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The presence of the past: Identity continuity and group dynamics

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Social psychologists are increasingly interested in the temporal dimensions of social life and in identity continuity in particular. Focusing on ethnicity and national identity we discuss the implications of perceived group continuity and collective self-continuity, and their interplay, for group dynamics. Using the social identity perspective and theories of identity motivation, we show, first, that the need for collective self-continuity forms a unique motivational basis for group identification. Second, we demonstrate that people are more likely to derive a sense of collective self-continuity from groups that are seen as relatively stable and immutable over time (i.e., essentialist in-groups). Third, we find that existential threats to group identity strengthen a sense of collective self-continuity, which, in turn, increases in-group defence mechanisms in the form of negative attitudes towards immigrant out-groups and towards social developments that potentially undermine in-group continuity. Fourth, we discuss empirical findings that indicate that group-based nostalgia for the nation is an identity management strategy in response to in-group continuity threats and that nostalgia leads to immigrant out-group exclusion.

Keywords: Identity continuity; History; National identity; Nostalgia; Intergroup relations.

I don't know why or how, but suddenly I understood that by having a child with a Jewish woman, I would be part of a greater life, of a history, with a connection to generations that came before and would come after me. . . . Seeing myself as a Jew, profoundly changed something in me, something that was less about just today and just me, and more about the relationship of the past to the present and to the future. (Kessel, 2000, p. 96)

This quotation is from an interview with the photographer Zigy Kaluzny. For her book *Suddenly Jewish*, Kessel interviewed Jews who were raised as Gentiles and

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later in life discovered their Jewish roots. Kaluzny explains that this discovery gave him a sense of identity in time and space and that he thought about his Jewishness in the context of historical continuity. Kessel (2000, p. 99) concludes that “People who find out that they are of Jewish descent receive an information packet of tremendous import”, and that a sense of historical rooting is a central aspect of this package. This illustrates how the past is crucial for our sense of self. Without the ability to recall our past we are not able to understand who we are in the present. This applies not only to our personal identities but also to identities that we derive from membership in groups in which a past orientation is identity defining. Whereas there are groups that are more present oriented, such as professional groups, and groups that have a focus on the future, such as ideological and revolutionary movements, ethnic groups tend to be strongly past oriented (DeVos, 1995).

Most anthropologists follow Max Weber (1968), who emphasised that ethnic groups are founded on the belief in common descent. Gil-White (2005, p. 243), for example, defines an ethnic group as “a collection of people who, at a minimum, represent themselves as a self-sufficiently and vertically reproducing historical unit implying cultural peoplehood”. Ethnicity implies an ideology of membership by descent, and this makes it different from, for example, religion or culture. The debate about whether Jews should be considered an ethnic or rather a religious or cultural group illustrates these different understandings. That is, from an ethnic perspective, the child of a Jewish mother is seen as Jewish even if he or she is an agnostic or atheist, and is also considered to be more Jewish than someone who converted to Judaism. In contrast to ethnicity, membership in a religious or cultural group can be obtained by means other than descent. Horowitz (1975) explains that Sikhs started out as a religious sect but turned into an ethnic group when descent became a membership requirement. Ethnicity is a form of collective identity that is firmly rooted in history hereby providing people with a sense of identity continuity and temporal depth.

In recent years, social psychologists have shown a growing interest in examining group history. Much of this work has focused on historical representations of intergroup conflict or of particular historical events. For instance, there is a considerable body of research that has looked at how representations of historical atrocities and wrongdoings such as slavery, colonialism, and genocide trigger feelings of group-based guilt that influence support for historical compensation and reconciliation (e.g., Branscombe & Doosje, 2004; Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). Another example is the body of research by Liu and colleagues that examines representations of group and world history (e.g., Liu et al., 2005; Liu, Lawrence, Ward, & Abraham, 2002), and how such representations guide current sociopolitical attitudes, such as support for military action (Liu & Hilton, 2005) and justification of social inequality (Sibley, Liu, Duckitt, & Khan, 2008; see also Liu & László, 2007).

Social psychologists have also started to address the importance of a sense of continuity for social identities (see Sani, 2008). It has been shown that the perception that one's group has temporal continuity (i.e., perceived collective continuity) is associated with stronger in-group attachment and bolsters social connectedness (Sani, Bowe, & Herrera, 2008; Sani, Herrera, & Bowe, 2009). Furthermore, research has found that people tend to oppose social developments and out-groups that undermine in-group continuity (Jetten & Hutchison, 2011; Jetten & Wohl, 2012). However, this emerging body of research has hardly addressed the underlying psychological mechanisms that drive these relationships. Thus, the questions that have been left unanswered are: (a) Why are people likely to identify with groups that are seen to possess collective continuity?, and (b) why do people tend to oppose social developments and out-groups that potentially disturb this sense of collective continuity?

We extend this recent line of research by testing the explanatory role of feelings of collective self-continuity in relation to national identity. We empirically demonstrate that collective self-continuity forms a psychological basis for group identification and plays an important role in intergroup relations. Theoretically, our research is guided by the social identity perspective (Turner & Reynolds, 2001; see Spears, 2011, for a recent review) and motivated identity construction theory (Vignoles, 2011). In line with this latter theory, we first propose that the need for self-continuity forms a unique motivational basis for group identification. Second, we discuss how groups can fulfil the need for self-continuity and argue that people are more likely to derive a sense of self-continuity from groups that are seen as relatively stable and immutable over time (i.e., essentialist in-groups). Third, individuals employ a range of identity management strategies when their ability to satisfy their identity motives is threatened or undermined. These strategies can take different forms, including in-group defences and negative attitudes towards out-groups and towards social developments that potentially undermine in-group continuity. Another identity management strategy in response to in-group continuity threats that we discuss is group-based nostalgia. Theorists of nostalgia have proposed that in times of social change and transition, group members often develop a sentimental longing for the group's lost and fondly remembered past in order to restore a sense of identity continuity (Boym, 2001; Davis, 1979).

In our research we focused on ethnic and national groups, which are typically defined and understood as communities that live together through time (e.g., Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1990). Furthermore, in contemporary Western Europe, social developments, such as immigration and European integration, are often portrayed as undermining the continuation of national identity. Therefore national identity is an interesting and important case for examining the importance of identity continuity for group dynamics, and we discuss our research that was conducted in the Netherlands.

We first elaborate on the theoretical background of our research. Subsequently, we consider the unique role of feelings of self-continuity for national identification. This is followed by a discussion of the way in which different understandings of group history (essentialist and narrativist) have different implications for feelings of self-continuity and thereby for national identification. Next, we discuss how immigrant out-groups and societal changes can be perceived as a threat to identity continuity, which subsequently results in increased attempts to exclude immigrant out-groups and protect the in-group. This is followed by a discussion of group-based nostalgia for the nation (i.e., national nostalgia) as a source of identity continuity and as a buffer against continuity threats to national identity. We argue that whereas national nostalgia can have positive consequences for the in-group it can also have negative consequences for the evaluation of immigrant out-groups. The reason is that longing for a shared national past that is lost makes social categorisation based on these collective experiences salient, which stimulates thinking along ethnic exclusionary lines with the related beliefs of primo-occupancy (i.e., autochthony).

COLLECTIVE SELF-CONTINUITY

Humans are faced with the issue of maintaining self-continuity because they not only are aware of the passage of chronological time but also have a sense of self. Self-continuity refers to having a sense of connection between one's past, present, and future self. It is about a sense of "I" over time despite the inevitable changes throughout one's life (Bluck & Liao, 2013). Thus, self-continuity does not imply the absence of change but involves a conceptual thread that is established and maintained against a backdrop of constant change. Psychological accounts of identity by Erikson (1963) and Breakwell (1986) consider self-continuity a core dimension of identity and describe the absence of it as "identity confusion" and "identity threat", respectively. Initially, empirical research on the importance of self-continuity was mainly conducted by clinical psychologists and psychiatrists, who observed that disturbances of self-continuity are a source of great discomfort and impaired psychological functioning (e.g., Scharfetter, 2003; Sims, 2003). More recently, continuity received broader scholarly interest within personality and social psychology. Studies have shown that self-continuity is a motivational principle for both personal and collective identity construction (Sani, 2008; Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Gollidge, & Scabini, 2006). Moreover, it has been found that people desire possible future selves that satisfy a sense of self-continuity and fear things that threaten it (Vignoles, Manzi, Regalia, Jemmolo, & Scabini, 2008). Thus, it is proposed that individuals are motivated to achieve and maintain a sense of self as being a temporally continuous human being (Vignoles, 2011). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) argues that the self can be experienced in terms of its unique, personal

characteristics or in terms of group memberships. One implication is that individuals are not only able to derive a sense of self-continuity from their personal identities, but also from their memberships in social groups. We use the concept of “collective self-continuity” to refer to the feeling that the part of the self that is derived from group membership has temporal endurance.

