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Globalization and Evolving National Identities: The Role of Essentialism

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Globalization has fueled immigration around the world, leading to increasingly diverse societies. One of the most important consequences of globalization has been greater mobility of populations around the world and greater contact between cultures than ever (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). With increased immigration, societies now host spaces that people with diverse racial and ethnic identities inhabit, where they get exposed to various cultural symbols, traditions, and practices (Chao et al., 2007; Chiu & Cheng, 2007; Chiu et al., 2009). The number of people who identify with multiple or hybrid identities is steadily increasing (Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2020). These changes lead individuals and societies to question existing definitions of national identities (Verkuyten et al., 2019). As a result, racially and ethnically diverse societies in a globalizing world emerge as spaces of negotiation

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over the content and boundaries of the unifying national identity (e.g., Ariely, 2012; Reijerse et al., 2013). Questions regarding what criteria define the national identity, who truly belongs and who does not—or cannot—belong to the nation become increasingly relevant.

Changing societal dynamics may cause a variety of identity-related concerns. People may take different positions regarding how the society should manage cultural diversity depending on their own position in the society (Nortio & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020). On one hand, dominant populations in immigrant-receiving societies may perceive immigrants as a threat to the nation, and strive to exclude them from the nation or force them to give up their cultural identities by assimilating (Verkuyten, 2006). On the other hand, immigrant populations are likely to strive to maintain and protect their own cultural identities, while seeking inclusion and acceptance as part of the nation. In the present chapter, I will consider the role of essentialism as an ideological tool that dominant and subordinated groups use to substantiate potentially conflicting visions of the national identity within racially or ethnically diverse societies.

Essentialism entails the tendency to attribute a natural, innate, and fixed essence to socially constructed categories (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Gelman, 2003; Gil-White, 2001; Haslam et al., 2000, 2002). Essentialist lay beliefs about social categories focus on distinct natures that define members of categories such as race and ethnicity, and underlie the assumed fundamental differences between these groups (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Haslam et al., 2000, 2002). Based on this perspective, social category membership is informative about people, since it reflects certain core and unchangeable characteristics they inherit through biology or culture (Bastian & Haslam, 2006). Whereas an essentialist perspective defines identities as separated by strict and impermeable boundaries, a non-essentialist (or social constructionist; No et al., 2008) perspective fosters more flexible and inclusive representations.

Essentialist ideas may be disseminated as part of the dominant discourse in a society (Ariely, 2012; Wagner et al., 2009). Such beliefs are generally selectively endorsed by individuals depending on their position within a particular sociopolitical context, as well as their personal experiences, needs, and motives (cognitive, epistemic, or ideological; Keller, 2005). In the following sections, I will lay out in detail how the

endorsement of essentialist or non-essentialist ideas can be used to reinforce exclusionary or inclusive definitions of a national identity, which can legitimize particular responses toward cultural diversity. I will then discuss how engagement with the changing composition of societies can organically shape essentialist beliefs among the public over time, feeding back into responses toward diversity. After analyzing this dynamic relationship, I will end by considering potential future trends and avenues for research.

Immigration and Construction of National Identities

Identities are constructed and reproduced within sociocultural contexts (Wagner et al., 2009). In a globalizing world, the perceived importance or relevance of national identities may weaken over time due to the increasing interconnectedness of societies across the world, and emerging superordinate identities such as global citizenship (Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013). However, it is also likely for people to cling to their national identities more strongly as a response to rapidly changing societal dynamics that evoke identity-related concerns or feelings of threat (Ariely, 2012). Given these circumstances, not only the importance or salience of the national identity, but also its content has inevitably been evolving. The changing composition of societies has exacerbated the need to reconsider the definition and boundaries of the unifying national identity (Ariely, 2012; Hong & Cheon, 2017). In a society where individuals come from various cultural backgrounds, have mixed-heritages, and identify with different, multiple, or hybrid ethnic and racial identities, the answer to the question of who truly belongs to the nation can become quite elusive (Lindstam et al., 2021).

