

(Kalev 2020).

Overall, all of the films demonstrated how important interdependence is to individuals and highlight how strong a factor this is for informing the construction of one's own sense of identity within European societies.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify how European identity is represented in films in receipt of funding from European institutions in a contemporary context. In this case the European institution selected was the Council of Europe and the fund selected was the Eurimages Cultural support fund. The timeframe selected was the years 2020 – 2022. The study used thematic analysis to analyse the transcripts and a selection of screenshots from three films which fit this criterion. The films analysed being: *Titane* (Ducournau, 2021), *Triangle of Sadness* (Östlund, 2022), and *February* (Kalev, 2020). While the results have been successful in identifying how these films represent European identity it was concluded based on the findings of the study as well as the literature used in the framework, that the concept of European identity is broad and multifaceted. Despite this some key elements of the representation of European identity were identified by the study which were deemed to be of significance to the academic conversation on European Identity in film's funded by European institutions.

### 5.1 Answering the research Question:

It is essential to recognise that there is and never will be a universal definition of European identity. As reasoned by Everett (2005), it is important not to fixate over the need for clear-cut definitions but rather to focus on the progress that comes from a stronger awareness of European identity. In this sense European identity can ultimately be seen as a condition of the diversity of a collection of states on the European continent which while all sharing common features are defined by their differences from one another. European institution's roles in shaping the perceptions of European identity among European citizens are fundamental to their primary goals.

The European Union was founded with the goal of harmonizing and conglomerating Europe through co-ordination of policy, and external governance. It had the goal of not only preventing conflict and suffering on the scale seen in the world wars and holocaust but also to better its international relationships and make Europe a more unified territory. The council of Europe was established with the purpose of protecting the human rights, freedom of speech and democracy which encompasses promoting concepts such as European identity in a positive light. In terms of representation, film has been proven to be one of the most effective mediums for observing how people shape their own identities (Halverson, 2010). This is because film reflects the values, beliefs, dreams, and hopes of a society by manipulating image, communicating complex ideas, and telling stories both through language and visuals (Cloete,

2017). This coupled with the pleasure and catharsis one receives from cinema and narrative storytelling, it is easy to see why film has so often been used as a tool to express identity and reflect on the structures of the society around us.

This study used a variety of theory to outline how European identity is represented in contemporary films in receipt of funding from European institutions and hence answering the research question. While similarities were found between aspects of the theoretical framework and the results, the analysis was chiefly explorative in nature, meaning that codes were gathered without a pre-established expectation of what themes and conclusions may emerge from them. In this respect although many diverse themes emerged from the study which reflects the multi-faceted nature of European identity, the researcher decided to highlight the four main overarching themes that were deemed most suitable and relevant to answering the research question. From these results, it was ultimately concluded that it is possible to represent European identity through co-produced films in receipt of funding from The Eurimages Cultural Support fund between the years of 2020- 2022. This is done through engagement with the both the similarities and differences with the nationalities of the countries which comprises Europe, with the chief intention of promoting unity. This is achieved by filmmakers through their engagement with key issues which are universal to European societies.

The Films often represented identity through the engagement around European social structures, highlighting how class and gender divides are still a Europe-wide issue which effects how individuals and nations perceive and express their own identity. While many differences exist between nations, the similarities with which they express their identities were shown to be a major factor for highlighting their fundamental similarities. This was mainly shown through the importance of engaging with their own culture and the need for individuals to express their own identity. The analysis also concluded that the presence of a history marred with conflict and suffering has led to a universal preoccupation with the topic. This was clearly demonstrated through representations of identity in the films. This manifested through the idea of suffering as an inherent aspect of European identity as well as the idea that the major conflicts of European history still very much frame how European identity is constructed. Ultimately the main conclusion of the study was highlighted by the theme of independence, that both individuals and nations are inherently dependant on one another. This demonstrates why European institutions continue to provide funding opportunities such as Eurimages and this study provides a clear outline of both the

importance of these funds as well as the general importance of the promotion of European identity as a force for positive social change.

## **5.2 Limitations**

The aim of the research was to demonstrate how films in receipt of funding from European institutions represented the concept of European identity with the intention of this correlation being used as a measurement tool to see if these films adhere to the intention of these funds. The largest limitation of this study was the broadness of the concepts and theories used in the study. European identity was found to encompass a broad array of ideologies, perspectives and ideas spanning across a range of academic outlooks as well as mediated through a multitude of cultural perspectives. While this provided a rich overview of the way in which European unity is promoted by European institutions, it was not the most concrete concept to work with, especially when compiling results from a very small dataset. Secondly, as the dataset only consisted of three films it was difficult to produce results that yielded significant and concrete findings. Despite this and as argued by Everett, this is not the purpose of the measurement of the representations of European identity which is more concerned with tracing how the concept operates through its awareness and power as a unifying factor (Everett, 2005). The research also had its own biases when selecting the films which may have skewed the sample selection, the researcher may have unconsciously chosen a film based on their own preferences or interests. Other independent variables relating to the researcher's selection of the data may also have skewed the data in a particular direction. Throughout the analysis however, the researcher used a reflexive approach, implementing constant review and reflection on personal biases to ensure accuracy in results.

