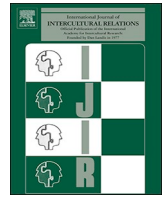


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International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel

Editorial

Viewing intercultural adaptation and social inclusion through constructs of national identity: An introduction



The global migrant¹ population exceeded 271 million in 2019—a figure almost double the 153 million reported in 1990 ([International Organization for Migration, 2020](#)). Migration presents an exigent sociopolitical challenge in the contemporary world, both in terms of how nation-states manage this accelerating phenomenon as well as how individuals respond—either as migrants themselves or as members of their receiving community. When migrants cross the border into their new countries, their journey has in many ways just begun. From this point, there is a definitive need for them to feel belonging within their destination communities. We have seen too clearly the cascading problems when social and economic integration are not achieved: among migrants, unrest arising from bleak living conditions and delimited socioeconomic mobility tracks, social isolation, and in extreme instances, violent militancy. Among host nationals, equally distressing developments are rife: resentment over perceived competition with migrants for economic resources and social services, a sense of threatened national identity, and in pernicious cases, nationalist groups promulgating anti-immigrant propaganda and scapegoating migrants for social and economic ills—even committing hate crimes. Every society at this point in time faces an exigent question: Do we choose an inclusive, evolving national identity that embraces new groups crossing our borders or opt for an exclusive one that thwarts acceptance of people who fall outside of a narrowly defined ethnocultural group of co-nationals?

The disturbing worldwide rise in xenophobia and nativist, populist rhetoric has prompted a fervent search among intercultural communication scholars for ways to utilize our work to encourage people to frame migration as a benefit rather than as a threat and ultimately to facilitate the acceptance of migrants in their societies. In this special issue, we aim to study intercultural adaption and inclusion of migrants, with an emphasis on the role and influence from diverse constructions of national identity in migrants gaining (or being denied) national ingroup acceptance. When such belonging is achieved, not only can many of the aforementioned social ills be countervailed, or at least mollified, but individuals stand poised to reap diverse benefits (for instance, improved mental health for migrants, more harmonious intergroup relations between migrants and their receiving society members, and long-term economic contributions from highly-skilled migrants who have settled as permanent residents).

Such assertions beg for clarification as to what is belonging and how it can benefit individuals. [Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, and Collier \(1992\)](#) defined sense of belonging as “the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment” (p. 173). It is typically realized by choosing a social identity with particular groups and seeking acceptance into those groups ([Shore et al., 2011](#)). Social psychologists argue that human beings seek belonging within interpersonal relationships and groups ([Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005](#)) and are hence driven to form positive, lasting, and stable relationships to satisfy this basic human need ([Baumeister & Leary, 1995](#); [Hagerty & Patusky, 1995](#)). When such needs go unmet and exclusion results, negative outcomes occur in both affective (e.g., misery, frustration, and/or anger) and performance-related domains (i.e., perceived incompetence and underachievement), including an erosion of valued social and psychological resources encompassing self-esteem, prestige, self-respect, independence, and self-determination ([Abrams et al., 2005](#)). Conversely, connectedness and belonging are necessary to function optimally in terms of mental health, adjustment, and well-being ([Pickett & Brewer, 2005](#)).

From the perspective of the receiving society, acceptance can entail diverse meanings: host citizens may believe that immigrants contribute meaningfully to the country’s economic well-being (functional indispensability) or believe they are part of the national identity (identity indispensability) ([Guerra, Gaertner, Antonio, & Deegan, 2015](#)). For immigrants, such acceptance is usually concomitant with sustained destination culture involvement, which can reduce acculturative stress and promote positive affect towards receiving society members ([Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987](#); [Nguyen et al., 1999](#); [Ward, 1996](#)). In fact, [Phinney, Horenczyk,](#)

¹ In this paper, we have used term “immigrant” specifically to refer to people who have settled and become citizens in a country that differs from their native land, while “migrant” is employed as a term inclusive of both naturalized immigrants as well as non-naturalized foreign residents of a country. When reviewing research, we have retained the word utilized by the authors being cited.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2020.06.001>

Liebkind, and Vedder (2001) concluded that immigrants who feel their efforts towards societal belonging are accepted report greater general life satisfaction and become more productive members of society.

That said, the opinions of migrants and recipient nationals regarding the extent and meaning of belonging, or national ingroup membership, do not always converge in everyday discourse. In this volume, Perkins, Kurtis, and Velazquez (2020) found that Americans leaned toward an essentialist view of national identity, where ingroup belonging is largely grounded in ascribed characteristics such as place of birth, ancestry, and ethnicity. Mexican immigrants and frequent sojourners to the US, on the other hand, tended to view citizenship as a personal choice, with immigrants and immigration being potential sources of both added resources and burdens. The national polity demonstrates a contradictory rhetoric on immigrant inclusion, where both monocultural and multicultural spaces concurrently define national boundaries.