Dominant groups may perceive an influx of immigrants and increasing cultural diversity as a threat to national unity (Rios et al., 2018; Verkuyten, 2009). Based on integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 1985), dominant group members may experience different types of threat in response to immigration, including realistic (i.e., concerns about security and competition over financial resources or jobs)

and symbolic (i.e., concerns about changes related to national identity and cultural or social order). Of course, individuals who identify with dominant groups do not show uniform responses toward immigrants and minorities. Within dominant groups, stronger endorsement of nationalist ideology (i.e., beliefs about the superiority of one's nation) and identification with the national identity are likely to fuel perceived threat and negative responses toward immigrants (Ariely, 2012; Janmaat, 2006; Nortio & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020). Likewise, stronger endorsement of a relatively inclusive or exclusionary construction of national identity can shape responses toward immigrants and other subordinated groups (Pehrson, Brown, et al., 2009; Perkins et al., 2020; Verkuyten et al., 2019). Researchers have distinguished between civic and ethnic constructions of national identity, which focus on the fulfillment of civic or ethnic criteria for national belonging, respectively (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Pakulski & Tranter, 2000; Shulman, 2002; Smith, 1991). Those in power may uphold a particular construction of the national identity (e.g., Ariely, 2012; Wright et al., 2012). The dominant representation of the national identity can be disseminated through political rhetoric, official history education, and mainstream media coverage (e.g., Ariely, 2012; Kurtiş et al., 2017). For instance, some nations define the national identity mainly based on civic markers, whereas others (e.g., most European nations) uphold an ethnic construction (Verkuyten, 2006; Wright et al., 2012). Conceptions of national identity are likely to be shaped by the dominant discourse to a large extent, but may also vary across individuals (e.g., Pehrson, Vignoles, et al., 2009; Perkins et al., 2020; Verkuyten et al., 2019).

Based on a civic construction of national identity, citizenship, adherence to civic duties, and shared principles make up the basis of the national identity, independent of one's ethnic, racial, or religious affiliations (Reijerse et al., 2013). A civic construction of national identity is generally inclusive; it relates to more open immigration policies at the state level, and more positive attitudes toward immigrants among the public (e.g., Rothi et al., 2005; Wright et al., 2012). An ethnic construction of national identity emphasizes ancestry and common blood as determinants of national belonging, defining the national identity on the basis of the dominant ethnic identity in the society (Verkuyten &

Martinovic, 2015; Wakefield et al., 2011). An ethnic construction is less inclusive than a civic construction, since the assumption is that ethnically diverse immigrants cannot possibly achieve the criteria for national belonging. Relatedly, endorsement of an ethnic construction of national identity is associated with negative attitudes toward immigrants (e.g., Pehrson, Vignoles, et al., 2009; Shulman, 2002; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2015; Wakefield et al., 2011; Wright, 2011). An ethnic (or ethno-cultural) definition may also include references to shared cultural traditions and practices; however, some researchers suggest that ethnic and cultural constructions of national identity are conceptually distinct (Pehrson, Vignoles, et al., 2009; Shulman, 2002). Although achievable cultural criteria could define the national identity in relatively inclusive terms (e.g., willingness to learn the language; Jones & Smith, 2001), cultural markers are commonly used to force cultural homogeneity within the nation (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2017; Reijerse et al., 2013).

Essentialism as an Ideological Tool for Identity Construction

Essentialist (or non-essentialist) ideas can serve as a means to justify and reinforce particular constructions of the nation, depending on group interests. Psychological essentialism is the tendency to attribute superficial similarities between members of a category (e.g., animals) to an assumed, underlying essence that makes them what/who they are (e.g., Gelman, 2003; Gil-White, 2001). Applied to human categories, essentialist tendencies can lead people to consider social categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, social class, and sexual orientation as reflecting a fundamental and distinct nature that defines members of such categories (e.g., Haslam et al., 2000). From an essentialist viewpoint, social categories such as race and ethnicity are determined by nature, and are stable across time and space (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Haslam et al., 2000, 2002; Prentice & Miller, 2007; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). Racial and ethnic groups therefore reflect a meaningful source of natural division among humans based on an assumed essence that shapes them to the core (e.g., No et al., 2008; Verkuyten, 2003; Williams & Eberhardt,

2008). In that sense, carrying one's group's essence is inescapable for an individual (Grillo, 2003; Wagner et al., 2009).