## **5.3 Suggestions for future research**

Although a significant conclusion was reached from the findings, the results did not entirely describe how European identity was represented. Future research could attempt to redefine the concept of European identity to something that can be more easily quantifiable. This could take the form of a change in methodology or a different system for organizing the research problem. On the other hand, the fragmented nature of the data allowed the researcher to look past latent meanings and attempt to delve directly into the complex and abstract concepts that were discussed. It is also recommended that in the future, the researcher would have a more structured plan for conducting the research which would be aided by experience of writing a thesis project as well as the adequate time and finances to complete the project within a shorter timeframe.

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## Appendix A. Film Overview

### **Film 1: Titane (Ducournau, 2021) 1h 48m**

Alexia's car accident leaves with a titanium plate in her head. This causes her to become cold and uncompassionate towards humans and results in a sexual fascination with cars and a habit of murdering humans who get in her way. When her crimes catch up to her, she is forced to disguise herself as the missing son of Vincent. Vincent takes Alexia in as his replacement son and the two develop an unlikely bond as Alexia learns what it means to be loved.

### **Film 2: Triangle of Sadness (Östlund, 2022) 2h 22m**

Influencers Carl and Yaya are invited aboard a luxury cruise alongside a group of ultra rich Europeans who have increasingly lost touch with reality, tensions between the ship's staff and the passengers which reaches fruition when a thunderstorm washes them away to a desert island where suddenly survival skills and food are much more valuable than the fortunes of the passengers.

### **Film 3: February (Kalev, 2020) 2h 4m**

This film chronicles three key moments of the life of a man from rural Bulgaria. The first section takes place when he is eight and learning how to herd sheep under the strict eye of his grandfather. The second when he is eighteen and is in the middle of his military service with the Bulgarian Naval services. The third when he is an old man still maintaining the farm he grew up on, as he fights to come to terms with his own mortality and the fact that nothing eventful has marked his life.

*NOTE: This information was gathered from IMDB and written by the researcher*

## Appendix B. Coding Books

### 1. Titane (Ducournau, 2021)

Selective Codes	Axial Codes	Open Codes
<b>Interdependence</b>	Affection	Hugging Need for intimacy. Kissing Need to be loved.
	Communication	Speech Language Slurs
	The Gaze	The gaze Male gaze Mirrors Reflection
	Escapism	Denial Ignoring Problems Running away Alcohol as escape Drugs
	Protection	Advice Restraint Safety equipment Security Self defense
	Reliance on others	Support Sympathy Empathy Trust
<b>Social Structures</b>	Class	Career Labor Work Money
	Gender	Hair Pregnancy Traditional gender roles childbirth
	Societal expectation	Duty Failure Fame Normality
<b>Expression of Identity</b>	Self-Expression	Dance Music
	Emotions	Crying / tears Emotions Fear Happiness

		Remorse
	European signifiers	European languages Euro currency
	Culture	Food / food preparation Drink Home
	Nationalism	Racial classifications Flags Racism The other
<b>Conflict and Suffering</b>	Violence	Death Murder Sexual harassment Stabbing Injury Self-harm Aggression destruction
	Pain	Distress Pain Scars
	Fire	Firemen Hell Red Smoking heat

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## 2. Triangle of Sadness (Östlund, 2022)

Selective Codes	Axial Codes	Open Codes
<b>Interdependence</b>	Reliance on others	Loneliness Support Finance Protection survival
	Human nature	Greed Fear Jealousy Disability The gaze Aesthetic qualities Superficialities
<b>Social Structures</b>	Class divisions	Career Labour Class divisions Wealth as power Rich entitlement Signifiers of wealth Exploitation of working class Profiting from exploitation
	Socio-economic concerns	Marxism Communism Capitalism Politics
	Gender	Gender roles Pay gap. Pregnancy Family Marriage
	<b>Expression of Identity</b>	Culture
	European signifiers	Directness European nationalities European languages Difference from USA
	Freedom	Unity Democracy Equality Subversion of the status quo
<b>Conflict and Suffering</b>	Conflict	Arguments Emergencies War Crime Profiting from war Xenophobia racism
	Pain	Death Corpse Blood Weapons

### 3. February (Kalev, 2020)

Selective Codes	Axial Codes	Open Codes
<b>Interdependence</b>	Freedom	Birds Captivity Authority Nature
	Authority	Curiosity Authority Family Innocence Parental figures
<b>Expression of Identity</b>	National Identity	Nationalism Identity Homeplace Protection of home country
	Culture	Alcohol Clothes Food Tradition
	Emotions	Fear Frustration Apathy Love
	Self-Expression	Dance Poetry Art Music Dance Dreams
<b>Social Structures</b>	Class	Poverty Belittlement of rural life Class differences Money
	Gender	Marriage Gender roles Male Sex
<b>Conflict and Suffering</b>	Conflict	Military Navy Violence War Hatred Fighting
	Suffering	Pain Neglect Bullying Wound

