"TO YOUR PETIT BOURGEOIS FEMINISM, I PREFER THE REAL ONE": DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITIES AND IDEOLOGIES IN FEMINISM-CENTRED PLENARY DEBATES IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Abstract

Political communication in the 21st century is largely centred on the concepts of identity and ideology. Considerable research has explored either identity construction or ideology in the context of parliamentary political communication, but little research has examined the interrelation of identification processes and the negotiation of ideologies. Further, only a small percentage of research in this context has observed identity as constructed in communication, ideology as discursively constructed or worked in an international setting. The present study addresses these gaps by discursively analysing the processes of constructing and negotiating the meanings of identities and ideologies in the context of women-centred plenary debates in the European Parliament.

The aim of this study is to explore how identities and ideologies are constructed and negotiated in front-stage political communication. Owing to the increased influence of political communication in the social sphere, particularly when referring to groups traditionally excluded from power, the study analyses debates where the figure of the woman is central. This study analyses 6 women-centred debates from 5 plenary sessions, which are temporally distributed between January 1st and March 31st of 2020. The analysis was conducted using concepts of Critical Discursive Psychology, which observes identity categories as produced communicatively and informed by the speaker's available beliefs, as a methodological tool, and intersectional feminism as a framework.

Results show that speakers in the European Parliament make use of seven discursive strategies to construct and negotiate the meanings of identities and ideologies. Additionally, results show that these discursive constructions, which have major effects at a legislative and social level for their power to orient action, are influenced by context, power-relations, the *backstage* of politics and situated political goals.

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1   INTRODUCTION

The study of political communication as a cross-disciplinary phenomenon has been a field of interest to scholars since the 1950s (Miller & McKerrow, 2010, p. 2; Kaid, 2004, p. XIII). However, the changes in political communication caused by the introduction of the internet in the 1990s and social media in the early 21st century brought increased attention to political communication research (see Gurevitch et al. 2010; Dahlgren, 2005; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). The growing impact of political discourse and communication within the sphere of politics as a direct result of globalization processes and broad internet use on a global scale has made it more important than ever to understand the nature and social impact of political communication. Furthermore, the changing nature of political communication due to the ever-changing socio-political contexts and its intended purposes demonstrates the need for further interdisciplinary research in this area.

With the growing impact of politics on the social sphere and the increased presence of nationalist and populist political tendencies in Europe (Bieber, 2018 pp. 529-530; see also Stone, 2014), identity has become increasingly relevant in political discourse. From the constructionist and critical postmodern viewpoints, political discourse plays a central role in constructing collective identities (Macmillan, 2013, p. 104). As a direct result, the potentially ideologically informed and goal-based nature of this construction renders ideology a central element in the study of identity construction in political communication. Furthermore, the impact of constructing

collective identities in political discourse is particularly relevant when it involves or refers to minorities or groups who have historically stood outside the sphere of power.

Following these statements on the relevance of identities and ideologies in political communication and the need for further research in the field of political communication, this study aims to answer the question: *How are identities and ideologies negotiated in front-stage political communication in the European Parliament's gender equality plenaries?* Furthermore, owing to the particular relevance of the study of ideologically-informed identity constructions of groups traditionally excluded from decision-making, this study focuses on the analysis of communication where the figure of the woman is central. The focus on the particular figure of the woman departs from the belief that gender is a topic which intersects with all others in political communication related to legality and political action. In this way, providing answers to: *how is the figure of the "woman" discursively constructed in front-stage political communication in the European Parliament?* And, *how is "feminism" constructed in front-stage political communication in the European Parliament?*, not only provides insight into how identities and ideologies are negotiated in this context, but also contributes to understanding and challenging said constructions throughout the political context in order to orient action towards a more gender equal world. This women-related context is further justified by the view that discourses in this context will be at least partially informed by feminism, thus making visible processes of negotiating identities and ideologies that might otherwise not be perceived. This results from the ideological relevance of other forms of identification, such as gender or sexuality, in this particular context.

The study is also a product of my personal interest and investment in international politics and feminism. Questions in this study arise from a preoccupation regarding the potential socio-political impact of purpose-informed identity and ideology constructions in political discourse surrounding intersectional feminism. The preoccupation that purpose-informed constructions of certain

identities and ideologies may be perceived as reflecting "reality" in a legal-political context has inspired this work with the intent to challenge such a view and provide grounds for a perspective shift towards a discursive understanding of ideologies.

The present study, which is temporally situated between January 1st and March 31st, 2020, analyses members' and other speakers' discourses in the European Parliament's plenary sessions. Specifically, the study observes 6 publicly accessible debates from 5 plenary sessions scheduled to centre on gender equality. The analysis developed using Critical Discursive Psychology concepts as an analytical tool and worked from the viewpoint of critical postmodernism. CDP is a discourse analytical method which observes identity categories as produced communicatively and informed by the speaker's available beliefs. Critical postmodernism also observes identity categories as produced in discourse. This study is further informed by identity politics, whose understanding of identity as constructed for a political end provides grounds for research on the understanding of identities and ideologies as subject to the speech's political goal(s). Due to the debates' women-related context, this study is further informed by feminist theories in communication. Data in this study is thus also observed using feminism as a framework for the analysis.

The present study will begin with an introduction to each of these particular aspects to provide an in-depth understanding of this study's theoretical perspective, the meaning of its central concepts, its contexts, its framework, and the methods for the analysis. In this way, the study will first delve into the theoretical background by reviewing the approaches to identities and ideologies upon which the analysis is built. The study will also introduce the relevance of identity politics in framing the research process. The review will continue with an introduction to the study of political discourse in international arenas to illustrate how previous research has addressed discourse analysis in this context and frame the analysis's expectations. The theoretical background exposition will finish with a review of the feminist framework and the study of communication in feminism-related contexts. The study will continue with the socio-political contextualisation of the analysed data and a

review of the study's methodological approach before moving on to the findings' exposition. The study will conclude with a discussion on the most relevant findings and an evaluation of the study and its limitations, providing room for further research on the subject.

2 IDENTITY, IDEOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION

Discourses, which are defined as "language-based systems of knowledge claims about what is and what ought to be" (Baxter & Asbury, 2015 p. 191), constitute the centre of this study's analysis. But before proceeding to analysing discourses to provide insights into how Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) negotiate identities and ideologies in plenary, we must first understand what these terms mean.

The interplay between language and identity has been central to linguistics and communication scholarships for centuries (de Fina, 2019 p. 1), which has resulted in a wide variety of competing perspectives on and understandings of identity (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 17). In the field of critical discourse studies, identities have often been conceived as "mental constructs that have a certain cognitive reality and that are constituted, among other things, by shared mental representations about self and others" (de Fina, 2019, p. 3) which may change in interaction and over time (see Van Dijk, 2009). Recent studies, however, have highlighted the need to approach identity not as pre-existing and enacted in interaction, but as ongoingly and dynamically constructed in communication (Baxter & Asbury, 2015:194; Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 4; Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003, p. 493; Ağcasulu & Ossewaarde, 2019, p. 362) with attention to the fact that some discourses are better valued than others (Baxter & Asbury, 2015, p. 197). While many authors have dedicated time to analysing identity construction in a particular setting (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 5;

Wagner, 2017), there is little research that tackles how both identity and ideology, as they are conceived in this study, are simultaneously negotiated in communication, and how they interrelate and influence the other's construction in talk (Ağcasulu & Ossewaarde, 2019). Further, a large percentage of the research on identity in political communication (and parliamentary discourse in particular) has focused on national contexts (see Ilie, 2010; Every & Augoustinos, 2007) with a smaller percentage of research on international parliamentary contexts (see Wodak, 2012; Abélès, 2004; Ağcasulu & Ossewaarde, 2019). Similarly, much of the research on ideology has approached it as a product of grand theories rather than as a matter of discourse analysis (Kissas, 2017, p. 3). Thus, this study aims to complement these research gaps by addressing identity and ideology construction in an international political setting: the European Parliament, and to contribute to the field of research which approaches identity as socially discursively constructed. More specifically, this study aims at providing insight into how communication is used to negotiate identities and ideologies in the context of feminism-related debates. The feminist context of the debates follows the purpose of assessing how a constructionist view of identities and ideologies in the feminism-centred context may contribute to challenging social inequalities surrounding relevant social groups. Thus, the study focuses on how are groups such as "women", "migrants" or the LGBTQ+ community are portrayed in relation to ideologies such as "feminism", "liberalism" or "populism", among others. Out of the many understandings and conceptualisations available, this study will follow mainly critical postmodern approaches to identity and ideology. This theoretical perspective will be further developed in the following sections.

2.1 Identity as discursively constructed

If we could refer to a process of "evolution" of the understanding of identity in communication, it would be briefly explained as the progression from *self-disclosure* to *self-making* (Baxter & Asbury, 2015, p. 197; see Mokros, 2002). *Self-disclosure* refers not only to the view that identities are fixed, autonomous entities that pre-exist

language but also claims the existence of a "real" self that is made visible in interaction. *Self-making*, on the other hand, refers to the process of constructing identities in communication. While these notions are not entirely irreconcilable, the latter is hegemonic in critical theory. This can be seen from many examples of discourse analysis surrounding identity, which point out at the simultaneously occurring tendencies to maintain a consistent account of oneself and enact/adapt/construct one's identity per the interactional context (see Wodak, 2012, van Dijk, 2010).

Postmodern and critical postmodern approaches to communication understand the "self" as ongoingly negotiated. As Benwell and Stokoe (2006) define it, postmodernism treats identity as "fluid, fragmentary, contingent and, crucially, *constituted in discourse*" (p.17, emphasis in original). Much like in social constructionism, here the self is also multiple and emergent, but with the added attention to the relevance of power dynamics surrounding discourses. As mentioned in the previous section, the postmodern critical framework highlights that not all discourses are valued in the same way, and, consequently, some identity constructions become harder to legitimise in a given context (Baxter & Asbury, 2015, p. 197).

Another aspect of the "evolution" of perspectives on identity in communication studies would be the progression from *identity as a project of the self* to *identity as socially constructed* (see Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; de Fina, 2019; Kim, 2007). While I refer to these dualisms as a progression because they appeared consecutively, all of the understandings presented can still be found in identity research and identity-related work in and outside of academia (e.g. self-help books), both as separate constructs and merged as a single understanding.

The notion of identity as a project of the self emerges from both Descartes' rationalism and Locke's empiricism in that they propose the principle of reflexivity whereby individuals make themselves through reason and action (Taylor, 1989 in

Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 19). This initial understanding later incorporated the Romantic notions of "true self" and "self-fulfilment" which are visible in many forms, for example under titles related to spirituality and self-help. The transition from this understanding towards the postmodern approach to identity reflected above took place in incorporating the impact of socialisation processes upon the individual mind expressed in Freud's psychoanalysis (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 20), thus bringing attention to the social aspect of identity. The introduction of psychoanalytic notions to discourse analysis in Lacan's (2002/1977) work brought him to situate the identification process within discourse. This perspective ultimately lead to the understanding that identity is constructed in discourse and shaped by the subject positions made available within it (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006, p. 21), and to postmodern perspectives of the self as fluid, fragmentary, intersubjective, and relative to power dynamics.

2.2   Ideology as malleable, multiple and fragmented

The concept of ideology is central to critical scholarships and, as such, it has been defined from multiple perspectives and used in discourse analysis in various ways. Throughout this study, I will approach ideology as, first and foremost, a relatively stable, organised, socially discursively constructed *belief system* (Van Dijk, 2006, p.116) that orients action towards what it states should be objectively normative (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 2008/1976, p. 120 in Susen, 2014, p. 94).

While at a social level ideologies appear to be relatively stable, they are enacted and described in multiple, fragmented and contradictory ways. This occurs because their enactment is context-bound, permeated by individual experiences and belief systems (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 117) and, in political discourse, it is goal-oriented and influenced by power-dynamics. I thus analyse and reflect on the *discursive reproduction and negotiation* of ideologies and belief systems. The goal is not to define what the represented ideologies entail but rather how relatively stable and organised

belief systems are reproduced, transformed, and their meanings negotiated in front-stage political communication. That is to say, I reflect on the inconsistent and contradictory use of a range of belief systems and on the communication strategies used to negotiate these inconsistencies. For this reason, the review of ideology here provided will delve into the discursive aspect of ideologies, consciously moving away from the current debate on their socio-cognitive aspect (see Van Dijk, 2006).