Nations as imagined communities

Human concepts of nations, and by extension, their national identity, play a critical role in the social processes determining the extent to which migrants achieve belonging and acceptance in their destination communities. Smith (1991) defined a nation as “a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy, and common legal rights and duties for all members” (p. 43). In modern nation-states, populaces construct a coherent set of communal national traits that allow their members to function as “imagined communities,” or collectives of individuals unknown to each other but united by these supposedly “shared” characteristics (Anderson, 1991).

In imagined communities, people construct a sense of similarity with their fellow group members through attributes including ancestry, language, and beliefs that are presumed shared, though in fact are not necessarily so. As Jenkins (1996) contended, “The symbolic construction of community allows people who have to get on with each other to do so without having to explore their differences in damaging detail” (p. 108). These surmised common attributes form the content of group identity—for instance, national identity at the level of nation-states—and these attributes are used as criteria for established ingroup members to maintain their ingroup status and potential members to gain such status. Such criteria are referred to in this special issue as *national identity markers* or *social markers*.

Thus, nations are conceived as imagined kinship communities, acting as powerful identity providers (Andreouli & Chrysochoou, 2015), and claims of being a member of a unique collective often further bolster that sense of connection to the ingroup by providing positive differentiation from outgroups—staples of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Such singularity is constructed via the self-ascription of distinguishing attributes that serve to essentialize national character (Andreouli & Chrysochoou, 2015): Chinese, Greeks, and Persians boast ancient histories of superior civilizations; Americans are divinely blessed—distinguished by their civil society rooted in democracy and personal liberty; Koreans constitute a pure and extended form of family (Seol & Seo, 2014); and Japanese are bound to each other by a unique culture that is supposedly incomprehensible to foreigners (Befu, 2001). In fact, in this special issue, the study by Leong et al. (2020) suggests that citizens of nation states do not necessarily share the same definition of national identity: the commonplace choices of social markers tend to be similar among traditional immigrant receiving societies such as Australia, Canada, and Singapore, yet in contrast, homogenous cultures such as Japan and Finland embrace a blend of markers that reflect their unique heritage and values.

Increasingly, traditional narratives that unite imagined communities around ascribed characteristics are threatened by the global flow of migrants. For instance, in Japan (Graburn & Ertl, 2008), China (Chow, 1997; Dikotter, 1997), and South Korea (Seol & Seo, 2014), citizenship, culture, descent, and ethnicity have long been broadly conceived as coterminous, but all three nations are experiencing unprecedented domestic diversity through migrant influxes that are predicted only to grow. Komisarof and Leong (2016) argued, “These developments have challenged notions of cultural homogeneity, traditional forms of group belonging, and also produced demands for inclusion from long-term migrants who want the rights and social benefits that accompany denizenship and/or citizenship in their home countries” (p. 261).

Thus, mass migration has unleashed social and political forces resulting in conflict between those who prefer that national identity and group boundaries remain exclusively defined and those demanding more inclusive forms of membership. Consequently, nation-states are struggling to define themselves more than ever as their citizens increasingly beg the questions, “Who are we, and what does it take to become one of ‘us’?” The responses are gravely important, as they determine who can receive the material and symbolic resources that sustain people economically and psychologically.

National identity: definition and assessment

In the political science literature, national identity (alternatively referred to as *citizenship representations*) has been “understood as stable socio-historical characteristics of nation states that are expressed through national policies and legislation [on migration]” (Reijerse, Vanbeselaere, Duriez, & Fichera, 2015, p. 702). Namely, legal definitions of citizenship and immigration laws that designate who is permitted in the country can be used to assess both national identity as well as who is admitted in that ingroup. For instance, *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) and *jus soli* (right of soil) define the parameters of national belonging—the former based upon descent or heritage from a specific group and the latter based upon birth in a territory of the country (Yogeewaran & Dasgupta, 2014).