An essence is a rather elusive concept (Brescoll et al., 2013; Prentice & Miller, 2007). The assumed source of a group essence is commonly traced back to biology or culture. Biological and cultural forms of essentialism make the same assumptions about a deterministic group essence, but differ in terms of the source of the essence they assume. People may assume that the essence of social categories has a biological basis, such as genes, DNA, or hormones (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2011; Keller, 2005). For instance, one may assume that race has a biological or genetic basis, which defines the personality characteristics, traits, and abilities of its members, and determines the kind of person they are (Byrd & Hughey, 2015; No et al., 2008; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). However, an essence does not have to be biological. People may also define the essence of a racial or ethnic group in cultural terms. Cultural essentialist lay beliefs suggest that racial or ethnic groups have static cultures that define who they are, and that being raised within one of those cultural worlds shapes individuals permanently (Grillo, 2003; Rangel & Keller, 2011; Verkuyten, 2003; Wagner et al., 2009). Verkuyten's (2003) definition of cultural essentialism suggests that "[p]eople are … more or less passive carriers of their culture, whereby their attitudes, beliefs, and achievements are supposed to reflect typical cultural patterns" (p. 385). Therefore, from a cultural essentialist perspective, racial or ethnic groups would have distinct and stable cultures (e.g., values, beliefs, practices, and lifestyles), and their members would share a set of fixed, psychological characteristics. In contrast, a social constructionist viewpoint acknowledges the sociopolitical and historical roots of social categories such as race and ethnicity, which are arbitrary human constructions that vary across societies and time (No et al., 2008).

Endorsement of biological essentialism has commonly been associated with negative intergroup outcomes such as greater legitimization of existing social hierarchies (Jost et al., 2004; Morton et al., 2009), greater acceptance of racial inequality and less interest in social contact with racial outgroup members (Williams & Eberhardt, 2008), greater anti-Black prejudice among White Americans (Andreychik & Gill, 2015; Condit et al., 2004; Jayaratne et al., 2006; Keller, 2005),

greater interethnic hostility (Kimel et al., 2016), more negative attitudes toward outgroups (Keller, 2005), and stronger endorsement of stereotypes (Bastian & Haslam, 2006). The studies that document the negative intergroup and interpersonal consequences of biological essentialism of race and ethnicity have been conducted with people who identify with dominant groups in the society. Indeed, endorsement of biological essentialism is typically greater among people with dominant identities (e.g., Kraus & Keltner, 2013; Mahalingam, 2003), whereas people with subordinated identities tend to endorse cultural essentialism more strongly (Mahalingam, 2003). Importantly, essentialism can have different consequences for intergroup relations depending on how and by whom it is utilized.

Allport (1954) considered essentialist thinking about categories as a natural cognitive tendency, which helps humans navigate their social world. Indeed, children show essentialist tendencies at very early ages (Gelman, 2003). Essentialism can serve cognitive or epistemic needs such as the need for structure, since it affirms a sense of stable societal order (Gil-White, 2001; Keller, 2005). However, researchers point out that even though essentialist tendencies may have cognitive roots, people's use of essentialist explanations depends on motivated reasoning processes (Brescoll et al., 2013). Essentialist beliefs can serve ideological motives such as justifying the existing social order (Brescoll et al., 2013; Keller, 2005), or become a means to challenge it (Grillo, 2003; Verkuyten, 2003; Wagner et al., 2009). Dominant and subordinated group members can strategically endorse or downplay essentialist ideas based on their position within a particular sociopolitical context (e.g., Figgou, 2013; Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2017; Morton et al., 2009; Verkuyten, 2003). In that sense, essentialist beliefs are dynamic and versatile; people can uphold or challenge essentialist ideas for social and political reasons (e.g., Morton et al., 2009; Verkuyten, 2003; Wagner et al., 2009). Essentialist ideas about the nation itself, as well as racial and ethnic identities, can thus form a basis for arguments regarding who truly belongs in a nation within diverse societies.