One of the basic premises upon which this study is built is that ideologies need to, by definition, enable group identification (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 119). They are "socially shared representations of groups […] (and the) foundations of group attitudes and other beliefs" (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 138). Furthermore, ideologies influence the production of discourse, are primarily discursively produced, legitimised and negotiated, and are related to knowledge. Other assumptions of ideology reflected on this study are the critical postmodern understandings that ideology constructs power through knowledge claims. Knowledge claims are understood as "taken for granted assertions of what is and what ought to be" (Baxter & Asbury, 2015, p. 193). Furthermore, it is additionally assumed that power follows a "bottom-up-and-out" dynamic that enters the social world in multiple and fragmented ways and across dispersed habitual sites (Baxter & Asbury, 2015, p. 192). Also reflected are the understandings that the social world is an unstable struggle of competing dominant and resistant discourses embedded in ideological beliefs, and that, arising from the assumption that some discourses are dominant or more valued than others, knowledge is necessarily biased. Following these assumptions, then, we reach an understanding of ideology that is intrinsically related to discourse, interaction, and, crucially, identity.

From a communicative point of view, ideologies are understood as discursively negotiated, and individually and contextually reframed. Since they are contingent upon context, individuals may make use of existing and available ideological paradigms in an inconsistent and contradictory manner, reinforcing an understanding of ideology as entering communication in multiple and fragmented

ways. As mentioned above, the discursive nature of ideology renders it visible only in practice. Ideological discourses do not reflect pre-existing phenomena but rather create an image of the social world that exists only in communication and is tied to the "us/them good/bad" notions (Susen, 2014, p. 96) and the political goal of the speech.

Ideology is related to identity because, first and foremost, ideology enables group identification and provides more or less visible boundaries into who is "us" and who is "them". Furthermore, at both the individual and the social level, different belief systems (and multiple understandings of the same system) coexist in a single space. Individually, then, ideologies are necessarily influenced by and subject to one's multiple beliefs. As introduced in the previous section, the processes of identification will be affected by these coexisting beliefs, which, in turn, will enter communication in varied and fragmented ways. Furthermore, the interpretation of, and adherence to, particular ideologies will affect and be affected by one's concepts of self and group memberships. Lastly, the existence of dominant or normative ideological perspectives will render particular identifications more or less problematic, thus influencing the interactional and social aspects of the identification process.

2.3   Identity and political discourse

The analysis of identity in political and overall ideological communicative contexts has produced a vast collection of research articles and books (see Ilie, 2010). As it was mentioned at the beginning of this study, however, most of this research has looked at identity as either pre-existing categories or as enacted in communication (see Van Dijk, 2010; Wodak, 2003; Trondal, 2002), research viewing identity as constructed in communication is significantly less affluent (Ağcasulu & Ossewaarde, 2019; Krzyżanowski 2011). In critical discourse studies, one common way of approaching identity in political discourse has been to centre on *identity politics*. This

perspective, which I will introduce below, is not without conflict. Identity politics has been variously used and defined to fit a number of perspectives and goals, and has thus evolved differently in accordance with these same objectives.

Identity politics as line of research is closely related to political activity. What is known today as the field of identity politics was born during the second half of the twentieth century amidst a variety of social movements to address issues of injustice surrounding marginalised groups within a particular context (Cressida, 2020, para. 1). Identity politics analysed these forms of social inequalities with the goal of reclaiming and redefining the meaning of the identity labels of discriminated groups such as the LGBTQ+ collective (Kruks, 2001, p. 85). In a similar way to the "representation matters" movement within the self-labelled intersectional feminism found in social media, identity politics as an approach aimed to challenge and substitute the dominant group's account of the marginalised community for one that empowered it and balanced identity-based power inequalities (see Alcoff, 2018). However, as criticism to and research in this area has pointed out, identity politics relies on a controversial and, as we have seen before, notoriously difficult to define term: identity (see Weir, 2008; Hill & Wilson, 2003; and Béland, 2017).

While the conceptual and operational definitions of identity within this field have changed with criticism, initial understandings of this term stood out as essentialist in three ways. Firstly, research on identity politics worked from a perspective of authenticity. The notion of identity was based on a past ideal of community unaffected and not-oppressed by a foreign other (see Alfred, 1999, p. 5) which essentially claimed the existence of a true-self, of a true meaning of social identities (Cressida, 2020, para. 4). Secondly, in wanting to redefine identity categories, research on identity politics necessarily separated each category from the others, as if individuals could not define themselves as belonging to more than one (marginalised) socio-cultural group at the same time. In other words, it did not work from an intersectional perspective of identity (Cressida, 2020, para. 7). And thirdly, in wanting to describe the characteristics and practices of particular groups in a way

that is different from the negative account mentioned above, research on (and the resulting activism of) identity politics would be imposing norms onto the individuals who belong to the collective (Carastathis, 2017, p. 7).

From here it is easy enough to arrive to the conclusion that identity politics as it was first conceptualised in the 1970s would not meet the challenges that intersectionality posed and still poses (see Hill-Collins & Bilge, 2016), especially within feminist identity politics. Additionally, it would not meet the critical and poststructuralist challenges regarding the alleged existence of unified essential characteristics of a specific social identity prior to being marginalised by the dominant or privileged group. Criticism on these two areas of identity politics has allowed essentialist understandings of identity in this field to shift and reconcile with more postmodern approaches to this concept (see Weir, 2008). As mentioned in Zacharias (2008), in order to address the challenges mentioned above, identity was redefined not as an essence of the individual but rather as an "effect of the working of language, modes of representation, and systems of signification that produce meaning" (p.1). It is worth noting, however, that there is no consensus regarding the current perspective of identity politics and that there is still much criticism directed towards the field.

Of interest to this study are the understandings of identity and identity politics introduced in Hill and Wilson (2003), Zacharias (2008), Béland (2017) and Weir (2008). More specifically, it is the perspective introduced in Hill and Wilson (2003) which states that identity politics be used as a guide to explore how identity is constructed in communication as the means to achieve political ends that renders identity politics relevant to this study. Despite the fact that it is not the purpose of this research to address issues of social injustice, identity politics, understood in the above sense, highlights the contextual and goal-based nature of identity, and by extension, of the ideological positions present in political discourse. Moreover, it allows for a use of this area of theorising as a means to explore the connection between identity and politics in relation to particular social groups that lies at the

centre of this study. From this image of identity and identity politics follows then the characterisation of political activity as something that aims to define or to sustain an image of who "we" are, and who "they" are, for a political end (Béland, 2017; Weir 2008). Further, it follows a definition of identity politics, specifically feminist identity politics, as centred on the question of "who is the "woman" that is imagined as the subject of feminism or of women's emancipation" (Zacharias, 2008, p. 1). Or, in its broader scope, who is this individual that is imagined at the centre of a particular movement or group. The use of this approach within the context of parliamentary political activity thus allows for an identification of the communicative processes involved in the discursive construction of political identities. It also serves to recognise how this central question of (feminist) identity politics is resolved following a political objective in the context of front-stage parliamentary activity. Identity politics would additionally allow us to identify the connection between identity constructions, political activity and power relations.

3 POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN INTERNATIONAL ARENAS

The study of political discourse in international arenas has been primarily centred on two of the most relevant EU institutions: The European Parliament and the European Commission (Krzyżanowski, 2011, p. 281; Ağcasulu & Ossewaarde, 2019; Wodak, 2012), with some research in the context of the United Nations and its institutions (Jaeger, 2008). Studies in this area suggest, first of all, that organised institutions such as the European Parliament have, over time, created their own organisational culture with distinct institutional practices and socio-political dynamics (Krzyżanowski, 2011, p. 282; Wodak, 2012, p. 533). Such a statement thus suggests that a certain degree of uniformity will arise in the analysis of the discursive practices of the institution's members as a result of the members' inability to move beyond institutional patterns (Krzyżanowski, 2011, p. 293). Similarly, this claim also suggests that these institutional practices and dynamics will become apparent in the analysis of communicative practices in the context of the European Parliament. Research in this context proposes as well that the identities of political-institutional actors are discursively constructed and renegotiated in political communication (Krzyżanowski, 2011, p. 284; see Abélès, 2004). Both Krzyżanowski (2011, p. 284) and Abélès (2004, p. 17) further argue that in this type of institutional political discourse, one can find an "us/them" logic which constructs and negotiates institutional identities and the identity of actors. This construction can be founded

on stereotypes and national categorisations (see Ağcasulu & Ossewaarde, 2019), and is necessarily influenced by the interactional and historical-political contexts.

The above claim on the existence of an "us/them" logic to political communication as a method for discursively constructing the identities of actors is supported by other studies of political discourse. In the context of the European Parliament, Ağcasulu and Ossewaarde (2019, p. 360) point out how, in the process of constructing a European identity in political debates, we can observe the simultaneous construction of, in the case of their particular study, Turkey's otherness. Thus, they suggest that identification processes in political discourse are bound to the construction, not only of an "us", but also of a more or less explicit "other" and a negotiation on the nature and inclusivity of the label "us". This claim is further supported by Wodak & Meyer (2001), who declare the discursive construction of the "us-them" divide a fundamental trait of discourses on identity (p.73). Macmillan (2013) also sustains the reality of this phenomenon in discussing the construction of Europe as Turkey's "other", albeit in the context of national political discourses in Turkey.

Another observed characteristic of political discourse in international arenas is the correlation between context, power relations, and the ideological perspectives expressed in political communication, as well as the interplay between ideological positions and identity constructions within political discourses (Ağcasulu & Ossewaarde, 2019, p. 366). In this way, the above claim suggests that context-bound ideological positions, institutional dynamics and power relations play an important role in the construction of identities in front-stage political communication. Further, it suggests that political action grounded on this self-other dichotomy will affect the constructed identity of the involved groups. In this sense, political communication is understood to play a central role in the construction of collective identities (Macmillan, 2013, p. 104) and the creation of dominant discourses surrounding social groups under a given identity category. Studies in the field also suggest that this process of constructing the identities of particular groups is additionally related to

the political agenda of institutions and the groups within them. According to Wodak's (2012) research on the *backstage* of politics, the political goal of MEPs will necessarily shape their ideological stance in a given moment, as well as their self-presentation and the identification of a more or less specified "other" (p. 537). Thus, in the analysis of public-directed political discourses, it is expected that the political agenda of a speaker will shape how they portray a relevant individual, institution, ideology or some form of group.

Relative to the construction of political identities, research on institutional political discourse has highlighted that the use of particular sociolinguistic discursive means (e.g. forms of address) and other linguistic cues relates to the role and position of the speaker. Thus, it serves as a form of construct of their political/parliamentarian identity (Wodak, 2012, p. 531, van Dijk, 2010). In looking at the front-stage of the European Parliament, it is expected then that there will be identifiable linguistic practices inscribed in the MEPs discourses which will highlight this process of constructing political/parliamentarian identities.

In the specific context of the European Parliament, it is worth noting the study by Abélès (2004) relative to the socio-political and institutional dynamics of the organisation. While he founded his research on different understandings on the role of linguistic and national backgrounds in comparison with the present study, Abélès' article offers insight into the dynamics of the European Parliament and its influence on the workings and structures of the institution. As opposed to (or rather complementing) the above proposed uniformity in the MEPs' discursive practices (Krzyżanowski, 2011, p. 293), Abélès (2004) argues that national and linguistic categorisations in the institutional structure of the European Parliament reinforce compartmentalization and affect socio-political dynamics (p.7). This compartmentalization, in turn, affects as well communication and the workings of plenary sessions in hindering discussion and turning the sessions into a series of monologues rather than an international version of the traditional dialogical scene of national parliaments (p. 8). In this way, it is to be expected that national divisions

may have a bigger influence on the MEP's ideological stance in a given context than their political group or party. Thus, it is expected that MEPs will construct their national identities in relation to the interactional context or, on the contrary, construct a common European, parliamentarian or political identity in detriment of national divisions. Wodak (2012) complements the above statement by discussing the effects of the *backstage* of politics in the European Parliament on its *frontstage*. In this way, the diverse groups with whom each MEP interacts in the backstage of politics will influence their position and stance at a given moment irrespective of allocated group belonging (e.g. party or committee).