Collective self-continuity refers to the feeling that being a group member connects one’s past, present, and future self. This is different from the concept of perceived collective continuity as discussed by Sani and colleagues (2008, 2009), which denotes the perception that one’s group has temporal endurance. These two forms of temporally understanding one’s social identity can be described in terms of Ashmore et al.’s (2004) distinction between “the story of my group” (group story) versus “the story of me as a member of my group” (collective identity story). They define “group story” as “the individual’s mentally represented narrative of a particular social category”, and “collective identity story” as “the individual’s mentally represented narrative of self as a member of a particular social category” (Ashmore et al. (2004), p. 96). We consider perceived collective continuity as a group story and collective self-continuity as a collective identity story. Applied to national identity, this means that we distinguish between the perception of one’s national group as continuous over time (i.e., group continuity) and the feeling that one’s national group membership affords a sense of self-continuity (i.e., collective self-continuity).

The concept of collective self-continuity was initially not discussed within the social identity tradition, which focused on the assumption that individuals seek to maintain or enhance positive intergroup distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, subsequent theorists have proposed motivational extensions of the social identity framework. This body of research takes a more functional approach to social identity (e.g., Aharpour & Brown, 2002; Breakwell, 1993; Brewer, 1991; Hogg & Abrams, 1990; Vignoles et al., 2006) and rests on the premise that group membership can have a diverse motivational basis. People seek identification with groups to fulfil various motives or needs. This research generally indicates that, next to self-esteem and distinctiveness, people seek a sense of continuity and belonging, which subsequently guide identity processes. However, this literature is fragmented as theorists have proposed a wide variety of motivational constructs in relation to identity. Recently, an attempt has been made to integrate these insights into an integrative model of motivated identity construction (Vignoles, 2011).

Motivated identity construction theory (MICT; Vignoles, 2011) proposes that both personal and social identities must satisfy certain requirements in order to be adaptive or useful, and that these requirements take on a motivational character in guiding processes of identity construction and maintenance. Specifically, integrating insights from previous work within the functional approach to social identity, MICT proposes that people are motivated not only to maintain a sense of self-esteem (the self-esteem motive), but also to perceive themselves as

continuous over time (the continuity motive), as being different from other people (the distinctiveness motive), as being competent and capable (efficacy motive), as included and accepted within their social contexts (belonging motive), and as having a meaningful life (the meaning motive). While recent studies have pointed out that the continuity motive is an important and unique aspect of identity (e.g., Vignoles et al., 2006), there have been few studies that have specifically examined the sense of self-continuity that people derive from their national group membership and how this guides processes of national identification and intergroup relations.

IDENTITY CONTINUITY AND NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Our first step was to try to demonstrate that a sense of collective self-continuity is important for national identification. In different studies, we examined the uniqueness and relative importance of self-continuity in comparison to other identity motives (Smeeke & Verkuyten, 2013). More specifically, we investigated whether collective self-continuity can be empirically distinguished from other identity motives that have been shown to predict group identification (Vignoles et al., 2006), and whether feelings of collective self-continuity uniquely predict national identification when taking these other identity motives into account. In addition to continuity, we focused on belonging, self-esteem, distinctiveness, and efficacy.

We tested our predictions among three different samples, in order to demonstrate the validity and robustness of the findings. Study 1A was conducted among 172 native Dutch adolescents and young adults who participated on a voluntary basis in a classroom setting. For Study 1B, a convenience sample of 102 native adults living in Utrecht was recruited by distributing questionnaires among adult family members of pupils from a high school. In Study 1C, the sample consisted of 89 Utrecht University students who came to the lab to participate in a study on Dutch societal issues. In these studies, participants completed a questionnaire with separate items for each identity motive and a separate scale for national identification. Each identity motive was assessed with a combination of items, which were based on previous research (see Easterbrook & Vignoles, 2012; Vignoles et al., 2006). For the continuity motive the items were: “Being Dutch gives me a sense of continuity—between past, present, and future”, and “Being Dutch gives me the feeling that I am part of a long shared history”. For the belonging motive the items were: “Being Dutch gives me the feeling that I am close to other people”, and “Being Dutch gives me the feeling that I am at home with other people”. For the self-esteem motive the items were: “Being Dutch gives me a positive feeling about myself”, and “The fact that I am Dutch gives me a proud feeling”. For the efficacy motive the items were: “My Dutch identity provides me with confidence to achieve my goals”, and “Being Dutch gives me a feeling of certainty that I am capable of doing the things I want to do”. Finally,

the items for the distinctiveness motive were: “Being Dutch gives me the feeling that I am different from other people in the world”, and “Being Dutch gives me the feeling that I am special”. For each motive, the two items were combined into a scale.

In Study 1C, we only assessed the continuity ($\alpha = .74$), belonging ($\alpha = .88$), and self-esteem ($\alpha = .72$) motive. In this study, each of these identity motives was measured with the same items as those in Studies 1A and 1B plus one additional item. The additional item for the continuity motive was “Being Dutch gives me the feeling that I am part of a shared future”. For the self-esteem motive this additional item was: “Being Dutch gives me a satisfactory feeling”, and for belonging this item was: “Being Dutch gives me the feeling that I am connected with other people.” We performed confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to determine whether the items assessing the national identity motives comprised distinct factors. In Studies 1A and 1B, we compared the fit of a five-factor model with the fit of three-, four-, and one-factor models. In the four-factor model the items of continuity and belonging loaded on one component, and in the three-factor model the motives of self-esteem and distinctiveness were also collapsed (next to continuity and belonging). Based on the findings of Studies 1A and 1B, we only measured the continuity, self-esteem, and belonging motive in Study 1C (each with three items) and compared the fit of a three-factor model to a two-factor (continuity and belonging) and a one-factor model. Items were permitted to load only on the motive that they were expected to indicate, and no item errors were allowed to correlate. As can be seen in Table 1, in Studies 1A and 1B, the five-factor solutions fit the data better than any of the alternative models. In Study 1C, the three-factor model fit the data better than a two-factor and one-factor solution. These results indicated that, although significantly correlated, the identity motives were empirically distinct in the three samples.

We then regressed national identification on the different identity motives. The results showed that when all five identity motives were entered in the equation simultaneously, only continuity, belonging, and self-esteem were unique significant predictors of national identification, whereas distinctiveness and efficacy had no significant effects. In Study 1C, collective self-continuity, belonging, and self-esteem each had a unique and strong effect on national identification. Thus, feelings of self-continuity, self-esteem, and belonging appear to be important and distinctive motivational principles of national identity for native Dutch participants. Importantly, feelings of collective self-continuity uniquely predicted national identification when controlling for other identity motives.

UNDERSTANDINGS OF NATIONAL HISTORY AND CONTINUITY

In discourses on national identity, people often appeal to historical origin and lineage (Condor, 2006). National history is the story of the formation of a

TABLE 1
Confirmatory factor analyses of national identity motives

<i>Identity motives</i>	χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	<i>CFI</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>	<i>AIC</i>
<i>Study 1A</i>							
5 factors	50.55	25	.002		.98	.08	99.46
4 factors	101.25	29	<.001	50.7***	.93	.12	153.25
3 factors	110.13	32	<.001	54.58***	.92	.12	156.13
1 factor	429.24	36	<.001	378.69***	.60	.25	467.24
<i>Study 1B</i>							
5 factors	39.46	25	.033		.99	.04	106.34
4 factors	86.42	29	<.001	46.96***	.90	.14	138.42
3 factors	95.43	32	<.001	55.97***	.89	.14	141.43
1 factor	214.54	35	<.001	175.08***	.69	.23	254.54
<i>Study 1C</i>							
3 factors	40.91	24	.017		.95	.09	82.91
2 factors	72.47	26	<.001	31.56***	.87	.14	110.47
1 factor	119.52	27	<.001	78.61***	.74	.20	155.52

Fit indices of competing measurement models of national identity motives in three different samples. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation; AIC = Akaike information criterion. *Source*: Smeekes and Verkuyten (2013). All rights reserved. © 2013 Elsevier. Reproduced by permission of Elsevier. Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder. *** $p < .001$.

national in-group and is central in the construction and maintenance of the national community (Renan, 1990; Sani, 2008). The national in-group typically creates a historical narrative that has strong normative properties; it serves to justify how things are and ought to be, based on the explanation of how it came to be that way (Liu & Lázsló, 2007). However, different narratives and representations of nationhood can prevail in a given societal context, and these representations may have different consequences for group dynamics.

Anthropologists speak about “participant primordialism” (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996) and “everyday primordialism” (Gil-White, 1999) to indicate that lay people tend to understand their ethnic group as possessing relatively immutable and fixed characteristics. This primordialism is also part of the ethnic understanding of nationhood, which reflects the perception that one only truly belongs to the country if one is of native descent. In contrast, people who endorse the idea of civic national belonging feel that anyone that possesses the country’s passport and commits to its basic rules, laws, and institutions belongs to the country. The distinction between ethnic and civic nationhood is widely used in the literature to differentiate between policies and legislation at the level

of nation-states (e.g., Brubaker, 1992; Koning, 2011). Survey research in different national contexts has shown that these alternative conceptions and criteria of national belonging also emerge side by side as contrasting normative images among the public (e.g., Citrin & Wright, 2008; Jones & Smith, 2001; Levanon & Lewin-Epstein, 2010; Reeskens & Hooghe, 2010). Moreover, several studies have shown that the relationship between national identification and anti-immigrant attitudes is stronger for people who endorse an ethnic conception of nationhood than for those who endorse a civic understanding (e.g., Pehrson, Vignoles, & Brown, 2009).