Dominant Perspectives: Essentialism as a Means for the Exclusion of "Others"

As a response to increasing diversity, dominant groups can endorse exclusionary constructions of the national identity in order to justify the argument that immigrants do not belong in the nation, thereby protecting their advantaged position in society. An ethnic construction of national identity represents a form of in-group essentialism, whereby people assume a blood-based or culture-based essence to the nation that only people from a particular ethnic group possess, and ethnically diverse immigrants simply do not (Moftizadeh et al., 2021; Pehrson, Brown, et al., 2009; Verkuyten et al., 2019). Such an essentialist construction of national identity represents immigrants as outsiders who undermine national unity (Lindstam et al., 2021; Pehrson, Brown, et al., 2009). For instance, Greek participants used biological essentialist representations of national identity (e.g., as based on blood and genes) to justify the exclusion of immigrants from the nation (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2017). Similarly, British participants who showed strong identification with the nation reported more negative attitudes toward asylum seekers, only if they endorsed a biological essentialist construction of national identity (Pehrson, Brown, et al., 2009). An essentialist perception of race among German participants was associated with greater prejudice toward Turkish immigrants (Keller, 2005). The dominant discourse in a society may also culturally essentialize immigrants by representing them as a homogeneous group with a set of fixed cultural characteristics that is not a good fit for the nation, such as the depiction of Sudanese immigrants in Australia as a violent or deviant group (Augoustinos et al., 2015; Hanson-Easey et al., 2014). Even when immigrants are accepted as part of the nation, this is likely to be on the condition of cultural assimilation (Kadianaki & Andreouli, 2017).

Zagefka and colleagues (2013) suggest that people who endorse essentialist beliefs may be particularly threatened by cultural contamination. Expecting immigrants to assimilate to the dominant culture can be a way of dealing with the perceived threat of cultural contamination by outsiders (Tip et al., 2012; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). Assimilation would require immigrants to adopt the dominant cultural patterns, and

give up their original culture (Berry, 1997). The assumption behind this response is that immigrants can only become part of the nation to the extent that they abandon their own cultural traditions, values, and practices (Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006). If dominant group members believe that immigrants wish to maintain their own cultural patterns instead of fully assimilating, this can lead to increased perceptions of threat, which is associated with more negative attitudes toward these groups (Tip et al., 2012). Perceived cultural threats and corresponding negative responses to immigrants are particularly likely to emerge if the dominant group perceives the cultural values and practices associated with immigrant groups as essentially different or contradicting their own (Reijerse et al., 2013). In a focus group study conducted in the Netherlands, Verkuyten (2003) showed that ethnic Dutch participants expressed essentialist beliefs about fundamental cultural differences in order to justify their support for restrictions on the entry of immigrants into the country. British participants who perceived British national identity in cultural essentialist terms were likely to be against minority cultural maintenance, which they perceived as a barrier against adaptation to the dominant culture (Moftizadeh et al., 2021). Ironically, essentialist thinking can fuel both the belief that immigrants should assimilate, as well as the belief that they would be unable to do so (Zagefka et al., 2013). As a result, the assumption that immigrants cannot fulfill expectations of assimilation can lead to negative reactions toward them (Zagefka et al., 2013). Interestingly, dominant group members may sometimes resort to non-essentialist beliefs to support arguments of assimilation. For instance, ethnic Dutch participants expressed non-essentialist ideas in order to argue that minority groups would be able to assimilate to the dominant Dutch culture, and therefore they should do so (Verkuyten, 2003).

Subordinated Perspectives: Essentialism as a Means for Identity Assertion

People with marginalized or oppressed identities might use essentialism strategically to induce political change through collective action (Spivak,

1988). They are most likely to turn to cultural, rather than biological, essentialism for this purpose (Mahalingam, 2003). In Verkuyten's (2003) study, ethnic minority participants in the Netherlands upheld cultural essentialist ideas in order to argue that complete assimilation to the dominant culture would not be possible for their group. Emphasizing the essential nature of a racial or ethnic identity can help minority groups to incite social movements, and fight for the recognition of their identity and rights (Grillo, 2003; Morton et al., 2009; Ngo, 2013; Verkuyten, 2003; Wagner et al., 2009; Yang et al., 2015). Minority group members who endorse cultural essentialism may show greater support for cultural inclusion of subordinated groups in the society in general (Soylu Yalcinkaya et al., 2017). Indeed, minority groups that experience anxiety about losing their cultural identity as a result of assimilation may be particularly likely to endorse ethnic essentialism (Yang et al., 2015). On the other hand, in the face of prejudice and discrimination, racial or ethnic minorities may tend to challenge cultural essentialist notions that portray their group as a homogeneous entity with static characteristics (Verkuyten, 2003).