To summarise, previous research suggests that identity constructions and ideological positions in the European Parliament will be context-bound, goal-oriented, rooted in a discursive construction of an "us-them" divide and influenced by institutional dynamics of compartmentalisation and socio-political relations. Furthermore, it suggests that linguistic practices will be a product of an organisational culture and be part of the process of constructing political-parliamentarian identities. But how would adding a feminist context affect such practices?

4 THE FEMINIST FOCUS: FEMINISM AS A FRAMEWORK

As stated in previous sections, this study focuses on political communication in the context of feminism-related debates in the European Parliament. The feminist angle of the study is rooted in an understanding of feminism as a counter-hegemonic force to the traditional parliamentarian structure and political discourse. Asides from providing a framework for the analysis of communicative practices on the construction of identity and ideology (as will be discussed below), the feminist focus is intrinsically related to the processes of identity and ideology construction. The use of feminism as a framework results from the viewpoint that feminism is a non-normative force in political discourse. As such, it is expected that this approach will make visible how some identities become harder to legitimise in a given context (Baxter & Asbury, 2015, p. 197), and showcase the effect of power dynamics in identity and ideology construction. Moreover, its understanding as a counter-hegemonic force in the analysed setting leads to believe that this framework will produce more transparent and further separated ideological positions than a more neutral or normative ideological-political context.

In contextualising speeches within women-centred and feminism-related debates, it becomes visible how the context, created within discourse itself, will affect the possible identifications available. The feminism-framed debates will provide insight into how speakers negotiate inconsistent or contradictory positions

related to identity and ideology constructions. The reason behind it is that using feminism as a framework for the analysis merges self-identifications related to, for example, gender or sexual orientation with group-belonging (e.g. political party) and political-ideological orientations, also within feminism itself (e.g. intersectional, non-intersectional). Identity constructions within the women-centred debates will be context-bound and negotiate the meanings of feminism.

As is the case with many other ideological paradigms, feminism has been variously defined not only throughout its history (see Heywood, 2006), but also throughout the numerous contexts in which it has been used, proclaimed and questioned. According to Evans (2016), it is then reasonable to assume that in comparing individuals who self-identify as feminist, results will show that their understandings of "feminism" differ. Likewise, it is also reasonable to assume that they might not label themselves thus if another meaning was ascribed to the identity category "feminist", and, consequently, that individuals who do not identify themselves in this way might still align with a given understanding of feminism in a particular context.

Feminism and the study of communication

As inferred from existing literature on feminist theory (see Heywood, 2006; Evans, 2016; Byerly, 2018), feminism, in its most basic understanding, is a belief system which states that principles of gender equality should be a fundamental value of human societies and orients action towards a more gender-equal world. Despite the fact that such a belief was held prior to the 19th century (see, for example, Madame de Lafayette, 1678/2005; and Olympe de Gouges, 1791/2020) most western histories of feminism put its starting point in the 19th and early 20th century (Heywood, 2006, p. 134; Carastathis 2017, p. 8) with the movement for women's suffrage and for their participation in the labour market. Within these histories of feminism, it is common

to explain the ideology's modern trajectory through the use of the "wave metaphor". This metaphor constitutes a thematic-chronological categorisation of diverse feminist movements in the past 170 years into distinct "waves", each of which was developed around a political goal or a particular movement (Heywood, 2006, pp. 134-140). In this way, the first wave would be dedicated to white-middle-class-centred movements for women's suffrage and social participation (including marriage, work-life, literature and education, among others) (see Magarey, 2001; Phillips & Cree, 2014). The second wave to movements for the recognition of the "feminine" as of equal value with the "masculine" (see Baumgardner, 2011), already, in some circles, with a view at contesting this heterosexual-white-centred perspective of women's rights (Thompson, 2002, p. 341, see Evans, 1995). The third wave refers to movements for women's liberation in all aspects of life (particularly gender liberation), the diversification of the political priorities of "feminisms" (see Baumgardner, 2011) and the reclaiming of the "feminine" as a tool for empowerment rather than oppression (Rampton, 2015). Lastly, according to some authors, there would be a fourth wave of feminism, born from and transmitted through (social) media (Rivers, 2017, p. 63; Zimmerman, 2017, p. 63), based on challenging the fragmentation of identities within communities of struggle (see Rampton, 2015; Munro, 2013, p. 24). It is important to notice that, for some authors, this intersectional perspective of feminism is part of the "third-wave" (Heywood, 2006, p. XIX). From this chronological definition emerges then an understanding of feminism which is essential to this study. According to Byerly (2018), the wave narrative, despite having been extensively contested for its claims of a discontinuity of feminism, can be used as an umbrella term for understanding how "different feminist ideologies interrelate" (p. 411). Observed in this way, the wave theory brings to light the existence of multiple, varied and even fragmented perspectives of an ideology which co-exist in a given time and in a global context under the same label. Thus, it highlights the discursive nature of more specific understandings of feminism despite their common core.

As one such understanding of feminism, intersectional, or fourth-wave, feminism is a clear example of how a particular understanding of this ideology can be discursively renegotiated. Intersectionality was initially aimed to contest the fragmentation of antiracist and feminist movements (Carastathis, 2017, p.3). However, as research in this area points out, this understanding has been developed within and outside of academia to redefine it as going beyond the contestation of representational and discursive dynamics within these collectives (Byerly, 2018, p. 24, see Evans 2016). Intersectionality has moved beyond feminist and antiracist movements to include a multiplicity of marginalised communities in a given social setting (Lazar, 2005, p. 1) because its theoretical basis was renegotiated to apply to contexts beyond its initial intended setting.

From this, it is necessary to conclude that despite the existence of more or less stable definitions of what is feminism, previous research on the matter and the contrast between modern and initial understandings of what is understood as feminism suggest that ideologies under this label are redefined through discourse and over time. Furthermore, they suggest that identities tied to feminism as an ideology will be individually and contextually reframed in communication. Such a conclusion would thus support the core hypothesis of this study on the constructed and discursively renegotiated nature of identities and ideologies in a feminism-related context.

5   METHODOLOGY

5.1   Context of analysis: The European Parliament

5.1.1   The European Parliament

The organisational body of the European Union (EU) is composed of 7 institutions dedicated to the legislative, judiciary, executive and economic branches needed for the development of the Union's functions. The European Parliament (EP) is one of the three institutions which constitute the legislative body of the EU. Alongside the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament is one of the institutional bodies in charge of adopting European legislation. The third legislative institution, the European Commission, is the body in charge of presenting the majority of the legislation proposals (right of initiative) that the other two institutions vote. The Council also holds the right of initiative. Unlike any of the other institutions of the EU, the European Parliament is democratically elected across national borders within the Union. This election procedure has been in place since 1979 and has been held every 5 years. The most recent elections were held in 2019. The presidency of the European Parliament is elected every 2.5 years and is currently held by David Maria Sassoli, who has been president since 2019.

Since the effective leave of the UK from the EU in February 1st 2020, the European Parliament is composed by 705 (previously 751) members (MEPs)

representing the EU's 27 Member States (MS) by proportional representation based on the population of each state. MEPs are distributed across 7 political groups organised by political affiliation in agreement with the group chair-people. The groups must be of at least 23 members, and represent at least 25% of the Member States. The 7 political groups which form the European Parliament are detailed in Table 1. MEPs that do not affiliate with any political group are represented in Parliament as Non-attached members (NI). There are currently 29 non-attached members in the EP. While MEPs may not belong to more than one political group, they may organise themselves in Intergroups to hold informal exchanges of views on any given subject. Intergroups, although subject to internal rules adopted by one of the five political bodies of the Parliament (the Conference of Presidents), are not defined as Parliament bodies and so do not represent the Parliament as an entity.

TABLE 1   The political groups of the European Parliament

Acronym	Name	Self-defined ideological position	Number of Members
EPP	European People's Party (Christian Democrats)	Centre-right (conservatives)	187 MEPs
S&D	Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament	Centre-left (social democracy)	147 MEPs
Renew	Renew Europe Group	Liberalism	98 MEPs
I&D	Identity and Democracy Group	Far-right (nationalism)	76 MEPs
Greens/EFA	Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance	Left (minority politics)	67 MEPs
ECR	European Conservatives and Reformists Group	Right wing with far-right factions (liberal conservatism)	61 MEPs
GUE/NGL	Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left	Left wing to far-left	40 MEPs

Asides from being divided into groups based on political affiliation, the Members of the Parliament are distributed across 27 specialised parliamentary committees. The Committees are in charge of the necessary preparatory work prior to the Parliament's plenary sittings. They amend and adopt both legislative proposals and own-initiative reports, which can be put to vote in plenary. Committee meetings, which are held once or twice a month in Brussels, Belgium, are public and can be accessed online on the European Parliament's website.

The European Parliament is further composed of 44 delegations which represent the European Union externally, and are in charge of maintaining relations and exchanging information with parliaments in non-EU countries, and of promoting the fundamental values of the EU. Further information on the groups, bodies, values, and history of the European Parliament can be found here: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en.

5.1.2 The Plenary

Plenary sessions, which constitute the data body of the present study, are defined as the high point of political activity and have the purpose of debating and passing legislation. Plenary debates take place in 24 languages. For this reason, interpreters and translators are present in the debates and offer simultaneous interpretation to MEPs and other officials present (e.g. members of the Commission) in any of the 24 official languages of the European Union.

Plenary sittings are usually chaired by the President of the European Parliament, sometimes in the company of one or several of the 14 vice-presidents. In the absence of the President, a vice-president can take over the role of presiding the table and opening the sitting. The subjects of the debates in the plenary are usually parliamentary reports or resolutions which need to be put to vote. For this reason, speeches in plenary debates are often designed with the aim to convince. The participants in the debates are often representatives of the Commission, representatives of the political groups, and MEPs. However, it can occur that

representatives of other institutions such as the Council of the European Union also take the floor. In the debates, participants will express their views, or that of their groups, not only for the other members present but as well for a public. Plenaries, like Committee meetings, are recorded and publicly available on the Parliament's website, and may also be televised. The speaking time of each participant is assigned beforehand and is distributed between the political groups in two time fractions, first equally and then proportionally to the number of members of each group. Once parliamentary reports have been debated in plenary, they are assigned a date to be put to vote. Reports and resolutions are adopted by an absolute majority of the votes cast. After casting the votes, MEPs may take the floor upon request to give an explanation on their choice or that of their political group. After their closing, plenary debates are usually transcribed in the original language of the speech. Transcriptions are also publicly available on the Parliament's website.

5.1.3   The socio-political context of the analysis

The present study's data set is temporally situated between January 1st and March 31st 2020. This period is heavily defined by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is ongoing at the time of the analysis, and which disrupted and altered the workings, role and agenda of the European Parliament alongside the other EU institutions, both during and after the data collection period. The outbreak of the disease was officially declared on January 30th by the World Health Organisation (WHO), and since then it has had significant impact on the social, political and economic contexts at a global scale. At an economic level, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the largest economic recession since 1929.

The data set's time frame is also defined by a series of socio-political events both within and outside of the European Union. The end of the 2010s decade has been marked by socio-political tension and conflicts in multiple points in the globe (Hong Kong protests, Catalan protests, Gilets Jaunes, the European migrant crisis, etc.) and a rise of nationalism and populism in Europe (see Stone, 2014). It has also been marked by the effects of the climate emergency (declared by the EP on the 28th

of November of 2019). Thus, the beginning of the decade has seen the influence of these events on the workings of the European Union and the Parliament's agenda, alongside other social, political and economic challenges.

The political-parliamentarian context of this study's data is dominated by the major challenges that the institutions must address. Between January and March of 2020, political changes in the rise of nationalist and populist political tendencies in Europe have had an effect on the structure and workings of the Parliament and the implementation of proposals at an EU level. As of February 1st 2020, the success of the Brexit party in the referendum of 2016 saw the effective leave of the UK from the European Union after nearly 4 years of negotiations. This event not only influenced the content of the debates, but also caused a restructuring of the Parliament and triggered negotiations for the prosperous relationship between the UK and the Union. The rise of nationalist and populist political tendencies has also affected the implementation of EU policies such as the Istanbul Convention or the new Gender Equality Strategy, which were seen as an attack on the sovereignty and values of particular countries within Europe.