In two large-scale studies among representative samples of the native Dutch population we examined people's endorsement of ethnic ("A real Dutch person is someone who is of Dutch origin", "A real Dutch person has Dutch ancestors") and civic ("Anyone who legally resides in the Netherlands is a real Dutch person", "A real Dutch person is anyone in possession of a Dutch passport") conceptions of national belonging and how these were related to national identification. These studies were part of two larger data collections among representative samples of the native Dutch population of 18 years and older. Respondents were drawn from different panels maintained by a large Dutch survey company (TNS Nipo) and completed the questionnaire online. We refer to these data collections as TNS Nipo1 ($N = 928$) and TNS Nipo2 ($N = 802$) in the remainder of this paper.

In both studies we found that, each measured on a 7-point scale, ethnic nationhood ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.71$; $M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.06$, respectively) was endorsed significantly ($ps < .01$) more strongly than civic nationhood ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.48$; $M = 3.97$, $SD = .95$, respectively). Furthermore, in both studies the endorsement of ethnic nationhood was positively associated with national identification ($r = .33$; $r = .35$) whereas this was not the case for civic nationhood ($r = -.02$; $r = -.16$). Additionally, in a regression analysis only ethnic nationhood was significantly associated with national identification. These findings indicate that Dutch natives tend to have an ethnic understanding of national belonging, which suggests that the sense of self-continuity and stability that is provided by shared ancestry and origin forms an important basis for their identification with the nation.

An ethnic conception of nationhood is related to what social psychologists have labelled as "essentialist continuity" (Sani, 2008; Sani et al., 2008). It has been proposed that one component of perceived group essentialism is the understanding of social categories as historically stable (Haslam, 1998). Essentialist continuity includes a temporal component and refers to the understanding that core features of the in-group's culture and identity are continuous over time and are passed on from generation to generation. Research has paid little attention to this specific component of perceived group essentialism. Furthermore, previous work has typically looked at the different ways in which out-groups are essentialised and how this affects prejudice towards these groups (e.g., Haslam,

Bastian, Bain, & Kashima, 2006), while few studies have examined the different ways in which in-groups can be essentialised and how this affects intergroup dynamics (Leyens et al., 2003; Verkuyten, 2003). The concept of essentialist continuity can be understood as the temporal dimension of in-group essentialism. This understanding has been distinguished from “narrativist continuity”, which denotes the perception that distinctive events and phases in group history are causally interconnected and form a coherent storyline.

The distinction between essentialist and narrativist continuity was first described in research looking at the strategies of young people to assert temporal continuity of their personal identity in the face of the inevitable changes in their lives (for an overview, see Chandler & Proulx, 2008). This body of research shows that although strategies to assert personal continuity become more sophisticated with age, adolescents generally use essentialist and narrativist strategies to construct identity continuity. It has subsequently been proposed by Sani and colleagues (2008) that similar constructions of identity continuity operate at the group level. Essentialist and narrativist understandings of historical continuity are different ways of representing and perceiving the group’s past in relation to the present, and both can form the basis for a sense of collective self-continuity.

Although it has been empirically demonstrated that understandings of group continuity have this two-dimensional structure (Sani et al., 2008), previous studies have not examined whether these two dimensions are equally important in predicting group identification and in satisfying the psychological need for self-continuity. Moreover, while research on identity motives has shown that the need for self-continuity is an important reason why people identify with groups (Vignoles et al., 2006), research has not examined how groups can provide a sense of self-continuity. We examined whether people are particularly likely to identify with a national in-group that is seen to possess essentialist (rather than narrativist) continuity, because this most strongly satisfies their psychological need for self-continuity. By using both survey and experimental designs (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014a), we first tried to provide empirical evidence for the relative importance of essentialist and narrativist historical understandings in bolstering national identification. Second, we tested the explanatory role of collective self-continuity in these relationships. The hypothesis was that particularly essentialist (compared to narrativist) continuity fosters group identification, via the satisfaction of the psychological need for self-continuity.

In a first study (Study 1; $N = 148$), we experimentally induced an essentialist and narrativist representation of national history and tested (compared to a control condition) whether these were equally predictive of national identification. This study was conducted among Utrecht University undergraduates who participated for course credit and completed the questionnaires in class. We designed a manipulation for these two understandings on the basis of the two-dimensional scale developed and validated in different European countries by Sani and colleagues (2008). Specifically, in the essentialist condition we asked

participants to read and write about the historical endurance of Dutch culture and identity. In the narrativist condition participants were asked to read and write about the interconnectedness of important events in Dutch history. In the control condition no text or writing task was given.¹ These conditions were pretested in a pilot study (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014a), which showed that participants in the essentialist condition scored higher on the essentialist manipulation checks (e.g., “Shared values and beliefs of Dutch people have endurance over time”) than those in the narrativist and control condition, and that participants in the narrativist condition scored higher on the narrativist manipulation checks (e.g., “Important events in Dutch history are part of an unbroken stream”). Using these three conditions, the results of Study 1 showed that native Dutch participants in the essentialist condition reported significantly higher levels of national identification than participants in the control condition. Moreover, participants in the essentialist condition also reported a higher score on national identification than participants in the narrativist condition. Importantly, there were no significant differences in national identification between participants in the narrativist and control conditions. These results provide support for the proposition that particularly essentialist continuity, and not narrativist continuity, enhances identification with the national in-group.

In two further studies we examined the proposition that the positive relationship between understandings of historical continuity and group identification can be explained by the need for self-continuity. Specifically, we expected that it is particularly essentialist (compared to narrativist) continuity that satisfies the need for self-continuity and thereby enhances group identification. We conducted a survey study among Utrecht University students (Study 2; $N = 114$) who participated for course credit and completed the questionnaires in regular class meetings. We used an adapted version of the scale developed by Sani et al. (2008) to assess the essentialist and narrative dimensions of perceived historical continuity, and we measured feelings of collective self-continuity (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014a). For essentialist continuity, two sample items are: “Shared values, beliefs and attitudes of Dutch people have endurance over time”, and “Throughout history the Netherlands has maintained its own customs and traditions” (four items, $\alpha = .88$). For narrativist continuity, two sample items are: “Dutch history is a sequence of interconnected events”, and “Major phases in Dutch history are linked to one another” (four items, $\alpha = .75$).

We first conducted CFA and found that the items assessing essentialist and narrativist continuity and feelings of self-continuity comprised three different

¹In addition to the absence of the independent variable(s), this control condition was not fully equivalent to the experimental condition, because participants did not receive a reading or writing task. This can be seen as a limitation of our design. However, we used manipulation checks in almost all of the studies in which we adopted this design, and these indicated significant differences between the experimental and control conditions.

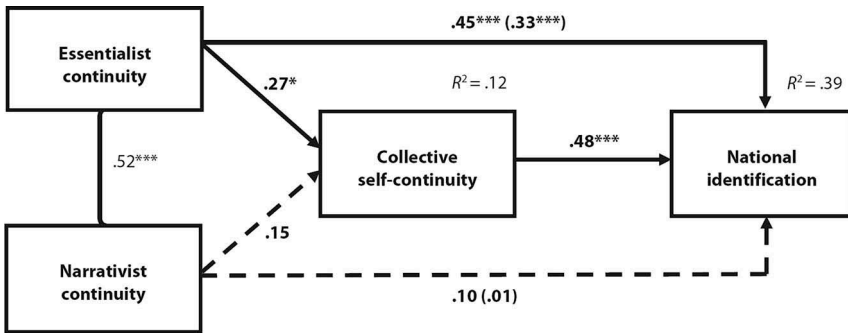


Figure 1. Influence of perceived essentialist and narrativist continuity on national identification, via collective self-continuity (controlling for age). Results of path modelling (Study 2; $N = 114$). Path-coefficients are standardised estimates (marked in boldface), and the path coefficients in parentheses reflect the mediator in the equation. $*p < .05$. $***p < .001$. Nonsignificant paths are shown as broken arrows. The model is saturated, and hence its fit is perfect. Copyright © 2014 Routledge. Reproduced with permission from Smeekes and Verkuyten (2014a). Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.

factors. We then specified the path model shown in Figure 1. Age was controlled for in this model as it could be a potential confounding variable in the relation between group continuity, self-continuity, and national identification.² In this model, essentialist continuity significantly predicted feelings of self-continuity and national identification. Narrativist continuity was not significantly related to self-continuity and also showed no significant relationship with national identification. Furthermore, there was a significant positive path from feelings of collective self-continuity to national identification. To test the indirect effect of essentialist continuity on national identification, via feelings of self-continuity, we carried out bootstrapping procedures. This analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of essentialist continuity, which supports the proposition that people are likely to identify with the nation when it is perceived as essentially enduring, because this gives them a sense of collective self-continuity.