Importantly, endorsement of essentialist beliefs among minority group members has important consequences in terms of the psychological experience of their identities. Essentialist thinking may make the experience of hybrid or multiple identities more challenging; trying to reconcile cultural identifications that represent distinct essences can be difficult (Chao et al., 2007). For instance, among Asian Americans who endorsed racial essentialist beliefs, reminders of American culture led to the feeling that they were unable to become true members of the dominant culture (No et al., 2008). Similarly, minority group members who essentialized the British national identity themselves, or believed that dominant group members essentialized Britishness, reported that maintaining their own culture was not compatible with adapting to the dominant culture (Moftizadeh et al., 2021). Relatedly, to the extent that immigrants held essentialist beliefs, they were less likely to use the national identity to define their self-concept, and less likely to adopt the dominant culture (Bastian & Haslam, 2008). Indeed, essentialist beliefs can lead immigrants toward strategies that Berry (1997) defines as separation (i.e., holding onto own cultural identity without adapting to the dominant

culture) and marginalization (i.e., rejecting both cultures) during the acculturation process (Bastian & Haslam, 2008). Furthermore, bicultural individuals who endorse essentialist beliefs may experience difficulty switching between cultural frames (Hong & Cheon, 2017), feel disgust toward hybrid cultural representations formed through the fusion of stimuli from different cultures (Cheon et al., 2016), and show greater stress response when discussing issues related to their bicultural identities (Chao et al., 2007).

Implications of Cultural Diversity for Essentialist Beliefs

Just like essentialism can shape (or justify) responses toward diversity, experiences with diversity also shape essentialist thinking. Changing sociocultural dynamics can influence individuals' lay beliefs about social groups (Xu et al., 2021). Individuals inhabiting a multicultural environment are likely to be exposed to diverse cultures, and experience intergroup contact. Such experiences can challenge, or in some cases further reinforce, essentialist thinking, which, in turn, would feed back into people's responses to diversity.

Research provides evidence for changes in essentialist thinking as a function of diversity exposure. For instance, children raised in Hawaii, a state characterized by racial diversity and a large multiracial population, tended to show less racial essentialist thinking than children raised in continental U.S. states (Pauker et al., 2018). Moreover, White students who have moved to Hawaii from continental U.S. states showed a decrease in their endorsement of racial essentialism at the end of their first year in college (Pauker et al., 2018). This effect became larger as a function of the amount of interracial contact experiences they reported. American students who studied abroad reported less essentialist thinking than American students who studied in the United States, although this effect was not observed among Chinese students who studied in the United States (Xu et al., 2021). It is possible that American students had more (or more positive) instances of intergroup contact than did Chinese students, although this was not directly assessed in the study.

Working with children in Israeli settings, Deeb and colleagues (2011) have found that children from different backgrounds showed similar levels of essentialism as they started kindergarten, and their essentialist tendencies decreased over the years. However, the decrease in essentialism was more pronounced among children who attended integrated (ethnically diverse) schools rather than segregated schools, and was even stronger for majority (Jewish) children compared to minority (Arab) children.

Furthermore, the observation that people can identify with multiple racial/ethnic categories and form hybrid identities can challenge essentialist thinking, suggesting that these identities are not strictly mutually exclusive. For instance, exposure to mixed-race individuals who appear racially ambiguous reduced majority (Whites in the United States) participants' endorsement of biological essentialism about race (Sanchez et al., 2015). The reduction in essentialist thinking was particularly true for exposure to racially ambiguous people who were labeled as biracial, rather than those who were labeled with only one of the racial categories (Young et al., 2013).