The effects of the climate emergency and social pressure are also major topics within the analysed data. As one of the greatest challenges of its time, climate change has been made a priority of the European Union for the period 2019-2024. For this reason, between January 1st and March 31st, the European Parliament debated the European Green Deal Investment Plan, the Just Transition Mechanism, the European Climate Law and Climate Pact, the European Industrial Strategy, the Circular Economy Action Plan, and the Farm to Fork Strategy in order to secure the goal of making the EU climate neutral by 2050.

Another priority for the period 2019-2024 which also becomes salient in the analysed data is the digitalisation process and its effects on the labour market. The digitalisation process has led to debates on the need for a restructuring of the schooling system in order to ensure that the skills being taught and the skills that are

needed are in synchronicity. In the same way, it also triggered debates on the effects of digitalisation on the Gender Pay Gap and the promotion of STEM careers for women, who represent only a small percentage of workers in the field. Data protection and Artificial Intelligence were also debated as a result of their increased role and effect in the lives of Europeans. Similarly, the effects of digitalisation on the labour market have also had a major relevance on the political climate of the beginning of the decade for its impact on the social and economic wellbeing of the EU.

Lastly, the question of gender-based inequalities is the main subject of the data body of the present study. The fourth trimester of 2019 saw the appointment of Helena Dalli as the new Commissioner for Gender Equality. Between January 1st and March 31st, the Commissioner and the European Parliament dealt, at large, with issues relative to the role and status of women in Europe and in the world. Digitalisation and Climate Change were also considered from the perspective of gender, triggering debates on how these challenges particularly affect women, and what can be the role of the EU on the matter. Between January and March, the European Parliament debated the need for a greater inclusion of women in the labour market, the need for support for female entrepreneurship, the gender pay gap and pension gap, the need for a more equal division of domestic and care responsibilities, girls' education and the encouragement of greater participation of women in STEM, the need for gender-balanced representation at all levels of decision-making, the "glass ceiling", the "Women on Boards Directive", the ratification of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women, Female Genital Mutilation, the allocation of adequate resources to combat gender-based violence and protect its victims, the protection and defence of the rights of groups experiencing multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination, and the specific challenges of women in the labour market.

To summarise, the political-parliamentarian context of this study is dominated by the effects of digitalisation and climate change, the rise of nationalist and populist

parties in Europe, the status of gender equality in Europe and in the world, and, in the second half of the selected time frame, the effects of COVID-19 in the social, political and economic sectors at a global scale.

5.2 Analytical method: Critical Discursive Psychology

For the analytical section of this study, I gathered data from the plenary sessions that took place between January 1st and March 31st 2020 in the European Parliament, including those held during the European Parliamentary Week (February 19th and 20th). This amounted to 14 plenaries with 97 hours and 22 minutes of front-stage parliamentary work, having already withdrawn from that amount the recorded minutes during which no front-stage procedure took place. Of the 14 plenary sessions, six took place in January, six in February, and two in March. It is essential to notice that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the March agenda and regular functioning of the Parliament, only the schedule for March 10th remained unchanged.

Plenaries were chosen as the ideal setting for conducting this study as they represent the high point of political activity in the European Parliament. Further, as representatives of all political groups are present in the debate, and both group and individual positions on the topic are presented, plenaries constitute the most diverse of the settings in terms of ideological positions.

The aim of this study is to inform of how identities and ideologies are negotiated in a feminism-related context. For this reason, only the six debates (distributed across five plenaries) in which issues central to feminist theory had a primary role in the debate were analysed. A total of 4 hours and 26 minutes of data were included in the analysis and are detailed in Table 2.

TABLE 2   Summary of the analysed data

Topic of the debate	Date	Duration (in minutes)	Content
Gender pay gap	13/01/2020	20:26 - 21:37 (71')	Reasons behind the gender pay gap, what it entails and role of the EU
Explanation of votes: gender pay gap	30/01/2020	13:15 - 13:39 (24')	Role of the EP on the gender pay gap
Gender equality strategy	12/02/2020	16:14 - 17:35 (81')	Negotiation of what EU gender-based policies should account for
EU priorities for the 64th session of the UN Commission on the status of women	12/02/2020	17:36 - 18:33 (57')	What should the EU focus on in relation to the status of women
Explanation of votes: EU priorities of the UN Commission	13/02/2020	12:27 - 12:34 (7')	What should these priorities and policies entail
International Women's Day MEPs debate	10/03/2020	9:00 - 9:26 (26')	Negotiation of what feminism entails

The "Web streaming" service of the European Parliament provided all of the analysed data, which is publicly accessible through the Parliament's website. It should be noted, however, that, for the sake of analysing communicative practices of and amongst the participants in the plenary, I used the simultaneous interpretation provided by the institution for this analysis where my linguistic repertoire was limited. The European Parliament's legal notice on the use of simultaneous interpretation was taken into consideration and, where available, the original official transcript of the speeches (and their translated unofficial version) took precedence. In the process of transcribing and translating the data, the translation from the original languages was kept as literal and faithful as possible. Overlaps and instances of self-editing have been kept in the transcripts in relation to their location

in the original recording and in consonance with the transcription requirements of the analytical method used.

While I gathered data in a reverse chronological order departing from the celebration of International Women's Day until the starting point of negotiations surrounding the status of women, the analysis took place in a layered chronological order. The analytical process began with a review of all of the sessions to gain an understanding of what constituted normal procedure, how were issues usually addressed, how diverse was the setting, and, most importantly, whether methods of feminist critical discourse analysis would be useful in this context. After a preliminary analysis using methods of feminist CDA and a thorough review of alternative critical discursive methods that could be applied in this context, I opted for Critical Discursive Psychology as a tool to analyse communicative practices and interpretative frameworks regarding identity and ideology. Both preliminary analyses (FCDA and CDP) were used on the same data excerpt (March 10th) and using Lazar's (2005) and Wiggins' (2017) description of the respective methods as a guide. The usefulness of CDP relied in that, while it acknowledges that some repertoires are more dominant than others, it focuses primarily on interaction and context-based communicative patterns (Wiggins, 2017, p. 45). For this reason, I deemed it a better fit to show how MEPs use communication to negotiate identities and ideologies.

Critical discursive psychology is a discourse analytic methodology that intends to both capture (some) detail of discourse and to address broader cultural issues (Wiggins, 2017, p. 44). CDP views discourse, language and interaction as socially and historically situated (Locke & Yarwood, 2017). Analyses following this methodology are guided by three concepts: interpretative repertoires, ideological dilemmas, and subject positions (Wiggins, 2017, p. 45, Reynolds & Wetherell, 2003, p. 496).

Potter and Wetherell (1987) define interpretative repertoires as "basically lexicon or register of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterize and evaluate

actions and events" (Potter & Wetherell 1987, p. 138, in Edley 2001, p. 198). Thus, interpretative repertoires are the range of linguistic resources that individuals can draw upon in interaction; they provide the basis for shared social understanding (Edley 2001, p. 198). To put it simply, interpretative repertoires are context-bound patterns in discourse. It is important to notice, however, that while the different repertoires can be used at any time and context, some are more "culturally dominant than others" (Wiggins, 2017, p. 45). Dominant repertoires are established over time and determine normality and normativity.

Ideological dilemmas are "contradictory or oppositional ways of understanding the same concept" (Wiggins, 2017, p. 45) that people use to argue for different positions. The concept particularly refers to the highly variable and dilemmatic nature of talk, where speakers have a tendency to draw on multiple interpretative repertoires, which may be contradictory.

Subject positions are the particular positions individuals speak from in conversation and in relation to the figure of an "other", they are contingent upon the repertoires made available in communication.

While CDP has been mostly used to analyse informal sets of talk regarding identification processes, I applied this methodology in front-stage political communication because it is where the notion of dominant repertoires has the most significant impact. The way repertoires and ideological dilemmas are negotiated within the context of the European Parliament influence political processes such as external action and the writing and passing of laws at the European level.

These concepts were used in the analysis because, in line with the goals of CDP, this study aims to analyse the linguistic resources MEPs draw upon to negotiate identities and ideologies as well as address broader cultural issues (gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.) "which cannot be reduced to a sequential analysis of talk" (Wiggins, 2017, p. 45). CDP was useful for the analysis of identity and ideology as it approaches these concepts as context-bound, and enacted, co-created and

(re)negotiated in communication. This understanding is in line with the critical postmodern approach underlying this study.

The first layer of analysis consisted of a broad overview of the debates in both their recorded and transcribed form that aimed to uncover the most relevant interpretative repertoires and the ideological dilemmas that arose from them. It is important to notice that, in the analysed data, interpretative repertoires had an ideological foundation. In this way, the register of terms that MEPs used to define and evaluate individuals, groups, ideologies and events were reoccurring throughout the data and traced back to the specifically defined characteristics of particular ideologies and commonly held assumptions in the ideological-political context. Essentially, their ideological and reoccurring nature made them identifiable through the speakers' use of linguistic cues common in and particular to the international parliamentarian context of the EP.

During the first layer of analysis, the focus remained on individual turns of talk, slowly shifting towards a closer look into single utterances while maintaining an awareness of the overall context of the debate and the speeches within it. The analysis of individual turns of talk provided insight into how MEPs positioned themselves relative to the variety of interpretative repertoires made available in each debate. This process resulted in the determination of the ideological dilemmas of each session, and provided as well an understanding of how MEPs navigated the ideological dilemmas of the debate and their own speeches throughout the analysed data. The identification of session-based dilemmas served to highlight the debate-based ideological spectrum onto which MEPs placed themselves, and made visible the process of negotiating repertoires despite an apparent lack of dialogue. This initial process of analysis resulted in a deeper understanding of the particular instances in communication in which the negotiation of identities and ideologies was the most relevant. This is owing to the fact that, precisely because interpretative repertoires had an ideological foundation and aimed to characterise groups and negotiate the meaning of labels, they shed light on how, for example, "us-them"

dichotomies not only define the self and the "Other" but also characterise the speaker from an ideological perspective and negotiate what that ideological perspective entails. It is how interpretative repertoires were used that gave rise to the categorisation of the processes of identity and ideology construction and negotiation.

This first layer was followed by the process of contrasting individual turns of talk (and single utterances within them) with the speeches of other speakers during the same debate and individual speakers across the analysed data. This process helped to determine how MEPs make visible their ideological positions and their multiple group affiliations through discourse, as well as negotiate their group- and ideology-based identifications.

The criteria for determining the instances in communication where the negotiation of identities and ideologies was the most relevant was, further, intrinsically related to critical postmodern approaches to identity and ideology and to the excerpts' relation to issues with which feminist theory concerns itself. This study's focus on political communication surrounding the figure of the woman results from the view that feminist-related discourses constitute a counterhegemonic or non-normative force. As such, it was expected that debates on topics related to feminism would yield more transparent and further separated ideological positions, and so would further highlight the processes of identity and ideology construction and negotiation. This focus affected the process of analysis, as feminism-related utterances were contrasted against the wave narrative (chronological and thematic classification of feminist movements into distinct "waves", see Evans, 2016 for a more detailed explanation) to illustrate further the process of negotiating ideologies and group-belonging.

The process of self-identification and the subsequent process of constructing a more or less imagined "Other", including the negotiation of group-belonging and ideological positions, also became apparent in the data. Thus, the combination of

focuses on the ideological spectrum of the debates and the subsequent positioning of MEPs, the interrelation between identification processes and ideology positions, the correlation between debate-centred utterances and feminist theory, and the processes of self-and-other construction resulted in the determination of 7 interrelated categories describing processes of identity and ideology construction. The categories are interrelated because, on occasion, MEPs will, for example, construct the debated political issue in an institutional/geographical context. In this way, the speaker will identify a macro group through the situated context (institutions, countries, regions, political or religious groups, etc.) and position themselves ideologically relative to the debated topic. In essence, it can happen that multiple discursive strategies take place simultaneously due to the inherently ideological nature of identifications in the political context of the study, and the variable and inconsistent nature of talk.

These categories, which explain the processes of identity and ideology negotiation and construction, are briefly presented in Table 3 and will be further developed in the findings section below. It should be noted that processes of negotiating identities and ideologies in the data which could not be explained by the use of the 7 categories were minimal, averaging 2 single utterances (statements) per debate.