Figure 1 also shows that essentialist continuity remained a significant predictor of national identification when collective self-continuity was included in the model. This means that part of the effect is explained by self-continuity (i.e., partial mediation) and that another mediating process is also involved. Previous research has shown that perceptions of collective continuity are positively correlated with the identity motive of belonging, and that belonging is positively

²The use of covariates substantially increases the chance of false positives in which a null-hypothesis is incorrectly rejected (Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2011). This means that significant results are sometimes dependent on the inclusion of covariates, and we therefore examined whether the findings were the same when age was not controlled for. This was the case.

correlated with national identification (Sani et al., 2008). Also, our earlier work (Smeeke & Verkuyten, 2013) indicated that the continuity and belonging motives were important predictors of national identification.

Therefore, in the next study we examined whether there is an additional mediational path through belonging and whether the predicted effects via collective self-continuity remained significant when feelings of belonging were taken into account. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the previous study implied that we could not make any claims about the causality of the proposed relationships. Moreover, the use of student samples limits the generalisability of the findings and raises questions about the theoretical conclusions that can be drawn (Henry, 2008; Mitchell, 2012).

Therefore, we conducted a third study among a national sample of the native Dutch adult population (Smeeke & Verkuyten, 2014a, Study 3). This study ($N = 301$) was embedded within the TNS Nipo1 data collection, and participants completed one of the two versions of the questionnaire that were specifically designed for this study. We used an experimental between-subjects design and included an additional measure of feelings of self-belonging (e.g., “Being Dutch gives me the feeling that I am close to other people”, and “Being Dutch gives me the feeling that I am connected with other people”; three items, $\alpha = .94$). This measure was based on previous research (see Easterbook & Vignoles, 2012; Vignoles et al., 2006). We hypothesised that an increased sense of collective self-continuity and of belonging would be two unique mechanisms by which an essentialist understanding of group history elevates national identification. The experimental manipulation was comparable to the one used in the experiment in Study 1, and the measures of self-continuity, self-belonging, and national identification were similar to those used in Studies 1 and 2 (Smeeke & Verkuyten, 2014a). Participants were randomly assigned to either the essentialist or the narrativist condition, and in addition to age, we controlled for level of education as a potential confound of continuity perceptions and national identification.³

We found that when essentialist continuity was salient, participants reported stronger feelings of collective self-continuity and belonging as well as higher levels of national identification than in the narrativist condition. Furthermore, both collective self-continuity and belonging were related to higher levels of national identification when simultaneously estimated in the specified model. The test of indirect effects provided causal support for the prediction that the salience of essentialist continuity enhanced national identification, via an increased sense of collective self-continuity and of belonging. This indicates that both collective self-continuity and belonging are unique mechanisms by

³ The results were similar when age, education, and national identification were not controlled for.

which an essentialist understanding of group history elevates national identification.

These three studies offer a novel connection to theories of group processes by linking feelings of collective self-continuity to notions of cultural essentialism. Essentialist thinking has been extensively studied in social psychology (e.g., Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000), and while it has been suggested that people are more likely to identify with essentialist in-groups because these satisfy motivational principles, such as uncertainty reduction (Hogg & Abrams, 1993), distinctiveness (Brewer & Roccas, 2001), and efficacy (Yzerbyt, Castano, Leyens, & Paladino, 2000), the explanatory role of self-continuity has remained largely unexplored. Furthermore, while it has been proposed that essentialism consists of multiple components (e.g., Haslam, 1998), the specific temporal component of in-group essentialism that we explored has received little attention in research (but see Sani, 2008; Sani et al., 2008) and has not been empirically investigated in relation to the self-continuity motive. Our findings indicate that the sense of self-continuity that people derive from an essentialist enduring in-group is another important reason why these groups are so attractive.

COLLECTIVE CONTINUITY THREAT

Self-continuity is often taken for granted but can be challenged by life transitions (e.g., entering adulthood, retirement, emigration) and societal changes (e.g., mass immigration, globalisation). Societal developments (e.g., large waves of immigrants, European unification) can be perceived as endangering the continuing existence of the in-group or changing it beyond recognition. It has been proposed that situations that elicit threats to identity motives will lead to increased strivings to satisfy them (Breakwell, 1986; Vignoles, 2011). The sense of self-continuity that people derive from their group membership is based not only on a feeling of collective roots and ancestry, but also on a belief that “we” (and hence “I”) will continue to be in the future (Condor, 1996). As such, threats to the continued existence of the in-group are likely to result in an increased motivation to maintain a sense of collective self-continuity (Jetten & Hutchison, 2011). It has furthermore been proposed that the need for self-continuity is a driving force for enhanced in-group protectionism and immigrant out-group rejection in the context of social identity threat (Breakwell, 1986; Vignoles, 2011). Experimental research has found that when threats to personal continuity are made salient (by making people think and write about a memorable childhood possession or a place or a thing of one’s personal past) individuals more strongly affirm their national culture (Shepherd, Kay, Landau, & Keefer, 2011, Study 1). These findings suggest that an elevated sense of collective self-continuity may be a mechanism through which social identity threat increases the tendency to protect in-group identity.

Although the concept of identity threat is central in social psychological research on intergroup dynamics, and different types of threat have been identified (e.g., Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999; Stephan & Stephan, 2000), there are few studies that have examined existential threats that originate from the potential loss of in-group continuity (yet see Wohl, Branscombe, & Reysen, 2010). Existential threats at the individual level have attracted attention in relation to the terror management perspective. Terror management theory (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991) argues that group identification and hostility towards out-groups are mechanisms to cope with the existential anxiety that follows from the awareness of the inevitability of one's personal death (i.e., mortality salience). One of the central hypotheses of the terror management perspective is that mortality salience results in increased investment in worldview defence mechanisms that buffer against existential threat. It has been proposed that collective self-continuity also serves such a buffering function (Sani et al., 2009). The reason is that mortality salience strengthens the sense of permanence and transcendence that is afforded by group membership and as such provides people with a sense of "symbolic immortality". This subsequently enhances the desire to engage in worldview defences in order to maintain a sense of symbolic immortality.

While groups are not mortal in the same way as individuals, they can also cease to exist. Therefore, the processes outlined by terror management theory may work in a similar way for existential threats at the group level. This means that people are likely to report stronger feelings of collective self-continuity when facing threats to the continued existence of their in-group, which subsequently strengthens their desire to defend their in-group identity. Although there is research showing that existential threat at the group level results in feelings of collective angst and tendencies to protect the future vitality of the in-group (e.g., Wohl et al., 2010), no previous work has linked existential group threats to the self-continuity motive, or looked at the context of national identity. We predicted that a threat to the continued existence of national identity would elevate a sense of national self-continuity (controlling for other identity motives), which subsequently strengthens people's desire to defend their national in-group against social forces that potentially undermine its continuity.

Previous studies have shown that there are different ways in which group members may attempt to defend their in-group identity. One possibility is to minimise the influence and presence of out-groups (e.g., Jetten & Wohl, 2012) and social developments (e.g., Jetten & Hutchison, 2011) that potentially undermine in-group identity. Another possibility is to maximise the protection of in-group culture and identity (Wohl et al., 2010). We therefore examined in-group defences in the form of opposition towards expressive rights of immigrant out-groups (Muslim immigrants), in one study (e.g., "Muslims should have the right to not only celebrate their Islamic holidays at home, but also in public life", "In the Netherlands wearing a headscarf should not be forbidden", reverse-scored;

six items, $\alpha = .85$), and in another study in the form of opposition to European integration (e.g., “In general, European integration has more disadvantages than advantages for the Netherlands”, “European integration causes the Dutch government to lose too much power”; three items, $\alpha = .84$) and national heritage protectionism (e.g., “It is important to protect traditional Dutch norms and values”, “It is important to maintain Dutch culture and traditions”; three items, $\alpha = .87$). In both studies we used an experimental design.

We first manipulated existential national threat by asking 84 native Dutch high-school pupils to write and think about how they would feel if their country would no longer exist and hence no longer had a shared history and future (Smeeke & Verkuyten, 2013, Study 2). They participated on a voluntary basis, and all questionnaires were administered in a classroom setting. We compared the existential threat to a control condition in which no writing and imagination tasks were given. We hypothesised that existential threat would result in elevated feelings of collective self-continuity and that this would subsequently induce opposition towards Muslim expressive rights. We included and controlled for the motives of belonging and self-esteem as these motives showed the highest correlation to collective self-continuity in our previous studies including five identity motives (see above). CFA again showed that the items assessing the identity motives of continuity, belonging, and self-esteem formed different factors. Furthermore, and as shown in Figure 2, when participants were thinking about existential threat to their national in-group, this increased their sense of collective self-continuity, which was subsequently related to more opposition towards the presence and visibility of Muslim immigrants as a means to defend national identity. Thus existential threat enhanced feelings of collective self-continuity, which in turn resulted in stronger opposition to Muslim expressive rights. The manipulation also increased feelings of belonging but not of self-esteem, and both these motives were not related to opposition.