In contrast, social psychologists argue that such policy models at the state level do not necessarily reflect concepts prevalent in the general population (e.g., Shulman, 2002; Yogeewaran & Dasgupta, 2014); moreover, immigrants may be granted citizenship via such government policies but still feel unaccepted in the receiving society (Reijerse, Van Acker, Vanbeselaere, Phalet, & Duriez, 2013). Therefore, an alternative has been developed to examine citizenship representations at the individual level, i.e., subjective

definitions of the national ingroup prototype, which encompass norms, values, and other characteristics that are utilized as membership criteria for deciding which migrants can become part of the national ingroup. This approach is rooted in social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which asserts the importance of group membership to an individual's personal identity, as well as self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), which describes the process by which prototypes are created by members to define their ingroup. Characteristics including norms, values, and customs are associated with these prototypes and employed as criteria for deciding which potential new members to include (or exclude) (Reijerse et al., 2013). The ways in which national identity is construed affect intergroup outcomes of both destination society members and immigrants in complex and dynamic ways (Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). For instance, in this special issue, group affirmation of inclusive social norms may help reduce prejudice against minority immigrant groups, but this applies only if individual recipient nationals also embrace these norms as integral aspects of their national heritage and continuity (Badea, Bender, & Korda, 2020).

Though social psychologists tend to focus upon citizenship representations at the individual level rather than state policies to discern such representations, this does not completely discount the relationships among citizenship representations, government policy, and the acceptance of migrants. State policies on migration may or may not reflect national identity concepts within the general population, but they surely impact the acculturation experiences of migrants in their newfound lands. For instance, such influence can be seen in the extent to which migrants are granted access to social services and achieve economic success and social mobility—in turn altering the degree that they consider themselves to be core members of society.

Varjonen, Arnold, and Jasinskaja-Lahti (2013) contended that the manner in which the social category of immigrants is constructed, defined, and utilized in social interaction reciprocally impacts immigrant policy, as when Finnish authorities allowed those with even distant Finnish ancestry in the former Soviet Union to “return” as immigrants. In South Korea, the restrictive legal status of migrants as guest workers was attributed by Nagy (2013) to an attachment among Korean nationals “to the idea of being ethnically and culturally homogenous” (p. 3); by refusing to grant ethnically non-Korean migrants citizenship, Koreans could maintain their group concept as an extended family linked by common descent. Kunovich (2009) demonstrated an association between national identity categories and preferences for public policies in 31 EU nations: those embracing national identities based on the fulfillment of social contracts preferred less restrictive policies related to immigration, citizenship, and cultural assimilation than those with national identities rooted in ethnicity. Thus, migrants who do not fit the group prototypes of host nationals often struggle to become part of the national ingroup, both in terms of social acceptance as well as the legal status and rights granted them by the government.

Critical perspectives illuminate the role of power operating at the nexus of national identity, acculturation, and acceptance, as well as the complex, multifaceted, and contested nature of national identity. Andreouli and Chrysochoou (2015) contended that national identity representations are constructed by multiple actors consisting of different host societal groups, diverse migrant communities, and the state (which demarcates national boundaries through legislation related to immigration and citizenship). Though each group has varied interests and agendas tied to their representations of the national ingroup, representations tend to become dominant from those with greater power (for example, members of the ethnic majority with ample social, cultural, and economic capital), allowing such groups to maintain hegemonic control over material and symbolic resources (Pratsinakis, 2018). Such conceptions lend themselves well to social dominance theory, which argues that the dominant ethnic group in a multiethnic society tends to be regarded as having “ownership” of the nation, its resources, and symbols—thus excluding ethnic minorities from the national identity and contributing to an ideological system that sustains group dominance (Devos & Mohamed, 2014).

More specifically, the status of actors in the social hierarchy, a history of past conflict, and conceptualizations of national identity can jointly determine reactions to outgroups and the policies governing resource distribution. In this volume, Devos, Yogeeswaran, Milojar, and Sibley (2020) found that New Zealanders of European descent (i.e., the higher status, dominant ethnic group) with a more civic-oriented view of national identity (e.g., considering respect for laws to be an important form of citizenship) were more likely to oppose policies that favored any form of affirmative-action based distribution of the country's natural resources, which would ostensibly benefit the Maori—the lower-status, indigenous minority of New Zealand. This effect is partly a result of the antagonistic history between European settlers and the Maori. Since the late 1960s, the Maori have relentlessly protested for greater justice and compensation over the colonization of their land (Keane, 2012). The legal redress and compromises have ostensibly eroded national solidarity (from the majority perspective) over time, as allocating more resources to the minority Maori means less for the rest of the country. In contrast, among New Zealanders of Maori or Pacific descent, a strong ethnic-oriented view of citizenship (e.g., emphasizing lineage and place of birth) predicted more support for affirmative action resource allocation policies.

In light of similar hegemonic struggles, Biles and Spoonley (2007) asserted that national identity is neither timeless, non-negotiable, nor culturally neutral, but rather continuously reconstructed as it is reimagined and practiced in communication, where it is subjected to ongoing processes of negotiation and contestation with other identity representations. Thus, representations of national identity are not impervious to change and may transform at any moment depending on the intergroup context (Augoustinos et al., 2015). This gives hope that exclusive citizenship representations can be recast into more open, welcoming forms of national identity that encourage migrant belonging.