TABLE 3   Processes of identity and ideology construction in the data

Category	Description
The discursive construction of the us-them divide	Ideological position and identity construction of the speaker and the "Other". Showcases group-relations and social identities, and follows an "us/them, good/bad" logic.
Explicit self-and-other identification	Explicit use of identity categories to refer to oneself and, on occasions, to an "other". **Is part of the discursive construction of the "us-them" divide.**

The imagined addressee	Implicit or explicit depiction of the individual or collective to whom the speech is directed or who is affected by the debated issue. **Is part of the discursive construction of the "us-them" divide.**
Identification of macro-groups	Context-bound and goal-oriented identity construction of particular groups (regional, national, supra-national, religious, etc.). Identifies the speaker relative to group-belonging and is ideologically charged. **Is part of the discursive construction of the "us-them" divide.**
Ideology talk	The context-sensitive characterisation and negotiation of explicitly mentioned ideological frameworks.
Constructing the debated political issues	Constructs the status, the nature, and the causes and consequences of the debated political issues. Showcases the renegotiation of the MEPs' and their parties' ideological stance. Creates an ideological spectrum of each debate which overpowers allocated group-belonging. Follows a political goal.
Political-ideological self-categorisation	Enactment and construction of political-ideological identities through linguistic cues and the implicit or explicit referral to one's institutional-ideological affiliations and political role.

6   FINDINGS

The strategies briefly described in the methodology section above showcase the processes of negotiating identities and ideologies. More importantly, they frame the *interpretative repertoires* that speakers in the European Parliament use **to make sense of why (not) certain legislative action needs (not) to be taken.** It is then a central finding in this study that all context-bound identification processes and ideological positions must always serve the political goal of the speech. This rule is kept throughout the entirety of the data, even in those occasions, such as the debate on International Women's Day, when no action proposal is being debated.

In this way, just as the processes of constructing and negotiating identities and ideologies must serve the goal of the speech, so this political goal will frame and be framed by context-bound identity and ideology constructions. Implicit and explicit characterisations of oneself and an "other" will be as much a product of the objective of the speaker as they will help to determine which is this goal they pursue. Thus, it becomes visible how identities and ideologies cannot be said to be fixed categories that pre-exist communication. Rather, they need to be constructed or reframed to fit each individual goal in a variety of contexts. It is this construction and renegotiation which takes place through the use of one or more of the discursive strategies described below.

The first four strategies are primarily centred on the question of constructing and negotiating identities in political communication. Nevertheless, they also address the negotiation of ideology as a direct result of identification processes, or of the ideological nature of identifications in front-stage political discourse. Since they primarily revolve around identification processes, they all, in some way, reflect the "us-them" logic of identifications in political discourse discussed in section 3 of the present study. The two strategies which follow revolve primarily around the negotiation of ideology, but discuss as well how, in that process, identities can also be discursively constructed. The last strategy is specifically dedicated to the process of constructing the political-ideological identity of the speaker. In this way, it highlights what is previously only hinted: that the renegotiation of ideologies cannot be separated from the discursive construction of identity in political communication.

6.1   The discursive construction of the "us-them" divide

"The discursive construction of the "us-them divide" reflects the process of simultaneously identifying oneself (or one's group) and an "other" relative to the "us/them" "good/bad" notions, power dynamics, and the MEPs use of particular belief systems. Asides from the implicit identification processes, this strategy reflects the negotiation of ideology in two ways. Firstly, this self-and-other identification is often related to belonging to political in-groups or affiliation with particular ideologies. Thus, it necessarily implies a categorisation of said groups or beliefs. And secondly, the analysis shows how MEPs make use of numerous belief systems in a fragmented manner to make sense of this process of differentiation. The discursive construction of the "us-them" divide constitutes an overarching category, as the processes of constructing identities and ideologies often take place through differentiation. In this way, the nature of this category will often result in an intersection between the identification of an "us" and a "them" with other discursive strategies.

In this study, MEPs and other speakers in the parliament constructed the "us-them" divide and the identities of each collective through a variety of interpretative repertoires grounded on multiple belief systems. In the example below, it is shown how a member of the European People's Party negotiates the identity of the collective "European leftists" and his party's ideological position in the context of the explanation of votes on the new Gender Pay Gap resolution. This example showcases two processes. Firstly, it shows how self-identification per one's ideological affiliation may happen through differentiation and the categorisation of an "other". And secondly, it shows how, in the context of political discourse, this discursive construction may intersect with the process of characterising and negotiating explicitly mentioned ideologies.

> **Antonio López-Istúriz White (PPE)** Gracias presidenta, yo voté eh... que sí, por supuesto, a esta Resolución, no por seguir la línea, por supuesto, de utilización política que hace esta izquierda retrógrada en Europa —que tenemos aquí, en estos compañeros en el Parlamento — que utiliza el feminismo de forma prehistórica, no, sino precisamente mirando al futuro como mi compañero Hook acaba de decir.

> Thank you, President, I voted uh… yes, of course, to this Resolution, not to follow the line, of course, of political manipulation done by this retrograde left in Europe – which we have here, in these colleagues in the Parliament – that uses feminism in a prehistoric way, no, but precisely looking to the future as my colleague Hook just said.

Here the speaker creates an image of the political right, in which he self-categorises, by negatively portraying its opposite. Relative to the negotiation of ideology, it is interesting to see how the speaker categorises feminism as standing outside of left-right divisions. This construction follows the goal of aligning the speaker with the feminist position of acting against the existing gender pay gap while distinguishing him from his political opposition. He does so by identifying right-wing European parties as using feminism in a way which looks into the future, and categorising left-wing European parties as using feminism in a prehistoric manner. In this way, he constructs and negotiates the identity and ideology of his political in-group and an out-group following the "us-them, good-bad" logic, but

also negotiates the meaning of "leftist", "right-wing" and "feminism" to make sense of his actions and stance.

Another example of this ideologically charged "us-them" logic which characterises identity constructions in political communication is the following extract from the explanation of votes on the Gender Pay Gap resolution of January 30th.

> **Guido Reil (ID)** […] Bezeichnend finde ich auch, dass diese Lohndifferenz uh… in katholischen Ländern wie in Polen zum Beispiel viel viel niedriger ist als in Ländern, die links regiert werden. Danke.

> […] I also find it significant that this wage gap uh… in Catholic countries like Poland, for example, is much much lower than in countries that are governed by the left. Thank you.

Here the speaker constructs the national identity of Poland through both explicit characterisation and the negative portrayal of an "other". In this way, the speaker defines Poland as a Catholic country with a right-wing government and, as a direct result of these characteristics, as a country with a low gender pay gap. In defining Poland thus, the speaker negotiates both his own ideological affiliations and the meanings of "right-wing", "left-wing" and "Catholic" relative to the interactional context and the political goal. In essence, in the context of the gender pay gap, the catholic right-wing in-group is identified as "good" and the left-wing out-group as "bad" to promote support for the policies proposed by the in-group. This construction, thus, brings to light the influence of the "backstage" of politics and power relations mentioned in section 3. Here the speaker not only affiliates with an ideological position with his stance (catholic and right-wing), but also constructs who belongs in the in-group, and therefore affiliates with a concrete ideologically-informed group. Defining "us" and "them" goes beyond the limitations imposed by political groups, nationality, committee and others. The in-group's identity is founded on a belief that traverses institutional categorisations. In this way, the speaker brings to light the tendency to construct one's identity and ideological position in spite of allocated group-belonging and, therefore, to found one's

ideological position and use beliefs in a manner that is inconsistent with one's political categorisation.

6.1.1 Explicit self-and-other identification

Following the understanding of identity as a process of differentiation which follows an "us-them" logic, the explicit identification of oneself and an "Other" would be a sub-category of the discursive construction of the "us-them" divide defined above. This strategy refers to the explicit use of identity categories to refer to oneself and, on occasion, to an "Other" in a context-sensitive and goal-oriented manner. Thus, it serves to both discursively construct one's identity per the interactional context and the political goal of the speech, and to negotiate the meaning of concrete identity categories.

In the example below, the explicit use of identity categories serves for the speaker to construct both his gender identity per the political goal of the speech, and to construct the role that people who identify within this category should enact. Furthermore, it constructs the identity of women relative to the role of men in this context, thus bringing to light an image of the world subject to gender-based power dynamics and based upon a belief system that is independent from group-belonging.

> **Antoni Comín i Oliveres (NI)** […] The social change that women need to be able to see their rights fully guaranteed affects all of us, women and men. If we men do not change our roles both in the public sphere and in the business world and in the family sphere, it will be impossible for women to get rid of the situations in which their rights are violated so often.

Men's identity construction is intrinsically related to the goal of the speech and, thus, frames the ideological position of the speaker on the basis of the belief systems used to inform this construction, his political identity and in comparison with other positions in the debate. In defining the role men should enact, as well as defining the status of women, the speaker seeks to endorse those proposals which aim to redefine gender roles in the public, business and family spheres. His goals thus fall towards the left end ("left" and "right" are arbitrary labels designed for analytical purposes)

of the debate's ideological spectrum (in comparison with other speeches within it), as well as align him with the ideological positions of other political groups despite the fact that the speaker does not belong in them. In this way, in explicitly constructing men's and women's identities relative to the debated topic, the speaker also frames his ideological position and positions himself relative to in-group-out-group divisions that are particular to the context speakers constructed in the debate.

The use of identity categories in political communication is also related to the role that the collective included in a label should play in accordance with the goal of the speech. In the example below, the speaker makes visible both her gender and her political identity to negotiate the role of the European Parliament and create an image of Europe that is directly related to the goal of the speech. The speaker also negotiates who is included in the in-group that needs to perform the stated role and defines it on the basis of inner differences and common goals.

> **Elżbieta Katarzyna Łukacijewska (PPE)** […] And I hope that we, women in the European Parliament, despite many differences, will be able to speak with one voice on this topic, important to millions of European Union citizens.

In a similar way, the speaker of the example below also constructs the identity of women in self-identifying as part of the collective. In so doing, she makes visible her ideological stance as well as frames her political goal.

> **Lucia Ďuriš Nicholsonová (ECR)** Medzinárodný deň žien je pre mňa o jednom posolstve a netýka sa len žien v EÚ, ale žien na celom svete. Nie sme len estetické rebro Adama. Sme samostatne mysliace bytosti, ktoré majú právo na slobodný výber, slobodnú voľbu.

> For me, International Women's Day is about one message and is not just about women in the EU, but about women all over the world. We are not just Adam's aesthetic rib. We are self-thinking beings who have the right to free choice, free choice.

Unlike in the previous example where the collective "women" referred solely to women in the European Parliament, here the collective extends beyond the limits of Europe and throughout the world. Through the use of Christian symbology

("Adam's rib"), the speaker defines the in-group (women in the world) on the basis of what we are ("self-thinking beings who have the right to free choice") and are not ("Adam's aesthetic rib"). In so doing, she frames her ideological position based on her use of belief systems (freedom of choice particular to feminist movements; self-presentation as pro-women's rights irrespective of geographical location), her political categorisation (ECR) and in comparison with other speeches in the debate (centre of the ideological spectrum).

In this way, we can see how identities are constructed in discourse and re-negotiated in interaction through self-identification in a manner which is inherently related to the ideological stance an MEP will choose to take in a particular context and moment.

6.1.2 The imagined addressee

Tightly intertwined with the previous strategy in the goal-oriented identification of an individual or group, *the imagined addressee* is also subject to the "us-them" logic of constructing identities in political communication. This strategy refers to the implicit or explicit depiction of the individual or collective to whom the speech is directed or who is affected by the debated issue (e.g. collectives affected by gender-based discrimination or policies addressing it). In this way, it highlights identification processes as MEPs construct and negotiate the meaning of certain identity categories. On the negotiation of ideology, MEPs make use of belief systems in a fragmented way. In the process, they negotiate their group's stance and align towards one or other end of the ideological spectrum of the debate. Additionally, as the main addressees throughout the analysed data are women, speakers often make use of arguments which can be positioned within particular feminist ideologies, even if they don't self-identify as feminist.

In this study, MEPs often construct an image of women which makes sense of the need to follow their political goal instead of another. In the process, they often mention commonly held assumptions about the addressee (interpretative

repertoires). These assumptions, when contrasted against the wave theory of feminism, showcase how speakers ideologically position themselves relative to perspectives of feminism irrespective of ideological self-identifications and group-belonging. One such example is the following extract from the debate on the Gender Equality Strategy.