As societal dynamics change with immigration, societies and individuals may recognize the positive consequences of diversity for society and embrace a multiculturalist ideology (e.g., Nortio & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020). A multiculturalist ideology emphasizes the importance of recognizing, respecting, and celebrating cultural differences (Berry, 2011; Dovidio et al., 2015; Wilton et al., 2019). Multiculturalist perspectives stress the importance of awareness about, and sensitivity for cultural differences, which are deemed meaningful. Multiculturalism as an ideology corresponds to integration as an acculturation strategy, which allows minorities to maintain their own cultural traditions and practices while also adapting to the dominant culture (Berry, 2011). Immigrants tend to support multiculturalism more strongly than do dominant group members (Verkuyten, 2006). Multiculturalism allows members of these groups to develop hybrid or dual identities by protecting and asserting the cultural identities that matter to them, while simultaneously developing an identification with the nation (Dovidio et al., 2015). Being

able to maintain their own cultural patterns is associated with positive psychological outcomes among minority group members (Tip et al., 2012).

Multiculturalism is in accordance with cultural essentialist conceptions of racial/ethnic groups (Verkuyten, 2006). Multiculturalism assumes that each racial/ethnic group has a distinct culture of its own, which should be respected and celebrated (Yogeeswaran et al., 2021), and that the differences between these distinct cultures are fixed (Bernardo et al., 2016). For instance, an intercultural training intervention designed to teach university students about cultural differences led to an increase in cultural essentialism (Fischer, 2011). Among minority group members, endorsement of ethnic essentialism was related with greater support for multiculturalism (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004). Among dominant group members, however, endorsement of ethnic essentialism was related with less support for multiculturalism, potentially because essentialized representations of minority groups make them seem more threatening (Verkuyten & Brug, 2004; Yogeeswaran et al., 2021). Indeed, multiculturalism can have unintended negative consequences among dominant group members because of its association with essentialist thinking. For instance, in a mostly White U.S. sample, exposure to multiculturalist ideas led to greater endorsement of racial essentialism compared to exposure to a colorblind ideology, which emphasizes that racial/ethnic identities and group differences should be ignored, and commonalities should be focused on instead (Wilton et al., 2019). This effect, in turn, predicted greater acceptance of racial inequality.

Alternative approaches to diversity include interculturalism and polyculturalism. Interculturalism is similar to multiculturalism with its emphasis on the value of cultural differences (Yogeeswaran et al., 2021). However, it presents a more dynamic view of culture, rather than presenting it as an essentialized entity associated with a particular ethnic group (Yogeeswaran et al., 2021). It entails recognition of the interconnected and constantly evolving nature of cultural identities through intergroup interactions (Verkuyten et al., 2020). Intergroup dialog is expected to foster the achievement of unity and harmony in society through flexible and hybrid identities. Indeed, ethnic essentialism was negatively associated with the endorsement of interculturalism, in

contrast with its positive association with multiculturalism (Verkuyten et al., 2020). Finally, polyculturalism stresses how cultures have been historically connected and have influenced each other, in order to highlight the similarities as opposed to differences between them (Bernardo et al., 2016). Similar to interculturalism, polyculturalism is also associated with less essentialist thinking about racial groups (Bernardo et al., 2016).

In addition to exposure to diverse ideologies, engagement with certain cultural affordances can shape essentialist thinking. Cultural products, such as demographic information forms, can convey the message that identifying with multiple identities is accepted or discouraged. For instance, a demographic information question that allows people to choose multiple ethnic identities, as opposed to one that forces people to choose only one identity, can act as a non-essentialist cue (Lee et al., 2014). However, representations of various racial/ethnic groups as a uniform entity under the umbrella term "minorities" can reinforce essentialist thinking (Craig & Richeson, 2014). In a series of studies, dominant group members (i.e., European Americans) in the United States were exposed to information about expected changes in demographics that will lead non-White minorities to become the majority in the society in a few decades (Craig & Richeson, 2014). As a result of this manipulation, participants showed greater automatic racial bias and expressed negative attitudes toward various minority groups. An essentialized representation of minorities lumped together as a unified entity can potentially activate threat perceptions, and lead to negative responses (Craig & Richeson, 2014; Knowles et al., 2021). Among minority groups also, such an essentialized representation that disregards the plurality in ways of being can activate identity threats (Branscombe et al., 1999; Richeson & Craig, 2011). Furthermore, media coverage of immigrant groups can reinforce essentialized depictions of immigrants, particularly through an emphasis on fundamental cultural differences (e.g., Augoustinos et al., 2015; Hanson-Easey et al., 2014).