Types of national identity

National identity and its corresponding citizenship representations can be conceived as *ascribed* or *achieved*. Ascribed identity hinges upon largely immutable criteria such as shared biological descent, territory, and place of birth (Esses, Dovidio, Semenya, & Jackson, 2005; Ha & Jang, 2015; Weinreich, 2009). Alternatively, identity can be achieved through fulfilling social contracts such as endorsing locally embraced values and ideals (Bornman, 2013; Dittmann, Purdie-Vaughns, & Eibach, 2011; Reijerse et al., 2013), respecting host cultural traditions (Ha & Jang, 2015), or demonstrating commitment to laws and institutions (Esses et al., 2005).

Here, national identity becomes largely a matter of individual choice (Weinreich, 2009). This fundamental dichotomy between ascribed and achieved forms elucidates how people construct national identity, and in conjunction with social markers, clarifies the criteria through which receiving culture members decide whether to accept migrants as national ingroup members.

The distinction between ascribed and achieved forms of national identity has taken other forms, most commonly using the nomenclature *ethnic* and *civic*, respectively. Ethnic national identity embraces a representation of the national ingroup based on a shared ancestral origin, while civic identity is realized through citizenship, participation in various institutions, and an emphasis upon common values, ideals, rights, and responsibilities among citizens (Pehrson, Brown, & Zagefka, 2009; Yogeewaran & Dasgupta, 2014). The ethnic/civic distinction has received broad support in the literature. For instance, Jones and Smith (2001a) factor analyzed data from 23 countries generated by the 1995 International Social Survey Program (ISSP), which measured seven membership criteria used across nations and found two underlying factors: “ascriptive/objectivist” criteria related to birth, religion, and residence (i.e., an ethnic form of national identification), and “civic/volunteerist” criteria associated with subjective feelings of membership and belief in core institutions. Kunovich (2009) also employed a confirmatory factor analysis on the ISSP data from 31 countries to distinguish civic versus ethnic forms of national identities. Most studies have found that civic representations of national identity are negatively associated with anti-immigrant attitudes, but ethnic concepts of citizenship are found to correlate positively with them (Pehrson et al., 2009; Reijerse et al., 2015; Yogeewaran & Dasgupta, 2014).

Other scholars have clarified the contextual features that contribute to ethnic or civic forms of national identity. Jones and Smith (2001b) found a positive association between preferences for a civic identity and cultural differentiation within a country (i.e., linguistic diversity and strength of regional vs. national sentiment), as well as a country’s degree of post-industrialism, but no such effect for globalization. They speculated that individual characteristics such as education, wealth, and migration experience correlate with civic identifications because they encourage reflexivity and universalism. Kunovich (2009) also identified several macro-level factors contributing to preferences for civic forms of identity: economic and cultural globalization, economic development, and democratic governance.

Kymlicka (2001) proposed a third type of national identity: cultural, in which the national ingroup is conceived as sharing, promulgating, and protecting a common culture. Using a nonrepresentative sample of high school students, Reijerse et al. (2013) found evidence in six EU countries of cultural national identities being distinct from ethnic and civic ones. Though cultural national identity was originally conceived to be open to immigrants who adopt the national culture, it has also been found to associate with negative general attitudes towards immigrants, presumably because immigrants are perceived by majority group members who embrace this form of national identity as threats to the national culture and cultural homogeneity (Reijerse et al., 2013). In addition to this controversy over the extent to which cultural citizenship is open to newcomers or instead constitutes a modern proxy for ethnic national identity, researchers also disagree as to whether cultural citizenship representations are actually distinct from ethnic and civic representations, as studies finding a supportive three-factor model for citizenship representations are still scarce because the model has not yet been broadly tested.

Conceptual critiques of national identity research

Diversity of national identity categories within nation-states

One conceptual (and empirical) criticism of the ethnic-civic distinction (which also applies to the broader ascribed-achieved dichotomy) is its homogenous application to entire nation-states. Specifically, all members of any national group are highly unlikely to agree about the ethnic and/or civic attributes that define their identity, and subgroups within each country (e.g., regional, generational, socioeconomic, ethnic, migrant vs. native born, or various ideological factions) often embrace divergent national identity concepts (Devos & Mohamed, 2014; Pehrson, 2019; Rothi, Lyons, & Chrysochoou, 2001). For instance, most national minorities prefer civic rather than ethnic forms of national identity (Devos & Mohamed, 2014). Also, in Kunovich’s (2009) study of 31 EU nations, among ethnic majority members, higher education and household income both predicted greater commitment to civic rather than ethnic forms of national identity. In this special issue, Phua, Leong and Hong (2020) demonstrated generational factions of national identity in Singapore, concluding that immigrant participation in conscription is an important marker of naturalization, but more so among the elder residents who have vivid memories of post-World War 2 chaos and value a strong military deterrence.