> **Luisa Regimenti (ID)** La donna è un mistero che costituisce nella storia delle generazioni umane un'opera immensa per la sua missione e per la sua vocazione al servizio dell'umanità e della vita, per il contributo quotidiano fatto di sensibilità, intuizione, dedizione e generosità verso la famiglia e la vita civile, e per l'elaborazione di una cultura in grado di coniugare la ragione con il sentimento, caratteristica propria della femminilità, con la quale la donna arricchisce la comprensione delle cose del mondo e contribuisce alla piena autenticità dei rapporti umani. Costantemente è visibile la propria dignità nelle instancabili battaglie per l'uguaglianza dei diritti della persona...

> The woman is a mystery which in the history of human generations constitutes an immense work for her mission and for her vocation in the service of humanity and life, for her daily contribution made of sensitivity, intuition, dedication and generosity towards family and civil life, and for the development of a culture capable of combining reason with feeling, a characteristic of femininity, with which women enrich their understanding of the things of the world and contribute to the full authenticity of human relationships. Your dignity is constantly visible in the tireless battles for the equality of the rights of the person…

Here the MEP discursively constructs which characteristics are associated with the label "women". She identifies the collective to whom she directs her speech and for whom the policies she later proposes should be adopted. The construction of the addressee's identity is fit to the political goal in such a way that this identification process would not be the same if the political goal was another. In looking at this construction of womanhood through feminist lenses, it becomes visible how the description provided above aligns with traditional approaches to femininity (*sensitivity, dedication, generosity*). Thus, this depiction constitutes an ideological position of the speaker relative to feminist theory in the characterisation of gender norms. At the same time, it positions the speaker within the ideological spectrum of

the debate. Thus, the speaker aligns with those positions which claim that gender inequalities are real and support action against them, but drifts away from those with a non-traditional approach to gender. Relative to group-belonging, this ideological position of the speaker is in direct contradiction with the statements of other ID members on the existence of gender-based inequalities (e.g. M. Krah *the gender pay gap is a modern myth*"). Thus, this conclusion reinforces the hypothesis that ideologies are used in an inconsistent manner per the interactional context and the political goal of the speech irrespective of allocated group-belonging.

In a similar way, the speaker from the example below also negotiates who is included in the identity category "women" and, in so doing, negotiates her ideological stance relative to feminist theory and the spectrum of the debate.

> **Ska Keller (Verts/ALE)** […] So let's never ever for one day even think the fight is over, it is not over, it needs to be continued with women of all origins, of all religions, no matter how they look, no matter whom they love, and let's not forget either the struggle of trans women, who are often overlooked. Thank you very much. (Applause)

As opposed to the previous example where the speaker constructed the addressee based on a traditional perspective of gender norms, here the speaker identifies women through intersectional lenses. Referring to "women of all origins, all religions, no matter how they look, […] whom they love" and transgender women as part of the in-group "women" positions the speaker ideologically. Relative to the wave theory of feminism, this construction of the addressee would be particular to fourth-wave feminist movements. In terms of the spectrum of the debate, this construction would align with those positions with a non-traditional approach to gender and an intersectional view of gender-based inequalities. In turn, the speaker also negotiates what intersectionality means in specifically referring to groups of women that are included in this fight for women's rights, and negotiates what it means to belong to the political party Verts/ALE and what is the party's stance in this debate.

6.1.3 Identification of macro-groups

The *identification of macro-groups* refers to the process of defining and negotiating the current and historical status of particular groups (including national, regional and supranational) and of the role they play, have played, should play or will play in relation to the debated topics. Additionally, it is also the process of defining and identifying said groups relative to the interactional context. This category reflects identification processes in two ways. Firstly, MEPs construct a context-bound goal-oriented image of the multiple groups (e.g. the EU, migrants, etc.). And secondly, they identify themselves in their implicit or explicit affiliation with one or multiple groups. In this sense, this identity construction of in-groups and out-groups would be intrinsically related to the "us-them" logic defined above.

This category reflects the negotiation of ideology in a variety of ways. First and foremost, as representatives of a particular political group, MEPs negotiate their group's self-assigned ideological identity (e.g. socialists, conservatives, populists) in making use of a range of belief systems to construct a goal-oriented picture of the world. Secondly, they align with and use a variety of ideological positions per the interactional context and their objectives, reinforcing the understanding of ideology as used in fragmented ways. Thirdly, they refer to and use fragments of feminist ideologies without necessarily aligning with feminism as a whole. Lastly, the MEPs use of particular belief systems and interpretative repertoires in the discursive construction of group identities within the debate creates an ideological spectrum. Parliamentarians then lean towards one or other end irrespective of allocated group-belonging.

In the fragment analysed below, the speaker negotiates the role of the European Union and the European Parliament, and, in so doing, constructs the identity of these institutional bodies per the interactional context.

Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Gender Equality - The European Union and its citizens need your full support in making Europe an equal place for women and men in all their diversity. Gender equality is a founding principle of the European Union. Europe is a good

place to live for many, but it would be an understatement to say that we are still not there yet when it comes to gender equality. Women are still being underpaid compared to men. One in three women in the EU have experienced physical or sexual violence, or both since the age of 15 – and that's millions of women. We cannot accept these appalling inequalities.

Here the speaker identifies the EU as still an unequal place for *"women and men in all their diversity"*. In so doing, she refers to feminist theory in aligning for gender equality from an intersectional perspective and negotiates her ideological position through the identification of the referenced inequalities. The speaker also negotiates the Commission's ideological stance relative to the debated topic in being its representing voice, creating a seemingly unified ideological identity of this institution per their stance on gender equality and the role of the EU. Lastly, the Commissioner also constructs a context-bound and goal-oriented identity of the European Union in identifying its "*founding principle*" and categorising the EU as "*a good place to live for many*" but "*not there yet when it comes to gender equality*".

Another example which also highlights the role and identity of national and institutional groups relative to the debated topic is the following extract.

> **Clare Daly (GUE/NGL)** I note that the strategy singles out women who face multiple... multiple forms of discrimination such as Roma and migrant women, and I welcome that, but we should really call this out. I mean it is a scandal that we have, in Bulgaria, Roma women segregated in maternity hospitals, not allowed to use toilet facilities or to eat with other women. We need concrete solutions for this, we need legislation outlawing such discrimination, and we need to facilitate women in the best possible way.

Here the speaker identifies the EU and the European Parliament through the negotiation of their role in the debated context and the ideological position that these groups should have. In so doing, she negotiates her own ideological stance and constructs her political identity through the use of "we" in action proposals. Group identities are here constructed following a two-folded "us-them" logic in the context of gender- and ethnic-based discrimination. The speaker constructs two in-groups: the European Union, in which Bulgaria would be included, and the European

Parliament. She also constructs two out-groups: Bulgaria, and other EU countries that are not Bulgaria. Thus, the EP would be constructed as an institution with the duty to "*call out*" the situation in Bulgaria and other EU countries, Bulgaria as a country in which Roma women are segregated in maternity hospitals, and the EU as a macro-group in which these forms of discrimination are not outlawed. In essence, here the speaker constructs a context-sensitive and goal-oriented identity of the mentioned groups, and negotiates her own identity through affiliation and group-belonging.

On the negotiation of ideology, the speaker uses belief systems in a fragmented way. In using an intersectional perspective of feminism as a basis for framing her political goal, the speaker negotiates this ideology as one which addresses particular forms of discrimination (gender and ethnicity), while not necessarily doing so with other forms. The proposition also negotiates ideology in constructing which should be the ideological stance of the EU/EP relative to the debated topic, and in positioning the speaker within the spectrum of the debate irrespective of her political group's stance.

6.2 Ideology talk

The strategy *ideology talk* showcases the process of characterising and negotiating explicitly mentioned ideologies per the context of the speech and its political goal. This category reflects the negotiation of ideology inasmuch as it involves the explicit definition of a number of belief systems (e.g. left-wing, feminism, populism, etc.) in a context-bound and goal-oriented manner. This strategy often intersects with the "us-them" logic of identification processes and showcases power-relations in the positive or negative characterisation of specific ideologies.

The example below highlights the discursive construction of ideologies in the negotiation of their meaning. In this meaning-making process, the speaker follows

an "us-them, good-bad" logic which is intrinsically related with the goal of the speech.

> **Jadwiga Wiśniewska,** w imieniu grupy ECR […] Za to bardzo mocny będzie głos lewicowo-liberalnych środowisk dążących do uznania aborcji za prawo człowieka i metodę planowania rodziny, jak również dążących do seksualizacji dzieci i manipulowania płciowością. Dlatego wzywam do opamiętania się. Proszę zagłosować zatem za rezolucją, która bez niepotrzebnej ideologii wyraża troskę o przyszłość kobiet. To rezolucja EKR-u.

> […] For this, the voice of left-liberal environments seeking to recognize abortion as a human right and a method of family planning, as well as seeking to sexualize children and manipulate sexuality will be very strong. That is why I am calling to repent. Please, vote for a resolution that expresses concern for the future of women without unnecessary ideology. This is ECRs resolution.

Here the speaker constructs the meaning of "liberal left" as an ideological framework in this context. The recognition of *"abortion as a human right and a method of family planning,"* the sexualisation of children and the manipulation of sexuality are identified as ideological foundations of the "liberal left". Furthermore, this construction negotiates, through opposition, the meaning of "conservatism" as an ideological framework and ECR as a political-ideological group. The speaker presents this ideology as one which is concerned with the future of women and which stands against the above mentioned characteristics of the political left. Thus, the negotiation of ideology is here intrinsically related to the identification of political groups, self-categorisation and the discursive construction of the "us-them" divide.

In the following extract, the negotiation of meaning of an ideology is done through opposition with another understanding of the same ideology. Here, the feminism of the speaker is categorised as "real", while that of the addressee is categorised as "petit bourgeois". Thus, this negative portrayal of an "Other" serves to define and negotiate what "feminism" means. Moreover, it also serves to identify

the speaker as feminist while acknowledging the existence of another type of feminism and feminists which are also characterised.

> **Mathilde Androuët (ID)** Monsieur le Président, chers collègues, à votre féminisme petit-bourgeois, je préfère celui du réel. Que comptez-vous faire, non pas pour améliorer la vie des femmes, mais vraiment pour sauver leur vie? Mutilations génitales, viol, violence, harcèlement. Chaque jour, une nouvelle atrocité est commise contre les femmes. Alors de quoi parlerez-vous devant les Nations unies? De ces fois où vous avez demandé à des responsables d'associations pro-migrants de taire des viols, parce que cela faisait le jeu des populistes? De la police anglaise qui refuse des dépôts de plainte contre les gangs pédophiles indo-pakistanais, par crainte de racisme? De la prostitution d'adolescentes africaines, roumaines ou albanaises, à cause de votre sacro-sainte liberté de circuler? Des féministes qui condamnent une adolescente menacée de mort en France pour injure à l'islam? Je m'interroge. Irez-vous avouer que vous avez laissé la loi des quartiers devenir la seule loi? Que vous avez abandonné les femmes à leurs bourreaux, juste parce qu'ils étaient et sont encore vos électeurs? Je ne vous demande même plus d'être féministes…

Mr President, dear colleagues, to your petit bourgeois feminism, I prefer the real one. What do you plan on doing, not to make women's lives better, but to truly save their lives? Genital mutilation, rape, violence, imprisonment. Every day, a new atrocity is committed against women. So what will you talk about in front of the United Nations? About those times where you have asked officials of pro-migrant associations to keep the rapes silent, because that played into the hands of populists? The English police who refuse to file complaints against Indo-Pakistani paedophile gangs for fear of racism? Of the prostitution of African, Romanian or Albanian teenage girls, because of your sacrosanct freedom of movement? Of the feminists who condemn a teenage girl threatened with death in France for insulting Islam? I'm wondering. Will you admit that you let the neighbourhood law become the only law? That you abandoned women to their tormentors, just because they were and still are your voters? I don't even ask you to be feminists…

In this way, the extract above reflects the discursively constructed nature of identities and ideologies. The speaker explicitly refers to people's tendency to identify themselves (ideologically, in this case) based on their own understanding of what identities and ideologies mean and entail. While the speaker claims the reality of one type of feminism over another, she sheds light on the fact that both the in-

group and the out-group identify as feminist based on what they think feminism entails. To shed light on that fact, she describes both feminisms, albeit in a goal-based and ideologically-informed manner. The negative description of the "Other" and their understanding of "feminism" serves to promote support for the speaker's goal of endorsing action against specified forms of discrimination against women in a manner that is different from what has been done and proposed thus far. This goal is what is implicitly described as the "real" feminism of the speaker: one which acts against what the "other" feminism does not, and does what the "other" feminism hasn't. In this way, negotiating the meaning of two ideologies under the same label also serves to identify the addressee (the EP/EU), as well as to position the speaker relative to the addressee's described "stance". While the central object remains the characterisation of the two types of feminism, the speaker identifies the EP/EU and her in-group ideologically in describing the role and status of the out-group (EP/EU) relative to specified forms of discrimination against women ("abandoned women to their tormentors, just because they were and still are your (EP) voters", allowed prostitution of ethnically and nationally identified women because of "your (the EU/EP) sacrosanct freedom of movement", etc.).