There was also no significant main effect of the manipulation on out-group opposition. However, we tested the indirect effect (via the continuity motive) on opposition, as exogenous variables can have an effect on endogenous variables in the absence of a direct relation between (see e.g., Hayes, 2009). While some authors prefer to talk about indirect effects instead of mediation in such cases (for a discussion see Mathieu & Taylor, 2006), it is important that establishing indirect effects provides support for one’s hypothesised causal relationships (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). Using bootstrapping procedures, we observed that this indirect effect was significant and remained so when controlling for the other two identity motives (see Figure 2).

In the next study we aimed to build on these findings in various ways (Smeeke & Verkuyten, 2013, Study 3). First, we used a nationally representative sample of the native Dutch adult population in order to improve the generalisability of the findings of the first study. In addition, we also wanted to generalise

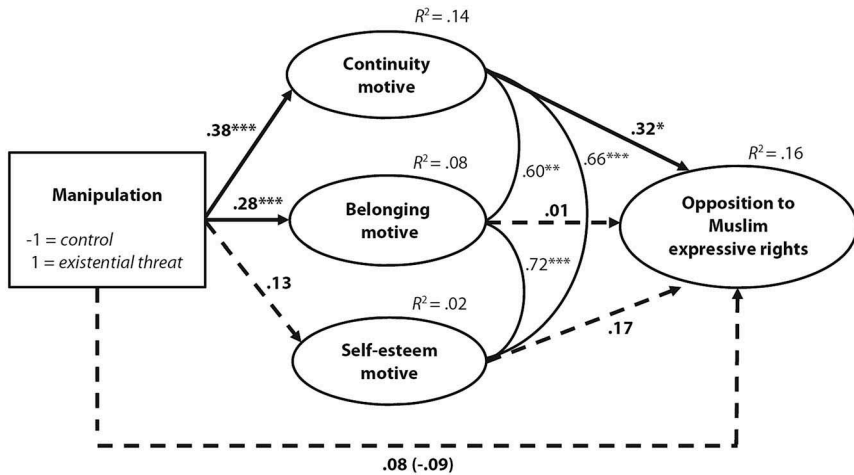


Figure 2. Influence of existential threat manipulation on opposition to Muslim expressive rights, via national identity motives of continuity, belonging, and self-esteem. Results of structural equation modelling (Study 2; $N = 89$). Path coefficients are standardised estimates (marked in boldface), and the path coefficient in parenthesis reflects the mediators in the equation. Correlations between latent variables are standardised. $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$. Nonsignificant paths are shown as broken arrows. To simplify, indicators of latent variables are not shown. Model fit: $\chi^2(90) = 122.06$, $p = .014$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .96, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06. Copyright © 2013 Elsevier. Reproduced with permission from Smeekes and Verkuyten (2013). Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightsholder.

the findings to a different social context. Previous work has demonstrated that existential threats to group identity result not only in in-group defence in the form of hostility towards immigrant out-groups (e.g., Jetten & Wohl, 2012), but also in increased attempts to protect the future vitality of the in-group (Wohl et al., 2010). Furthermore, it has been observed that not only out-groups, but also social developments, such as mergers, can form an existential threat to in-group identity and therefore evoke resistance (Jetten & Hutchison, 2011). Research has shown that opposition to European integration is growing in various European countries, and that it is strong in the Netherlands (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2010). In many European countries, including the Netherlands, this issue has been more and more framed and perceived as a threat to the continuation of national identity (Lubbers & Jaspers, 2011). Eurosceptic politicians and commentators have been warning about the formation of a European super state, in which different national identities would be lost. We therefore manipulated existential national threat in the context of European integration and examined people's in-group defences in the form of (a) opposition against European integration and (b) national heritage protectionism.

This experiment ($N = 412$) was part of TNS Nipo2, in which participants were randomly assigned to one of two versions designed for this experiment. In the existential threat condition, we asked native Dutch participants to read and write about how they would feel if their country was merged, and hence disappeared, into a larger European super state. We compared this to a control condition in which no writing or imagination tasks were given. We predicted that this existential threat to in-group identity would enhance national heritage protectionism and opposition to European integration, via an increased sense of collective self-continuity. As this experiment was part of a larger data collection on national and European identity, we were limited in the amount of items that could be included in the survey. Since self-esteem was not affected by the existential threat manipulation and did not independently predict immigrant out-group opposition in our previous studies, we left it out.

We found that there was a significant effect of our existential threat manipulation on the manipulation check (i.e., “The maintenance of traditional Dutch culture and identity is threatened by increasing European integration”). The findings shown in [Figure 3](#) furthermore support our expectation that when people face existential threats to their national identity, they feel a stronger sense of collective self-continuity, which results in increased attempts to defend their in-group in the form of opposing European integration and protecting the in-group culture and identity. The manipulation also increased feelings of belonging, but these were, in turn, not related to opposition and in-group protectionism. Mediation analysis using bootstrapping procedures showed that both indirect effects were significant. The direct effect of the existential threat on national heritage protectionism disappeared when continuity (and belonging) were added to the equation, indicating full mediation. For opposition to European integration, the effect was partially mediated by continuity as the (reduced) direct effect remained significant when the two motives were added to the equation.

Interestingly, these studies indicate that in addition to collective self-continuity, existential group threats also elevate feelings of national belonging, but not self-esteem. This suggests that when the very existence of the national in-group is at stake, the continuity and belongingness concerns are more important than self-esteem. The reason may be that existential group threats may make people aware of what binds them as a national community, and, unlike self-esteem, both collective self-continuity and belonging are concerned with connections and bonds. They relate to feelings of (temporal) connectedness and relatedness that people derive from their national group membership. Collective self-esteem is more concerned with feelings of positivity and status that group membership provides, and this may be less important when the very existence of the national in-group is at stake.

As a next step, we proposed that whether group members will be concerned about existential threats to the future vitality of their in-group is likely to depend on the degree to which they perceive their in-group to possess essentialist

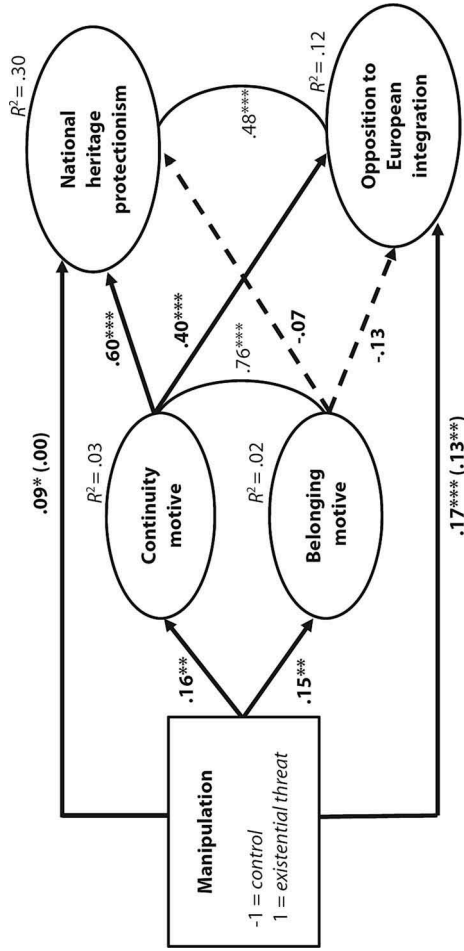


Figure 3. Influence of existential threat manipulation on national heritage protectionism and opposition to European integration, via identity motives of continuity and belonging. Results of structural equation modelling (Study 3; $N = 412$). Path coefficients are standardised estimates (marked in boldface), and the path coefficients in parentheses reflect the mediators in the equation. Correlations between latent variables are not shown. Model fit: $\chi^2(45) = 100.53, p < .001$; comparative fit index (CFI) = .98; root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06. Copyright © 2013 Elsevier. Reproduced with permission from Smeekes and Verkuyten (2013). Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rights holder.

continuity. We argued that especially those who tend to perceive their nation as culturally enduring and invariant (i.e., essentialist) should feel threatened by the increasing presence of cultural and religious newcomers. Specifically, we reasoned that immigrants present a threat to people who perceive strong essentialist continuity, because these developments may change their national identity “beyond recognition”.

We examined essentialist continuity in the context of debates about the presence and visibility of Muslim immigrants in Western Europe. The increasing number of Islamic schools, Mosques, veiled women, and other visible signs of Islam are often represented as a threat to the traditional Western way of life and as eroding “the authenticity of the nation from within” (Triandafyllidou, 1998, p. 602). Natives who perceive high essentialist continuity should be especially opposed to expressive rights for Muslims, because they are prone to feel that expressions of Islam represent a threat to the continuation of their national identity and culture.