Moreover, at the national level, the definition of ethnic-based boundaries such as ancestry, birthplace, or lineage-based heritage is considered problematic in culturally diverse environments where no ethnocultural group constitutes the dominant majority. This challenge is underscored by recent evidence on the Mauritius national identity (van der Werf, Verkuyten, Martinovic, & Ng Tseung-Wong, 2018, 2020). This demographically diverse nation comprises three major ethno-religious groups (i.e., Hindus, Creoles, and Muslims)—none of which singularly defines the culture of the country. Rather than the conventional ethnic-civic distinction, the people view their national identity in the form of *being*, *doing*, and *feeling* Mauritian. More crucially, the impact of national identity on attitudes toward other ethnic groups and immigrants seemingly diverge between Creoles and the two other religious groups. *Feeling* Mauritian (i.e., commitments to national shared values such as tolerance of diversity) predicted greater inclusion among Hindus, Creoles, and Muslims. *Doing* Mauritian (i.e., group-specific practices such as language use and way of life), however, predicted outgroup rejection for Hindus and Muslims, but not Creoles.

In summary, empirical evidence suggests there is a diversity of citizenship representations within countries. Furthermore, ethnic and civic attributes are unlikely to be equally salient across all nation-states (Kunovich, 2009; Shulman, 2002). To better capture variability in the desired content of national identity categories among individuals within and across nation states, and to make meaningful group-level comparisons between national units in terms of predominant preferences for civic or ethnic-based boundaries, Kunovich and Shulman recommended that national identity be examined at both the individual and collective levels.

Inconsistent application of markers as criteria for social acceptance

Another criticism of the concept of national identity is that within each country, citizenship representations and their associated markers are likely to be employed differently by the same ingroup depending upon the outgroup being considered. For instance, [Komisarof, Leong, and Teng \(2020\)](#) found that Japanese college students tended to place greater stress upon the importance of Japanese sociolinguistic markers when immigrants were perceived as low in status. Thus, participants demonstrated less tolerant attitudes toward “low status” immigrants, who were more rigidly expected to have higher levels of Japanese skills in order to gain social acceptance than immigrants from more esteemed groups. Similarly, as a result of inconsistent treatment, immigrant groups may be less readily accepted by receiving nationals based on their racial appearance, country of origin, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic class, or even field of employment and level of professional skills ([Andreouli & Chrysochoou, 2015](#); [Birman & Simon, 2014](#); [Devos & Mohamed, 2014](#); [Farrer, 2014](#); [Komisarof, 2020](#); [Spencer & Charsley, 2016](#)). These criteria are often utilized to categorize migrants as “desirable/worthy” or “undesirable/unworthy” ([Komisarof & Hua, 2016](#); [Montreuil & Bourhis, 2001](#)), with such constructions of difference being used, according to [Andreouli and Chrysochoou \(2015\)](#), “to justify and legitimize social stratification within the nation-state and to create a hierarchy of cultures that would obstruct mobility for newcomers when at the same time the dream for social mobility would remain alive for natives” (p. 320).

Multiple identity concepts at the individual level

It is also possible for the same individual to simultaneously embrace both civic and ethnic forms of national identity. For example, Americans may emphasize a civic identity that prioritizes the importance of respecting American institutions, laws, and freedom of speech, as well as an ethnic identity consisting of having European ancestors, being Christian, and speaking English, with such people choosing from conflicting clusters of acceptance criteria toward various groups in response to environmental demands, self-interest, and prejudices ([Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014](#)). Future research will need to differentiate contexts that emphasize particular citizenship representations at the individual level and the dynamics of how national identity concepts shift across contexts.

Another dimension upon which people’s beliefs about national belonging can vary is explicit vs. implicit beliefs (i.e., self-reports of perceptions or knowledge vs. unacknowledged and/or unconscious associations). For instance, when people are asked whether another group, or they themselves, are associated with a certain nationality, their implicit sentiments may differ subconsciously from their stated beliefs; in other cases, the two may converge: European Americans have been found to explicitly rate African Americans as equally American to European Americans but implicitly less so, whereas European Americans rated East Asian Americans as less authentically American than Whites regardless of whether their explicit or implicit beliefs were assessed ([Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014](#)). Generally, European Americans are conceived as being more American than African, Asian, Latino, and Native Americans among both the majority and even many minority group members across a broad range of circumstances and experimental test conditions ([Devos & Mohamed, 2014](#)). These findings expose an exclusionary, ethnic-based national identity that stands at odds with openly espoused, commonplace beliefs supporting a civic one—a contradiction that often escapes individual conscious awareness.