6.3   Constructing the debated political issues

This strategy refers to the process of defining and negotiating the debated political issues: what they consist in, what are their causes and their consequences, and what is their current and historical status in the described context. Multiple debated political issues can be negotiated simultaneously (e.g. gender inequality and policies to solve it).

This strategy reflects the negotiation of ideology in a similar way to the identification of macro groups. Here, MEPs also negotiate their group's stance, use belief systems in multiple and fragmented ways, including feminism, and position themselves within the spectrum of the debate irrespective of official group-

belonging. In the construction of the debated political issues, we can also see how political-ideological affiliations are not limited to one's political group but rather intersect with national, institutional and other identity categories. Here, power relations, political goals, context and the *backstage* of politics also influence the construction of identities and ideologies. Additionally, this category also reflects identification processes in cases where the cause of the debated topic is said to be rooted in a collective of people.

An example found in this study on how negotiating the status, nature, causes and consequences of the debated topics constructs and renegotiates identities and ideologies would be this fragment from the debate on the new Gender Equality Strategy.

> **Sylwia Spurek (S&D)** (Thanks president in Polish) I come from Poland, a country in which women are still not properly protected from violence; a country in which women who are living in villages still do not have proper access to health care, in which the burden of childcare is put on women, and only one per cent of men take paternity leave. I come from Poland, a country in which women do not have the right to safe and legal abortion. The list of issues is long and the situation affects even more women with disabilities, elderly, LGTBI, Roma women and Muslim women, and it is disgraceful that in the 21st century in the centre of Europe there are women who cannot enjoy their fundamental human rights.

After the explicit self-and-other categorisation of the speaker and the president per their national background, we find the simultaneous construction of the status of gender (in)equality in a particular context (Poland), and of the nature of gender (in)equality. The speaker defines gender inequality in the described national context as consisting of violence against women, lack of or unequal access to healthcare services, assigning of gender roles relative to childcare which negatively affect women, lack of access to safe abortion, the intersection of gender based-discrimination with other forms of segregation and the disrespect of fundamental human rights. Moreover, there is an implicit understanding that the causes of this

persistent inequality are rooted in national policies and a lack of a European intervention.

As it can be seen in comparison with the example which will follow, this description of Poland is subject to the political goal of endorsing an EU intervention on Member States to guarantee the implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy, the Istanbul Convention and other policies on the subject of gender-based discrimination. Further, it constitutes an ideological position within the spectrum of the debate relative to (1) the status of gender equality within Europe ("equality has been achieved" versus "equality is still very far from being reached"), and (2) the nature of gender (in)equality. Additionally, it constitutes an ideological position relative to feminist ideologies (intersectionality, pro-choice, etc.) and relative to group positions on this particular topic. These group positions are stated at the beginning of the debate and are presented as the epitome of the political group's stance. Thus, this speaker renegotiates socialism and democracy as consisting of a firm defence of gender equality at the intersection with specifically mentioned forms of discrimination. Additionally, she renegotiates the intersectional perspective of feminism in stating which forms of discrimination co-exist with gender-based segregation in a given context. Lastly, she consciously distinguishes her own position from that of her nation-based allocated group in showing a negative image of the country she represents and which she intends to change.

Another example found in this study which paints a rather different picture of the same context would be the following intervention from the debate on the EU priorities for the 64th session of the UN Commission on the status of women.

Beata Mazurek (ECR) Choć minęło 25 lat od Światowej Konferencji w sprawie kobiet, która odbyła się w Pekinie, to ta debata uświadamia nam, że jest jeszcze wiele do zrobienia w kwestii ochrony i wzmocnienia roli kobiet w różnych obszarach. Musimy odpowiedzieć sobie na pytanie, co już udało się zrobić, i jakie kroki należy podjąć, by kobiety na całym świecie przestały borykać się z takimi problemami jak przemoc, szeroko pojęte nierówności ekonomiczne, czy choćby dyskryminacja kobiety jako matki w środowisku

zatrudnienia. Może Parlament Europejski powinien wziąć przykład z Polski, w której to różnice w wynagrodzeniach kobiet i mężczyzn są jednymi z najniższych w Europie, a niski wskaźnik przemocy wobec kobiet plasuje Polskę w czołówce najbezpieczniejszych krajów Starego Kontynentu. Jednocześnie mówimy stanowcze „nie" dla postulatów niektórych środowisk, by aborcja była jedną z metod planowania rodziny, oraz by Unia Europejska finansowała organizacje zaangażowane w jej promowanie.

Although 25 years have passed since the World Conference on Women in Beijing, this debate makes us aware that there is still much to be done to protect and strengthen the role of women in various areas. We need to answer the question of what has already been done and what steps should be taken so that women around the world stop tackling such problems as violence, broadly understood economic inequalities, or even discrimination against women as mothers in the employment environment. Maybe the European Parliament should take an example from Poland, in which the gender pay gap is one of the lowest in Europe, and the low rate of violence against women places Poland among the safest countries in the Old Continent. At the same time, we say a firm 'no' to the postulates of some environments, that abortion should be one of the methods of family planning, and that the European Union should finance the organizations involved in its promotion.

In comparison with the example above, here the highlighted fragment of the speech portrays a complete opposite, yet still similarly goal-oriented, image of Poland in the context of gender inequalities. Here the speaker refers to different yet equally specific forms of discrimination which do not intersect with other forms of segregation. In this way, the speaker refers to and aligns with feminist positions in advocating for gender equality while consciously separating her stance from other feminist positions such as the access to safe abortion and intersectionality. Furthermore, this speech negotiates the speaker's group's stance and the meaning of conservative and reformist policies. The speaker frames conservatism as the defence of the rights of mothers in the employment sector, the elimination of the gender pay gap, the promotion of safety from violence and the veto to the use of abortion as a family planning method. Thus, this construction is dissimilar to other previously seen constructions of conservatism. Additionally, the speaker positions herself on the status of gender inequalities in the EU and Poland in a manner which highlights power dynamics and group affiliations. She makes visible how MEPs may choose to

highlight their national identity over their political identity when taking an ideological stance, a choice which is in direct opposition to the previous example.

6.4 Political-ideological self-categorisation

In this section are categorised the implicit enactment of political identities and the implicit or explicit referral to one's party, political group, or institutional role. This category makes visible the processes of constructing one's political and institutional identity while also constructing an ideological identity via group-belonging. This process is often part of the identification of macro groups (political and institutional) in the use of a plural subject ("we (the European Parliament) must…") but may also happen independently.

Some instances in which this political self-categorisation happens independently from any other processes are these extracts spoken by the presiding chair in the International Women's Day debate.

> **President:** Good morning, colleagues, the session is now open and before we move to our debate I want to make two announcements […] Thank you and to endorse our commitment as a Parliament to International Women's Day I now give the floor to a round of speakers for the Political Groups. Our first speaker for 2 minutes Ms. Fitzgerald.

> **President:** Ms. Fitzgerald, please hold, I think there are problems with the interpretation (?)

> **Interpreter**: Yes

> **President:** Which language, please?

> **Interpreter**: German

> **Unknown Speaker**: [German

> **President**: German

> Okay…Do you want to start again or did you get any of that?

Interpreter: (unintelligible) okay

President: Okay, try...please speak now, Frances, and we'll see if the translation

Fitzgerald: [yes

President: ...is working

These examples highlight identification processes and the construction of a political identity in three distinct ways. The first fragment from the presiding chair's introduction to the debate makes visible one of the ways in which speakers in the Parliament construct or enact their political role in interaction. The act of declaring the plenary session open discursively constructs the political role of "president of the table" in this particular context and moment. In this sense, the use of particular habitual sentences in the parliamentary context serves to highlight one's institutional identity through discourse. The phrase "I now give the floor to…" would be another such example. In the fragment that follows the opening of the session, the uses of "our debate" and "our commitment as a Parliament" discursively construct the identity of the speaker as a member of the European Parliament and participant in the debate. The last utterance is where the added "ideological" note to the title becomes relevant. While it is a normal practice to refer to speakers by their last name, it is rather uncommon in the analysed data to refer to an MEP by their first name. In this particular case, its use serves to construct the president's political identity in terms of group-belonging and political-ideological affiliation.

Another way in which speakers in the Parliament discursively construct their political-ideological identity is through explicit referral to their political role. For example, in the following extracts we can see how the speakers construct and enact their political identities in referring to their work, the party to which they belong, and to actions associated with political roles. Furthermore, this construction of political identities also makes visible their ideological positions in terms of (1) the actions they endorse and (2) group affiliations.

Antony Hook (Renew). – As an MEP, I have often been inspired in my work by thoughts of my baby daughter's future and so, in my last speech in this Parliament, I appeal for equality between men and women.

The speaker here constructs his political-ideological identity through a series of context-relevant linguistic cues. Firstly, the speaker specifically refers to his position as an MEP. Secondly, in stating that it is his last speech in this Parliament, he constructs his identity as an MEP representing the UK. And thirdly, he constructs his political identity as an active MEP through the use of the word "appeal for", which refers to the act of voting in Parliament that took place prior to this debate. It is important to notice, as well, how the speaker makes visible his ideological position in stating his stance relative to gender equality and the voting that took place that day. In this particular moment, the speaker's group affiliations (including political party) are irrelevant. Rather, what is important is his position in relation to gender equality and how that relates to what other speakers say (spectrum of the debate).

John Howarth (S&D). – Madam President, chers collègues, very appropriate that our last vote as Labour MEPs is to support this report on the gender pay gap.

In this example, the speaker makes visible his political-ideological identities through explicit group affiliation at different levels. Firstly, the use of habitual sentences such as "Madam President, chers collègues" serves to identify him as an MEP and speaker in the debate. Secondly, the explicit referral to the act of voting and his position as an MEP makes visible his role in Parliament. Thirdly, his explicit self-identification as "Labour MEP" (as well as the use of "last vote") serves to construct his identity as an MEP representing the UK and member of the Labour Party in his home state. Lastly, the explicit referral to his position as a member of the Labour Party positions him ideologically in terms of political group-belonging. It is worth noting, as well, that in stating that "supporting this report on the gender pay gap" is common to the Labour Party MEPs, he also negotiates his own and his group's ideological position at the moment of the debate. As a consequence, the speaker also negotiates the identity of Labour as a party with a particular ideological position relative to the gender pay gap outside of the context of the debate.

To summarise, the often simultaneous and overlapping use of the seven discursive strategies comprised in this section justifies an understanding of identities and ideologies as discursively constructed in a context-sensitive and goal-oriented manner. More importantly, it shows that the discursive construction of identities cannot be separated from the renegotiation of ideologies in political communication. The feminist framework serves to further justify the hypothesis that ideologies are used in myriad and fragmented ways, and to showcase how the ideological stance of political groups is renegotiated in communication relative to the context and the political goal. The above categories also show how the multiple group affiliations of MEPs may intersect and affect their ideological stance at a given moment, and thus that political actors' stances cannot be said to be ruled solely by their political-parliamentarian in-group.

In essence, the above categories show how MEPs negotiate their groups' stances, use belief systems in multiple and fragmented ways, including feminism, and ideologically position themselves within the spectrum of the debate irrespective of allocated group-belonging. Further, they show how power relations, political goals, context, and the *backstage* of politics inform the construction of identities and ideologies, and how habitual sentences frame the construction of political identities.