In a survey study (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014b, Study 1) among Utrecht University students ($N = 145$) administered during regular classroom meetings, we again measured perceptions of essentialist (e.g., “Shared values, beliefs and attitudes of Dutch people have endurance over time”; four items, $\alpha = .86$) and narrativist (e.g., “Dutch history is a sequence of interconnected events”; four items, $\alpha = .75$) continuity using Sani et al.’s (2008) scale. We subsequently measured feelings of continuity threat (e.g., “Muslims in the Netherlands undermine the traditional Dutch way of life”, “The maintenance of Dutch norms and values is threatened by the presence of Muslims”; three items, $\alpha = .83$). Opposition to the rights and opportunities for Muslims to publicly express and confirm their identity was measured in the same way as mentioned previously (e.g., “Muslims should have the right to not only celebrate their Islamic holidays at home, but also in public life”, reverse-scored; six items, $\alpha = .75$). The findings from a CFA confirmed that the different constructs could be empirically distinguished. Subsequently, regression analysis showed that stronger perception of essentialist group continuity (but not narrativist continuity) was associated with stronger perceptions of continuity threat and more opposition to Muslim expressive rights (controlling for age and gender).⁴ Mediation analysis revealed that perceived continuity threat significantly mediated the relation between essentialist continuity and opposition. Thus, the more natives perceived their national culture as stable and temporally enduring, the more likely they were to perceive Muslim immigrants as causing a rupture with their national past, and subsequently the more they opposed expressive rights for this out-group.

⁴ The results were similar when age and gender were not controlled for.

IDENTITY CONTINUITY AND GROUP-BASED NOSTALGIA

According to social identity theory and motivated identity construction theory, people engage in identity management strategies when the possibility to satisfy their social identity needs is undermined or threatened (Breakwell, 1986; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Vignoles, 2011). Personal life events can induce the feeling of personal self-discontinuity, and societal developments can be perceived as endangering the existence of the in-group or change it beyond recognition. One psychological response to self-discontinuity is nostalgia, as it helps people to regain a sense of identity continuity.

Social psychological research on the personal self has shown that nostalgia can indeed buffer against the negative effects of existential and continuity threat (e.g., Routledge et al., 2011; Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015) and serves as an enabler of self-continuity (Sedikides, Wildschut, Geartner, Routledge, & Arndt, 2008). For instance, Sedikides and colleagues (2015) demonstrated that experimentally inducing feelings of nostalgia strengthened feelings of self-continuity. These and other findings (see Tsumura & Murata, 2012) demonstrate that nostalgia can increase self-continuity and therefore has restorative properties for the personal self (but see Iyer & Jetten, 2011; Verplanken, 2012).

As people derive part of their sense of self from their membership in groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), they can also experience emotions on behalf of their group membership. While social psychology has extensively studied group-based emotions such as guilt and shame (e.g., Branscombe & Doosje, 2004), group-based nostalgia has only recently become the focus of attention (see Smeekes, 2015; Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Martinovic, 2015; Wildschut, Bruder, Robertson, Tilburg, & Sedikides, 2014). In our research we examined the role of group-based nostalgia in relation to national identity and looked at its relevance for both intragroup and intergroup dynamics. Public debates on immigration and cultural diversity have become increasingly nostalgic in Western Europe. Politicians have claimed that, as a consequence of the growing cultural and religious diversification of Western European societies, native majority members no longer feel at home in their own country and increasingly long for the good old days of when it was “just us” (Duyvendak, 2011). This is particularly blamed on the growing presence and visibility of Muslim immigrants who tend to be perceived as having ways of life that are incompatible with that of natives (e.g., Gijbbers & Lubbers, 2009; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007).

Following the criteria for identifying group-level emotions as indicated by intergroup emotions theory (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000; Mackie & Smith, 1998), Wildschut and colleagues (2014) demonstrated that group-based nostalgia qualifies as a group-level emotion. Specifically, they found that group-based nostalgia can be differentiated from personal nostalgia and that it regulates positive attitudes and behaviours towards the in-group. We built on this line of

work by examining how group-based nostalgia affects orientations toward the in-group as well as toward immigrant out-groups. Theorists of nostalgia have proposed that group-based nostalgia emerges in times of social change and discontinuity, because it serves a restorative function. It is suggested that group-based nostalgia can repair a sense of collective continuity by creating a renewed sense of shared social identity to mend the lost identity (Boym, 2001; Davis, 1979). This renewed sense of social identity is based on the awareness of shared past experiences and makes in-group members more aware of the values and symbols that bind them together as a community. In this way, group-based nostalgia can have positive consequences for the in-group. However, just as longing for the in-group past makes clear what constitutes “our” unique identity, it also makes salient how “we” are different from specific out-groups. This means that while group-based nostalgia is likely to provide a sense of attachment to fellow in-group members, it also marks group boundaries and can hamper positive intergroup relations. Reactionary anti-immigrant movements are typically based on nostalgia for a “purer” society of the past (Mols & Jetten, 2014; Verkuyten, 2013).

Qualitative research among a group of employees has provided some evidence for these processes by showing that they experienced discontinuity of their employee identity after moving to a new site, which resulted in a group-based nostalgia for their lost working environment (Milligan, 2003). This group-based nostalgia subsequently resulted in new social identity categories: Old employees saw the new employees as fundamentally different and felt that they typically did not have the same values and attitudes. Furthermore, old employees felt that the new ones could not understand what these values were and why they were important, because they were not part of the old working environment. As a result, the new employees would never be like the old ones, and they were also seen as less committed and loyal to the organisation than old employees. Similarly, ethnographic work by Kasinitz and Hillyard (1995) showed that group-based nostalgia for the old ethnic neighbourhood among working-class Whites helped them to claim that they, instead of the non-White population who arrived later, were the “authentic” voice of the community. Working-class white minority members described themselves as “old-timers” and as highly distinct from “newcomers”, and they used group-based nostalgia as a resource to claim authenticity and to recapture some of the culture of the good old days of the neighbourhood.

These findings suggest that the group-based nostalgia that follows from experiences of displacement and discontinuity is likely to result in processes of social categorisation based on temporality—between the old “us” that share a past (e.g., old employees/residents) and the new “them” (e.g., new employees/residents) who are not part of this past. The longing for a shared past that is lost makes a social category based on collective experiences salient, which helps “old-timers” to regain a sense of identity continuity. This is in line with

propositions from self-categorisation theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), suggesting that when a shared social identity is salient, individuals tend to see and define themselves as members of their shared social category membership (rather than as individual persons) and tend to use in-group prototypes to include or exclude potential new members.

Applying this reasoning to the context of native majority members facing increasing cultural and religious diversification of their nation, it can first be expected that group-based nostalgia for their lost national home of the past (i.e., national nostalgia) follows from feelings of displacement and discontinuity as a result of the increasing cultural and religious diversification of the country. There is support for the positive association between feelings of discontinuity and displacement and national nostalgia in the TNS Nipo1 data. Feelings of national nostalgia (e.g., “How often do you experience nostalgia when you think about the Netherlands of the past?”), as well as feelings of displacement caused by immigrants (e.g., “Native Dutch are slowly losing the Netherlands to newcomers”), and feelings of discontinuity caused by Muslims (e.g., “Muslims’ way of life threatens the continuity of Dutch identity”) were measured. Both displacement ($r = .43$) and discontinuity ($r = .40$) were significantly and positively correlated with national nostalgia. Furthermore, both displacement and discontinuity were significant positive predictors of national nostalgia when tested simultaneously in a regression analysis. Although we cannot draw any causal conclusions on the basis of these findings, they do support the relation between feelings of displacement and discontinuity, on the one hand, and national nostalgia, on the other.

As a second step, we predicted that national nostalgia results in a social categorisation between “us”—the old/original inhabitants of the country—and “them”—those who have arrived later from elsewhere. Specifically, we proposed that, as a means to regain identity continuity, national nostalgia activates an ethnic representation of the nation (i.e., ethnic belonging), which means that the national in-group is perceived as a community of people with common native descent. This in-group prototype excludes immigrants from national in-group membership because they do not fit this ancestry requirement (Duriez, Reijerse, Luyckx, Vanbeselaere, & Meeus, 2013; Pehrson et al., 2009; Wakefield et al., 2011). Thus, we predicted that national nostalgia would be positively related to national in-group identification and to prejudice towards immigrants, because it fosters an exclusionary national in-group understanding of ethnic belonging. We tested this prediction in three survey studies among native Dutch participants (Smeekes, 2015).

This first study (Smeekes, 2015, Study 1) was conducted among a sample of Dutch adults ($N = 197$) and examined the relations between national nostalgia, in-group identification, and prejudice towards immigrant out-groups, while controlling for personal nostalgia. Participants received a questionnaire by means of an email sent by a survey company (Thesistools) and were drawn from a panel

maintained by this company. The measures for personal and national nostalgia were based on Batcho's (1995) Nostalgia Inventory. Similar to this inventory, participants indicated the extent to which they longed for specific aspects of their personal and the national past. The three items for personal nostalgia were derived from this inventory ("My family house", "My childhood toys", and "My school"; $\alpha = .73$), and for national nostalgia we adapted two items to the national context [i.e., "the way (Dutch) society was", "the way (Dutch) people used to be"] and added one new item [i.e., "The way the Dutch landscape (i.e., surroundings) looked like"]. These three items were combined into a scale ($\alpha = .88$). We subsequently assessed national identification (e.g., "I identify strongly with the Netherlands", and "I feel really Dutch"; four items, $\alpha = .93$) and prejudice towards the four largest immigrant out-groups in the Netherlands (i.e., Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese, and Antilleans) using feeling thermometers, for which we created a single scale ($\alpha = .87$).