Utility of national identity and marker framework

Despite the aforementioned caveats, the civic/ethnic (and by extension achieved vs. ascribed) approaches to studying national identity provide a useful framework for understanding psychological conceptions of nationality, though such distinctions must be made with great sensitivity to context and variations at both the group and individual levels. Namely, these national identity concepts and their associated markers viewed as most important for being admitted into such groups enable one to specify which features matter most for gaining acceptance in a destination society. However, national identity research can also be *subversive*, as once such concepts and their associated markers are identified, they can be challenged if they are deemed exclusive. For instance, national identity concepts can fail to reflect a country’s actual demographic diversity, excluding citizens who are ethnic minorities ([Devos & Mohamed, 2014](#)). National identity concepts may also be utilized as justifications to reject exigently needed migrants: in Japan, widespread concepts of nationality recognizing only ethnic Japanese are at odds with the social acceptance of foreign labor that can potentially supplement the native workforce, which is being depleted by a low birthrate and a greying society ([Komisarof, 2009](#)). In such cases, grasping the nuances of national identity and who benefits from them can serve as a first step in replacing discriminatory representations with more equitable ones.

Empirical critiques of national identity research

Questionnaires like the ISSP—utilized to assess civic, ethnic, or other preconceived citizenship representations—often encounter problems in defining conceptually equivalent items and models across cultures ([Jones & Smith, 2001a](#); [Kunovich, 2009](#); [Pehrson, 2019](#); [Reijerse et al., 2013](#)). Specifically, the items that load onto each of the ethnic-civic dimensions are not always consistent ([Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010](#)). For example, speaking the native language is considered an aspect of cultural identity in certain receiving societies ([Shulman, 2002](#)), ethnic identity in others ([Brown, 1996](#)), and civic identity in still others ([Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010](#)). Thus, the same item can potentially represent divergent citizenship concepts (and by extension concepts of national identity): citizenship might be interpreted in a predominantly ethnic nation as an ascribed indicator of membership in the dominant ethnic group, whereas in a civic nation, citizenship is more likely to be associated with permanent residence and a legal designation that is acquirable by anyone, regardless of ethnicity.

Such potentially divergent interpretations of the same nominal stimulus underscore the importance of ethnographic or otherwise inductive, culture-specific research to ascertain how particular markers are conceived in the societies surveyed (i.e., as ascribed or achievable, as ethnic or civic) to ensure that comparisons across cultures for the same individual markers are conceptually equivalent. Thus, one potential limitation of the ethnic/civic and similar frameworks is the imposition of meanings upon specific social markers that diverge from locally constructed ones. For example, if language is presumed by researchers to be an achievable or civic marker in a society where language is—unbeknownst to those researchers—commonly conceived as ascribed or ethnic, then high endorsement of proficiency in the local language would be misinterpreted as an indication of a civic or achievable concept of national identity.

Another empirical concern about the ISSP and similarly concise instruments is that only a small number of markers are tested. Thus, they may fail to identify important membership criteria among the populations being examined. In such cases, rich and more comprehensive data is sacrificed for brevity, leading to an incomplete understanding of the national identity in the cultures under study.

Social markers: identifying ingroup acceptance criteria

In recent years, a different framework for assessing national identity, *social markers of acceptance* (“SMA”), was proposed by [Leong \(2014\)](#) to capture both elements of identity and inclusion. Such markers were defined by [Komisarof, Leong, and Teng \(2020\)](#) as “socially constructed indicators (e.g., adherence to social norms; expression of mainstream beliefs, attitudes, or values; and competencies such as language skills), or the perceptual signposts that recipient nationals use in deciding whether a migrant is a part of the host community” (p. 238). SMA assess the degree of host society inclusiveness, as one can measure which, how many, and to what extent markers are considered important as well as the degree to which these markers are considered achievable. Recipient nationals’ choices of markers indicate which they consider to be the essential attributes for migrants to possess and/or adopt to be accepted in the destination society to the same degree as a native. Among receiving society members, the more markers expected, the greater the emphasis upon their importance, and the less achievable the markers’ acquisition is considered, then the narrower the acceptance criteria. On the other hand, fewer markers, loosely expected ones, and/or high anticipated achievability of the markers reflect a more open and inclusive benchmark for acceptance.