Conclusion

Culturally diverse societies are a reality within a global world. The realization that the world is becoming highly interconnected, and populations highly mobile, can lead to various reactions (Nortio & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020; Verkuyten, 2006). One might expect that emerging ideas about global citizenship (e.g., Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013), which emphasize a unifying, superordinate identity as opposed to essentialized national differences, would challenge the importance attributed to the national identity over time. Global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or global climate change may make the interconnectedness of societies more salient, strengthening superordinate identities. However, such global threats may also lead to greater perceived intergroup competition, and increased xenophobia (Esses & Hamilton, 2021). Indeed, as nations become more diverse, and the world more interconnected, people may experience various concerns about their existing identities and their position within the social structure. In this sociopolitical context, assumed biological or cultural essences may help define the "Other," who is denied inclusion or equal status in the society (Ålund, 1999). Over time, static, cultural essentialist views of immigrant populations can be used as an explanation for their subordinated status (Ålund, 1999). However, essentialism plays a versatile role in the process of identity construction (Yogeeswaran et al., 2021), since immigrant populations may use cultural essentialism strategically to assert their identities (Verkuyten, 2003), while also seeking acceptance into the nation.

People have long maintained beliefs in the biological essence of race, and the cultural essence of ethnicity, although race and ethnicity are not bounded entities but evolving representations of dynamic groups within changing sociopolitical contexts (Smedley & Smedley, 2005; Verkuyten, 2018). Since biological essentialism of race has historically been linked with racist arguments about the superiority or inferiority of particular racial groups (Grillo, 2003), genetic essentialist discourse with racist connotations may be less acceptable today. Still, the biological roots of race may be revisited in the age of the genomic revolution, given the popularity of tools such as commercial genetic ancestry tests (Phelan et al., 2014; Roth et al., 2020; Verkuyten, 2018). These tests estimate the

proportion of one's ancestors who originated from particular geographic regions using a DNA sample (Phelan et al., 2014). Since these regions of ancestry correspond to major racial categories used today, genetic ancestry testing can reinforce an essentialist conception of race as "written" in one's genes (Roth et al., 2020). For instance, being exposed to articles suggesting that these tests reveal the genetic basis of race increases racial essentialism (Phelan et al., 2014). However, such tests often reveal that people have mixed ancestry, which could potentially challenge reified notions of distinct racial groups (Roth et al., 2020). The implications of these tests for lay beliefs about race may depend on people's prior knowledge about genetics (Roth et al., 2020). For instance, in a sample of European American participants who took the test, racial essentialism decreased among those who had more prior knowledge, but increased among those who had less prior knowledge (Roth et al., 2020). This pattern suggests that knowledge about genetics help people make more informed interpretations of test results. Other research has shown that people can selectively embrace certain identities based on their ancestry test results, suggesting a strategic use of such tests for political motives (Roth & Ivemark, 2018). Future research may consider the role of genetic ancestry tests and genetics knowledge in shaping people's conceptions of race, ethnicity, and nationhood (Verkuyten, 2018). Lay beliefs in the biological basis of race can be weakened through interventions or educational programs (Tawa, 2016), as well as a more refined discussion of race in textbooks (Morning, 2008).

Experience with cultural diversity is likely to transform both dominant and subordinated populations over time (Berry, 2011; Wagner et al., 2009). Wagner and colleagues (2009) point out that people actively construct their own and others' identities in relation to each other within changing societies. Societies are dynamic, just like dominant representations of identities, and individuals' own perceptions and experiences of their identities (Wagner et al., 2009). Considering individuals as actors situated in different positions within particular sociopolitical contexts in a globalizing world helps illuminate the versatile role of ideologies such as essentialism in the construction of identities and corresponding responses to cultural diversity. Since cultural diversity, contact, and fusion are an inevitable consequences of globalization, engagement with such cultural

affordances will, in turn, shape essentialist thinking over time, feeding back into the ongoing process of identity construction.

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