7   DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to answer the question: *How are identities and ideologies negotiated in front-stage political communication in the European Parliament's gender equality plenaries?* This aim was developed around the study's underlying goal of problematizing the view of identity as merely enacted in communication. The study sought to problematize as well the understanding of ideology as a matter of grand theories rather than of discourse analysis. Both goals were designed to contribute to the interdisciplinary study of political communication.

This study's central concepts were observed from a critical postmodern perspective and informed by identity politics, which was understood as a guide to explore how identity (and, here, ideology) is constructed as the means to achieve political ends (Hill & Wilson, 2003). In response to the first research question, the findings identified seven communicative strategies that Members and other speakers in the European Parliament use to construct and negotiate the meanings of identities and ideologies. The findings are contextualised within the data's feminism-related nature and informed by feminist theories in communication.

In line with previous studies in the context of political communication in international arenas, findings in this study indicate the presence of an "us-them" logic in political communication relative to the construction of identities (Krzyżanowski, 2011, p. 284; Abélès, 2004, p. 17; Ağcasulu and Ossewaarde, 2019,

p.360; Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p. 73). Nevertheless, this study's findings further indicate that *the discursive construction of the "us-them" divide* involves both identification processes and negotiating ideologies. In observing the inherently ideological nature of political categorisations and group-belonging in the EP, alongside the understanding of ideologies as enabling identification, using an "us-them" logic in this context will necessarily imply that the construction of identities and the negotiation of ideologies are interrelated processes. Thus, this finding shows that identifications in political discourse are informed by the speaker's ideological position in a given moment, including the position from which they are speaking relative to group-belonging. This finding is highlighted by the ideological relevance of particular identifications such as gender or sexuality within the feminism-related context.

The influence of context on identification processes and ideological positions has also been considered a characteristic of political discourse by other authors (Ağcasulu & Ossewaarde, 2019, p. 366). The findings of this study suggest that contextual factors are the dominant influencer of identification processes and ideological positions in political communication. Particularly, a speaker's political agenda is a determining factor in the speaker's portrayal of a relevant individual or group, their use of particular ideologies, and their situated ideological stance. This finding illustrates how creating dominant discourses surrounding social groups is intrinsically related to a political agenda. Thus, it supports the argument that identities and ideologies are discursively constructed and are interrelated in the context of political communication. More importantly, it implies that ideologies must be used in an inconsistent and fragmented way, since the meaning of ideologies must be negotiated for each particular goal and context, in correlation with other situated beliefs. In essence, ideologies are used in an inconsistent and fragmented manner because different beliefs are salient or relevant at different times, and because they are subject to the political goal of the speech. Additionally, the above finding shows that the speaker's multiple group affiliations (including

ideology-based and parliamentarian) will influence a speaker's position in myriad ways at different times.

In terms of political identities and group belonging, previous research suggests that the existence of an organisational culture with distinct institutional practices and dynamics hinders MEPs from moving beyond institutional patterns (Krzyżanowski, 2011, p. 293). Previous research also suggests that political identities relative to a speaker's role and position are constructed through the use of particular sociolinguistic discursive means (Wodak, 2012, p. 531, van Dijk, 2010). Lastly, research in the EP context argues that national and linguistic categorisations in the institutional structure of the European Parliament affect communication (Abélès, 2004, p. 7). Consequently, national- and linguistic-based affiliations are often said to have a bigger effect on speakers' ideological stances than parliamentarian group-belonging.

Relative to the MEPs' inability to move beyond institutional practices, findings in this study do not suggest that an organisational culture constricts MEPs' communicative practices in identity and ideology constructions. Nevertheless, they do suggest the existence of observable effects on the influence of power dynamics in MEPs identifications and ideological stances. In this way, the construction of identities and ideologies cannot be understood as existing outside of the influence of socio-political dynamics, context and purpose.

The findings of this study also suggest the existence of patterns in discourse, which are part of ideological-political identification processes. The use of habitual sentences and the explicit or implicit referral to one's multiple roles as a speaker in Parliament serves to construct one's political identity and, often, one's ideological identity via group-belonging. This is in line with previous research on identity (see van Dijk, 2010), but goes further in that it implies that speakers not only construct their own political-ideological identities but also negotiate the meaning of role-based identifications, and the identity and ideological stance of their political group and

institution. In other words, the process of constructing one's political-ideological identity implies as well the construction of the context in which this identity is inscribed.

Relative to institutional categorisation, while the analysis suggests that the *backstage* of politics and power relations influence constructions in discourse, Abélès' (2004) claim on the effect of national and linguistic affiliations is only partially supported by the present study. This study's data-set highlights how multiple group affiliations become relevant at different times. In this study, MEPs sometimes chose to highlight their national group-belonging over parliamentarian categorisations, and based their ideological stance on this national identification. However, MEPs were also shown to refrain from using nation- and language-based affiliations as grounds for their political stance. It should be noted, however, that refraining from basing one's political stance on national/linguistic group-belonging did not necessarily imply the MEP's construction of or alignment with a unified parliamentarian identity. Rather, it implies that MEPs based their ideological stance also on other forms of group-belonging such as party or committee, including those groups that do not pertain to the European Parliament's domain. This finding illustrates how the influence of power-relations on ideological positions is not limited to nationality or language, but may be informed by religious affiliation, contextually situated beliefs, or political role or party, among others. This finding also illustrates that the multiple possible identifications of speakers in Parliament interact and intersect in myriad ways. In other words, it highlights the intersectional nature of identities in discourse.

Relative to the present study's second research question: *"How is the figure of the "woman" discursively constructed in front-stage political communication in the European Parliament?"*, the seven discursive strategies provide a framework for understanding how context, power-relations, political goals, ideology and the *backstage* of politics influence the construction of the collective identity "women". In the analysed context, it was particularly relevant to construct a temporally and geographically

situated image of both gender equality and women which justified the need, or lack thereof, to implement legal action. While ideology, context, power relations and the *backstage* of politics certainly informed the discursive construction of the figure of the woman, it was the speakers' political goals, and not their beliefs, which determined how "women" would be defined in discourse. Thus, the discursive construction of the "us-them" divide served to either identify women through opposition or contextualise the identification of the collective by presenting an "ally" and an "enemy" or a context with positive impact and another with negative implications. The explicit self and other categorisation identified the speaker as either pertaining to the collective "women", the collective's defined opposite (usually "men"), or the "ally". The imagined addressee negotiated what was meant by "women". The identification of macro-groups clarified the role of the EU/EP, Member States, Parties or religious and social groups relative to the status of women. Ideology talk defined ideologies relative to the wellbeing of women. And, lastly, political-ideological self-categorisations identified the speaker as part of the political, parliamentarian or ideological group working for the benefit of women or the context. The ideology positions and identifications contained in the seven discursive strategies were, thus, bound to the political goals of the speech.

Relative to the third research question in the present study: "*How is "feminism" constructed in front-stage political communication in the European Parliament?*", the study shows how speakers in Parliament negotiate the meaning of "feminism" per their political goals. When explicitly defined, "feminism" is reframed in a goal-based manner, which often refers back to a "real" or "true" feminism (usually that of the speaker's in-group). Speakers in Parliament will create us-them dichotomies (e.g. "our feminism" versus "their feminism") which identify themselves and an "Other", also politically and ideologically (e.g. right-left divisions), and define the role of macro groups (e.g. working for or against the benefit of women) and the identity of the addressee (e.g. who is included in the label "women") in explicitly stating their view of what feminism means. The multiple meanings of feminism that speakers construct can often be traced back to diverse feminist movements of the past two

centuries throughout the globe, but feminism is mainly constructed in a way that justifies the speaker's position relative to a proposal and seeks to promote either support for or the veto of potential European legislation. Feminism is also constructed implicitly in the EP by referring to politically relevant proposals of multiple feminist movements in Europe and in the world. In discussing, for example, particular EU legislation referring to issues such as abortion, gender-based violence, intersectionality or the gender pay gap, speakers will negotiate the meaning of feminism in discussing whether it should include such issues and how. To put an example, speakers will negotiate what intersectionality means and who it includes to justify whether a proposal should be adopted as is, modified, or voted against. The political goal which frames how feminism is constructed often reflects the *backstage* of politics, power relations and political-ideological affiliations, but may, of course, be also informed by individual beliefs. In this way, feminism is both individually and contextually reframed, and discursively renegotiated over time in the pursuit of defining what "real" feminism entails for a concrete political purpose.

Findings in this study give evidence that, irrespectively of the existence of manifests and a cognitive perception of its social stability, ideology is socially discursively renegotiated and individually and contextually reframed. The use of multiple ideological paradigms in a fragmented manner and the explicit construction or renegotiation of the meaning of ideologies found in the data implies that ideology should indeed be studied from a discourse analytical perspective. It is paramount to study and understand ideology as constituted in discourse for the effects of its discursive construction at a legislative level and its public nature in front-stage political communication. Furthermore, this study's findings highlight the fluidity of explicit ideological self-categorisations found in political groups as members' multiple belief systems, situated identifications and the speeches' purpose interact and intersect to negotiate the nature and inclusivity of ideologies and the identities they enable. The study of ideology should benefit from the insight of discourse analytical perspectives in providing grounds for research on the role of

discourse on socio-political tendencies and the use and evolution of ideologies in multiple contexts.

8   CONCLUSION

From the research presented in this study, it becomes apparent that identifications, either ideology-based (e.g., communist, populist) or otherwise, are socially discursively constructed, context-bound, and subject to political ends, power-relations and the *backstage* of politics. Furthermore, the extracts demonstrate that the multiple in-groups, with both strict (e.g., political party, committee, institutional) and fluid boundaries (e.g., gender, sexuality, generation, ideology), to which speakers belong or with which they identify, interact and intersect in myriad ways. Since speakers' ideological positions are subject to all of these variables, ideology cannot be understood as a unifying trait of fixed political groups, nor can it be used to either predict or determine behaviour or stances of groups or individuals within them. Additionally, ideology must be understood as a matter of discourse analysis, since it is the discursive construction and renegotiation of ideologies which has an impact on the socio-political contexts, and not its alleged social stability. This conclusion suggests that adopting a discursive understanding of identities and ideologies might help generate understanding on the processes of constructing dominant narratives surrounding the collective identities of groups often excluded from the sphere of power.

The seven discursive strategies analysed in this study provide a framework for understanding the processes of constructing dominant narratives surrounding the collective identity of "women", among other collective identities in the women-

related political context. Additionally, the provided framework takes into consideration the interrelation between identification processes and the negotiation of ideologies. In this way, this study contributes to the study of political communication in providing insight into how identities and ideologies are socially discursively constructed, and how these construction processes interrelate.

In regards to the social and practical implications of this study resulting from its critical foundations, it is important to notice the role of understanding how are particular characterisations of groups constructed and perpetuated. A conscious awareness of how identities and ideologies are constructed in Parliament is a powerful tool for understanding and challenging said constructions throughout the political context in order to orient action towards a more gender equal world. It is also a powerful tool for advocating for identification as a conscious process, an essential notion in recent feminist movements regarding the concept of gender as a spectrum and people's right to change how they identify. For these reasons, it is helpful in generating understanding towards intersectionality in a context with enormous socio-political implications. It is, then, the socio-political impact of these constructions which renders valuable understanding how do they take place and why.

Nevertheless, it must be clear that since this study looked only at debates in which the figure of the woman was central, and observed data using feminism as a framework for the analysis, this study's findings are limited by its context and framework. Further research would be needed to demonstrate the validity of the categories across other political contexts in the EP and other international arenas, where different identifications are relevant. Additionally, the analysed data included a small percentage of utterances which could not be fit into the provided categorisation. Thus, further research across multiple contexts over a longer period of time will help to determine whether MEPs use additional discursive strategies not comprised in this study to construct and negotiate identities and ideologies.

Other limitations of this study refer to translation and interpretation. Previous studies in the context of the European Parliament have criticised the unreliability of simultaneous interpretation services and brought up the difficulties in transmitting the meaning of expressions in translation (see Abélès, 2004). It has also been noted during the analytical process of this study that there are incongruences between what is said in the debate and what is transcribed. In this way, the truthfulness of translation, transcription and interpretation services on which this study relies may have affected the analytical process and its findings despite thorough attempts at contrasting speech and text, translation and interpretation, and several translation services. In this way, a more comprehensive look at the data using users of all 24 languages could contribute to a deeper and more reliable approach to the study's results.

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