Benefits of this framework include the fact that there is no limit to the number of markers that can be tested for in a study; [Komisarof, Leong, and Teng \(2020\)](#) utilized 41. Also, factor analysis allows the researcher to identify those SMA that uniquely associate with each other within each population—thus reflecting locally-constructed meanings—without imposing a preexisting framework such as ethnic-civic national identity. [Komisarof, Leong, and Teng](#) found three distinct components of national identity among Japanese: ethnic, socio-economic, and socio-linguistic markers. SMA from the ethnic dimension emphasized ascribed, immutable dispositions that echo contemporary ethnic representations of national identity (e.g., [Jones & Smith, 2001a](#); [Reijerse et al., 2013, 2015](#); [Kunovich, 2009](#)), whereas the socio-economic and socio-linguistic factors underscored immigrants’ economic contributions in their workplaces as well as their linguistic proficiency, respectively, with both of these dimensions highlighting a premium placed on positive intercultural communication and engagement in different life domains.

Incidentally, the role and centrality of economic contributions in immigrants gaining a sense of acceptance have been replicated in other cultural contexts. [Moffitt, Nardon and Zhang \(2020\)](#) in this special issue found similar narratives of intercultural adaptation in Canada, where becoming “one of us” was dependent upon professional achievement in the workplace. Immigrants who are successful in their careers also managed to blend into the recipient society, whereas those who had not reached such levels of belonging tended to focus on challenges and barriers to workplace participation as primary sources of rejection by the recipient society.

Whereas established acculturation frameworks ([Berry, 2008](#); [Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997](#); [Piontkowski, Rohmann, & Florack, 2002](#)) are useful for identifying broad acculturation attitudes and their social-psychological consequences, the SMA framework has the advantage of identifying the types of cultural features, whether culture-general or specific, that matter most in terms of gaining acceptance in the destination society. Moreover, SMA studies have contributed to the broader literature on social markers by uncovering the contextual nature of marker application; namely, SMA’s perceived importance changes along with variables such as receiving society members’ perceptions of immigrant threats, contributions, and social status, as well as different degrees of intergroup permeability, economic optimism, family ties, and national pride ([Komisarof, Leong, & Teng, 2020](#); [Leong, 2014](#)).

A conceptually similar framework to SMA is that of *identity markers* ([Kiely, Bechhofer, Stewart, & McCrone, 2001](#)), or the communication rules by which people claim their own identity or accept/reject the identity claims of others. Both identity markers and SMA illuminate socially constructed signals of differences that define the boundaries of national ingroup membership (an idea developed by [Barth, 1969](#); [Cohen, 1985](#); and [Jenkins, 1996](#)). [Kiely, Bechhofer, Stewart, and McCrone](#) went further in that they distinguished between markers that are more readily evident to others versus those less so (e.g., accent is comparatively quickly perceived but place of birth requires greater familiarity with one’s communicative partner). In this volume, this perspective is echoed in the study by [Violante, Cain and Mukherjee \(2020\)](#) in how primordial (i.e., native born), assimilationist (i.e., speaks English), and civic (i.e., loyalty) national identities are evaluated among ordinary American citizens. English proficiency is considered a more “visible” (i.e., perceptually accessible) marker than birthplace or degree of loyalty, and its associated assimilationist national identity better predicted stereotypes about the supposedly American identity and behavior of fictitious characters than primordial or civic identities.

In addition to being utilized to demarcate group boundaries and define national identity, [Komisarof, Leong, and Teng \(2020\)](#) noted the potential of markers to be utilized as tools of exclusion—particularly when they are unrealizable through acculturation (e.g., changing one’s birthplace or genealogy) or expected in quantities so numerous that they become almost impossible to achieve. [Pratsinakis \(2018\)](#) elaborated upon the role of markers in such rejection: migrants—especially those whose differences from the “mainstream” ethnic group are questioned and devalued—are “seen as a threat to the social cohesion and cultural homogeneity of the nation, and the acceptance of newcomers is provisional upon their compliance with a set of norms and behaviors, dispelling

impressions of their perceived dangerous character” (p. 3). Thus, perceptions of threat are stoked by the seeming unfamiliarity of the “other,” which tends to happen with those of low perceived status, whether due to their lack of professional training, country of origin, racial appearance, and/or ethnicity. Native citizens then construct a social hierarchy in which they claim the dominant position and present themselves as the standard by which others—namely, “undesirable” migrants—are judged, relegating them to the status of outsiders (Pratsinakis, 2018). Thus, acting as acceptance criteria that are either too onerous or outright impossible for certain groups to acquire, markers can become a means by which hegemonic relations are structured—a hegemony that is in turn enforced through control over material and social resources. Indeed, future research must clarify how we can mitigate markers’ potential to be used perniciously while augmenting their potential to serve as vehicles by which migrants and their destination societies can forge a better sense of familiarity, commonality, and connection.