Confirmatory factor analyses showed that the items assessing personal nostalgia, national nostalgia, national identification, and out-group prejudice comprised four different factors. The results further demonstrated that national nostalgia was related to stronger in-group identification as well as to higher prejudice towards immigrants. In addition, only national nostalgia (and not personal nostalgia) was a relevant predictor of both in-group identification and out-group prejudice when tested simultaneously in the model. These relationships remained significant when controlling for several background characteristics (i.e., age, gender, education, and political orientation). We included these covariates in the analysis (as in the other studies) in order to demonstrate the unique predictive power of national nostalgia for intragroup and intergroup processes. Nevertheless, in each study, the correlations between national nostalgia, ethnic belonging, and out-group prejudice were also significant when these covariates were not taken into account.

The second study (Smeeke, 2015, Study 2) aimed to replicate and build on the findings of the first one in various ways. First, we examined whether ethnic belonging functions as a mediator between national nostalgia, on the one hand, and in-group identification and out-group prejudice, on the other hand. Second, we used a measure of national nostalgia that was different from the one used in the previous study to test whether a more general measure of this construct would yield similar results. National nostalgia was measured by asking people to indicate to what extent they experience a more general sentimental longing for the country of the past (e.g., "How often do you experience nostalgia when you think about the Netherlands of the past?", "How often do you long for the good old days of the country?"; four items, $\alpha = .90$). Third, we aimed to provide further evidence for the empirical distinctiveness and unique predictive power of national nostalgia by considering the potentially related construct of self-uncertainty (Hogg, 2000). Nostalgia and uncertainty (e.g., "I feel anxious when things are changing", and "I get worried when a situation is uncertain"; five items,

$\alpha = .93$) are connected in the sense that both can be seen as reflecting a difficulty in dealing with change and discontinuity. Uncertainty predicts out-group attitudes and in-group identification (Hogg, 2007) and could therefore be a confounding variable in the relationship between national nostalgia and out-group attitudes.

We tested the prediction that national nostalgia is related to stronger immigrant out-group prejudice and in-group identification via ethnic belonging using the TNS Nipo1 dataset ($N = 928$). With CFA, we first showed that the different measures formed empirically distinct constructs. Second, the results replicated those of the first study and additionally provided support for the prediction that national nostalgia was positively related to in-group identification and out-group prejudice, via the endorsement of ethnic national belonging.

We sought to replicate and extend these findings in a third study. Research has shown that group-based nostalgia is related not only to in-group identification but also to tendencies to support the in-group (Wildschut et al., 2014, Study 2). For instance, Wildschut and colleagues (2014) showed in an experiment among college students that making nostalgia for a shared event in their student life salient resulted in intentions to support their fellow students in a publicity campaign for the university. Furthermore, qualitative work by Brown and Humphreys (2002) found that group-based nostalgia for an organisational identity resulted in increased emotional support for fellow in-group members during organisational change. Therefore, in the third study (Smeekes, 2015, Study 3) we examined whether, in addition to immigrant out-group prejudice, national nostalgia was related to tendencies to protect the national in-group (e.g., "It is important to protect traditional Dutch norms and values", "It is important to maintain Dutch culture and traditions"; three items, $\alpha = .88$). Following theoretical and qualitative work on group-based nostalgia (Boym, 2001; Davis, 1979) we predicted that this relationship would also be mediated by a representation of ethnic nationhood. We used the data of TNS Nipo2 ($N = 802$) and showed with structural equation modelling that national nostalgia had a positive effect on in-group protection and immigrant out-group prejudice, via the endorsement of ethnic national belonging. Yet, the main effects of national nostalgia on out-group prejudice and in-group protection remained significant when the mediator was included in the model, indicating partial mediation.

These three studies provide evidence for our prediction that feelings of group-based nostalgia have positive consequences for the in-group and more negative consequences for the evaluations of immigrant out-groups, because these feelings are related to notions of ethnic belonging. We further examined the negative consequences of national nostalgia for evaluations of immigrant out-groups in a series of studies that investigated the causal effect of national nostalgia and that considered autochthony beliefs as a related but different exclusionary in-group representation. More specifically, we tested whether feelings of national nostalgia have negative consequences for the evaluation of immigrant out-groups because

they encourage the belief in entitlements for the first inhabitants of a territory (autochthony).

GROUP-BASED NOSTALGIA AND AUTOCHTHONY

Expressions of group-based nostalgia have been linked to beliefs about collective psychological ownership and the related entitlements. For instance, ethnographic research by Kasinitz and Hillyard (1995) has described how nostalgia for communal solidarity among working-class White Americans helped them to claim that they, instead of the growing non-White population, represented the authentic voice of the community and were therefore entitled to assert ownership of the neighbourhood. In anthropology the term autochthony is used for the historical belief that a place belongs to those who were there first and therefore are entitled to it (Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2005; Geschiere, 2009). This relates to ethnic belonging in which the principle of territory is added to that of lineage, which is central in ethnicity (Weber, 1968). Whereas ethnicity concerns belonging in terms of common origin and blood ties, autochthony and the related sense of ownership defines belonging as being historically rooted in place (Geschiere, 2009). Thus, autochthony and ethnic nationhood share an emphasis on common ancestry but differ in the fact that the latter implies territorial claims.

For many people, nationhood is about homeland and being able to decide about homeland affairs. The term autochthony literally means being “born from the soil” and involves the claim of primo-occupancy with the related sense of ownership and entitlements, including the right to protection against newcomers. It has an “implicit call for excluding strangers” (‘allochthons’), whoever they may be” (Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2005, p. 386). In political theory the term “historical right” refers to the right to a piece of land because of first occupancy (Gans, 2001; Murphy, 1990), and autochthony is a strong justification for territorial and nationalist sovereignty claims and a core issue in violent conflicts and war (Toft, 2014). Autochthony claims are also used to exclude newcomers and to justify prejudice towards immigrant-origin groups in Western Europe. The past 20 years have witnessed an upsurge of autochthony in countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and Denmark (Ceuppens, 2011; Geschiere, 2009). Autochthony has become a key notion in discussions about immigration and minority rights among the far right and also for middle-of-the-road parties. In these countries, arguments about primo-occupancy are increasingly evoked to exclude immigrants from full participation in the receiving society. The notion of autochthony is particularly salient in the Netherlands where it is commonly used after it was introduced as a policy term in the 1980s to identify the native population.

While autochthony has received much attention in anthropology (e.g., Ceuppens, 2011; Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2005; Geschiere, 2009), the concept has only recently been introduced in the social psychological literature (see

Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2013). This recent work has shown that autochthony can be empirically distinguished from other constructs, such as ethnic belonging, social dominance orientation, and conformity, and that it has unique predictive power in explaining intergroup attitudes. Specifically, it was found that autochthony was independently and positively related to prejudice toward immigrant out-groups. However, there are no studies that have linked the concept of autochthony to feelings of national nostalgia. We expected that, for Dutch majority members, feeling nostalgic about their lost national home would make them want to restore group boundaries and entitlements based on their status as primo-occupants of the country, as a means to regain identity continuity. This stronger endorsement of autochthony beliefs was subsequently predicted to be related to higher prejudice towards immigrant out-groups. We tested this proposition in two studies.

In a survey study (Smeekes et al. 2015, Study 2), we examined the associations between national nostalgia (e.g., “How often do you experience nostalgia when you think about the Netherlands of the past?”, “How often do you long for the good old days of the country?”; four items, $\alpha = .90$), autochthony (e.g., “The original inhabitants of a country are more entitled than newcomers”, “Every country belongs to its original inhabitants”; four items from Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2013; $\alpha = .93$) and opposition to Muslim immigrant rights (e.g., “Muslims should have the right to not only celebrate their Islamic holidays at home, but also in public life”, “In the Netherlands wearing a headscarf should not be forbidden”, both items reverse-scored; six items, $\alpha = .90$). This study ($N = 162$) was embedded within the TNS Nipo1 data collection, and we found that national nostalgia was related to more opposition to Muslim expressive rights, via stronger endorsement of autochthony beliefs. Importantly, this result was obtained while controlling for potential confounding variables in the relation between national nostalgia, autochthony, and opposition (i.e., education, political orientation, and national identification) and therefore strengthened support for the associations and our theoretical prediction that national nostalgia has unique predictive power in intergroup relations. Particularly, national identification was an important covariate in this study (and in the next studies), as we wanted to rule out the possibility that the effects of national nostalgia on autochthony and opposition are driven by a general positive affect toward the nation. However, the results were similar when these covariates were not taken into account.

As these findings were based on cross-sectional data, no causal conclusions could be drawn. Therefore, in a further study we used an experimental design in which national nostalgia was manipulated (Smeekes et al., 2015, Study 3). Participants were 59 native Dutch students from Utrecht University who came to the lab to participate in a study on current Dutch societal problems and received 7 euros for their participation. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the national nostalgia condition, participants first

watched a short movie (of about 3 minutes) about the Netherlands during the 1990s, which is the period in which the students grew up. The movie showed typical Dutch things from this time period, such as TV shows, the national coin (the guilder, which was replaced by the Euro in 2002), and images of the last Eleven Cities tour—a traditional and famous (almost 200 kilometres long) Dutch natural ice skating race that has not been held since 1997 (due to warmer winters). This movie was included in order to strengthen feelings of national nostalgia among the student sample that is relatively young and for whom nostalgic feelings might not be very salient in daily life. Moreover, the movie provided examples of national objects and events that one can feel nostalgic about, to facilitate the reading and writing task that followed. This task was based on previous manipulations of personal nostalgia (see Iyer & Jetten, 2011).