Limitations and directions for future research

One limitation of the research in this special issue is the unit of analysis. The papers examine ingroup belonging in various nations, yet collective identity is not always defined at this level—i.e., national identity can be based not on state nationalism but instead upon communal, cantonal, or linguistic identities, as in the case of Switzerland (Borrmann, 2010). Thus, although our focus is upon markers used to gain access to national ingroups, the borders of relevant imagined communities for people are not always the nation-state, so markers should also be examined in these smaller communities—wherever group boundaries exist. In addition, it is important for marker-related research to go beyond descriptive studies of which markers are important and explain *why* specific types of markers are chosen over others, to predict how boundaries will change over time, and to advance testable predictions about such processes. In essence, if predictive theory building is a central role of the social sciences, then such goals represent the next frontier in marker-related research.

Future research also needs to specify how markers may be employed differently to demarcate group boundaries depending upon the operationalization of acceptance. For instance, immigrant acceptance can be conceptualized as host citizens perceiving functional indispensability (in which immigrants contribute invaluable to the country’s economic well-being) or identity indispensability (i.e., they are part of the national identity); moreover, immigrants may be regarded as indispensable in these two domains to different extents, with consequent unique effects on intergroup outcomes for each type of belonging (Guerra et al., 2015). For example, a group might be viewed as an important economic contributor but not as part of the national ingroup—i.e., high in functional but low in identity indispensability—thus resulting in recipient society members desiring temporary migrant workers from that group but not welcoming their permanent residence.

Another area begging for clarification is the influence on outgroup attitudes and other relational outcomes of the *intentions* behind markers’ utilization as acceptance criteria. Komisarof (2020) moved in this direction by distinguishing between *normative*, *punitive*, and *compassionate* forms of marker use in constructing group boundaries. When applying a marker normatively, recipient society members assume that migrants “should” follow the marker, often applying reasoning along the lines of “When in Rome, do as the Romans do”—a decidedly assimilationist ideology. In more extreme cases, hosts take a punitive approach—assuming that migrants not only should adopt valued markers, but if they do not, they deserve to be punished through sanctions such as social exclusion or even forced return to their country of origin. Markers are compassionately employed when recipient nationals believe that migrants adapting to a particular marker will improve their quality of life; hence, the primary motivation is to express concern for and to help the migrants. For instance, Komisarof (2020) noted that some Japanese university students wanted migrants to learn Japanese so they could both improve their employment prospects and avoid social isolation by making Japanese friends.

Research also needs to clarify when and how marker adaptation can be beneficial or detrimental. As noted by Birman and Simon (2014), context can exert profound effects on which acculturation strategy is most adaptive for migrants, and these effects can mean that rejecting markers and embracing one’s heritage culture may be advantageous: for example, among some Latino populations in the US whose lives are centered predominantly in their own communities, native (i.e., non-US) cultural norms predominate. In this sense, adhering to recipient dominant culture markers (i.e., those of European Americans) can potentially be dysfunctional or maladaptive. Thus, studies need to define more clearly the contexts in which adopting markers is helpful to migrants and when it is not.

Scholars would also do well to replicate Leong’s (2014) approach of comparing assumptions about social marker importance in native-born and migrant populations in the same nation. This would allow them to identify gaps in such conceptions—a critical first step in building a foundation for positive interactions and mutual understanding between these communities. We also recommend that researchers increasingly examine the difference between implicit and explicit conceptions of national identity and belongingness. Even if people endorse in principle an inclusive type of national identity, in practice they may reject certain groups. Therefore, intensively testing concepts of national identity and endorsed markers on both the explicit and implicit levels is a key to better understanding the complexity of national identities as well as how to potentially lessen unconscious biases and make ingroup concepts more inclusive.

Conclusion

The papers in these pages offer a variety of epistemological and methodological frames, including consideration of both qualitative and quantitative data as well as a broad variety of outcome measures. Such diversification serves as a means of triangulating our examination of the nexus of social inclusion, intercultural adaption, and constructs of national identity. Ultimately, the aim of this issue is to better understand how societies can foster a sense of belonging among their migrants while also promoting intergroup harmony between migrants and their destination societies. We hope that highlighting national identity and marker-related research opens new avenues of insight into achieving these elusive, yet exigent goals. The world cannot wait.

Acknowledgement

The authors wish to thank Dr. Seth Schwartz for his comments on an earlier version of this manuscript.

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