Following research on personal nostalgia (e.g., Iyer & Jetten, 2011), we designed a control condition that allowed us to differentiate the effect of national nostalgia from that of a more general reflection on the national past, as well as from the mere salience of national identity. Specifically, in this control condition participants also watched a movie of similar duration, but this one showed a short overview of things that had happened in the Netherlands and made the news in 2012. Similar to the national nostalgia condition, the participants then proceeded to a reading and writing task in which they were asked to write in as detailed a manner as possible about an event that made the news in 2012. We subsequently administered two manipulation check items that were combined into a scale (i.e., “I feel nostalgic when I think about the Netherlands of the past”, and “I long for the Netherlands of the past”) and measured autochthony beliefs and opposition to Muslim rights with the same items as those in the previous study.

We found that the national nostalgia manipulation had a significant effect on the manipulation checks; participants displayed stronger feelings of national nostalgia in the national nostalgia condition. Furthermore, the findings shown in [Figure 4](#) replicated those of the first study and provide support for the predicted causal relationships. The salience of national nostalgia increased beliefs in autochthony, which subsequently resulted in stronger opposition to Muslim expressive rights (controlling for political orientation and national identification).⁵ Although there was no direct effect of the national nostalgia manipulation on opposition, the indirect effect was found to be significant, suggesting that national nostalgia indirectly fosters negative out-group attitudes via an exclusionary sense of national identity based on primo-occupancy.

Taken together, these studies provide support for our prediction that feelings of national nostalgia among the native majority have negative consequences for immigrant out-groups, because they trigger a social categorisation between old inhabitants of the country that are part of the shared national past and new

⁵ The results were similar when national identification and political orientation were not controlled for.

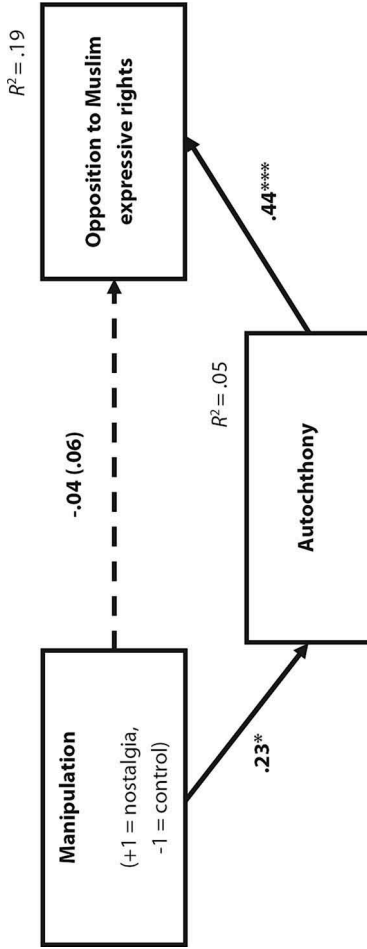


Figure 4. Influence of national nostalgia manipulation on opposition to Muslim expressive rights, via autochthony (including national identification and political orientation as covariates). Results of path modelling (Study 3; $N = 59$). Path coefficients are standardised estimates (marked in boldface). Nonsignificant paths are shown as broken arrows. $*p < .05$. $***p < .001$. Copyright © 2014 Wiley. Reproduced with permission from Smeekes et al. (2015). Permission to reuse must be obtained from the rightholder.

inhabitants who arrived later and are not part of this past. We found that national nostalgia predicts both autochthony and ethnic belonging. Whereas the notion of ancestry defines the boundary between natives and immigrants in terms of ethnic belonging, autochthony reaffirms and restores this boundary on the basis of primo-occupancy. Similar to ethnic belonging, this exclusionary in-group representation of “being here first” subsequently had negative consequences for the evaluation of immigrant out-groups.

DISCUSSION

Social psychologists have shown an increasing interest in perceptions of continuity at the group level (e.g., Sani, 2008). The combination of the social identity perspective and motivated identity construction theory makes clear that people can derive a sense of self-continuity from their group memberships, which provides a basis for group identification and plays a role in intergroup relations. We have considered the implications of identity continuity for group dynamics by examining both perceived group continuity and collective self-continuity, and also their interplay, and by considering the role of group-based nostalgia. We conducted our research among Dutch natives and in the context of national identity because nations are important in the lives of individuals and are understood as communities that live together through time (Anderson, 1983).

We first highlighted the importance of identity continuity for national identity by demonstrating that collective self-continuity is a distinct identity motive that independently predicts national identification. People are likely to identify with groups that provide them with a sense of self-continuity. We subsequently examined how national groups can afford members a sense of self-continuity and showed that collective self-continuity can be satisfied by groups that are seen to possess essentialist (rather than narrativist) continuity. These results demonstrate the importance of a sense of collective self-continuity as an explanation for why natives tend to identify with national in-groups that are seen as having stable and fixed cultural characteristics, rather than with groups that are perceived as more mutable and fluid.

Subsequently we considered the role of identity continuity in the context of threats to the future existence of the national in-group. First, we reasoned that if self-continuity is an identity motive, then a sense of collective self-continuity should become more important and relevant when the continued existence of the national in-group is undermined. We therefore investigated whether existential threats to national identity instigated feelings of collective self-continuity. Our experimental findings confirmed this expectation: The elevated sense of self-continuity that results from existential group threat increases in-group defence in the form of opposition to out-groups perceived as threatening (e.g., Muslim immigrants) and opposition to threatening social developments (e.g., European integration), and in the form of national heritage protectionism.

Second, we demonstrated that whether group members will be concerned about continuity threat is dependent on the degree to which they understand their national in-group as having an essentialist enduring quality. The reason for this prediction was that natives who tend to see their nation as culturally invariant and stable are more likely to feel threatened by cultural change, as this may subvert the very essence of their national in-group (Condor, 1997). These stronger feelings of continuity threat were subsequently expected to translate into more negative attitudes towards Muslim immigrants. We found empirical support for this reasoning.

A further step in our research on identity continuity was to examine the role of group-based nostalgia, which can function to protect identity against self-continuity threats (Sedikides et al., 2015; Tsumura & Murata, 2012). We demonstrated that individuals can have nostalgic feelings for their national in-group and that these are linked to experiences of discontinuity and displacement. We also showed that national nostalgia can have negative consequences for the evaluation of immigrant out-groups because it strengthens the endorsement of ethnic criteria for national belonging and of autochthony beliefs. This finding is in line with previous qualitative work (Milligan, 2003) suggesting that group-based nostalgia is likely to result in exclusionary social categories based on a shared past, in order to repair a sense of identity continuity.

Taken together, our results highlight the importance of identity continuity for national self-understandings and for the analysis of intergroup dynamics. Identity continuity provides a unique basis for national identity and drives in-group defensive reactions in the context of existential threats to group identity. These findings complement research on identity motives suggesting that continuity is an important motivation for why people identify with groups (i.e., Vignoles, 2011; Vignoles et al., 2006) and improve our understanding of the causes and consequences of identity continuity at the collective level. Our research also complements work within the terror management perspective (Solomon et al., 1991) by demonstrating the relevance of existential threats at the group level, rather than the individual level. Moreover, while terror management theorists have proposed that people engage in in-group defensive reactions because this allows them to obtain a sense of symbolic immortality (i.e., self-continuity), research within this framework has not empirically demonstrated that the sense of self-continuity that people derive from their group membership can provide these transcending properties.

The ability to reflect on the past and to project oneself and the social groups to which one belongs in the future helps people to make sense of the world and the social contexts in which they live. Group members draw on their collective past to understand “who we are”, and this subsequently informs their attitudes towards social developments in the present. This is particularly important for past-oriented social identities, such as ethnic and national group memberships, which are firmly rooted in history. Social psychologists predominantly focus on

the synchronic dimension of social life and are much less concerned with the diachronic dimension. By examining the role of identity continuity in relation to group dynamics, our research sheds light on the interplay between temporal aspects of the collective self and their social psychological consequences. We believe our findings to be robust and internally as well as externally valid, as we have examined and demonstrated the role of identity continuity while controlling for various other constructs, by conducting research among a variety of samples (including national ones), and by using both survey and experimental designs.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite the progress made in our research, we wish to acknowledge and discuss several limitations that provide suggestions for future work. The first is that we focused on ethnicity and national identity, and therefore it is unclear whether similar findings would be observed for other social identities. Ethnicity and national identity are particularly suitable for studying perceptions and feelings of group continuity as they are rooted in collective history, and this temporality aspect may be less relevant for other social identities. However, many group memberships are, at least occasionally, experienced as enduring identities to which one has a longer term commitment, and previous work has shown that there is a wide spectrum of social identities from which people derive a sense of self-continuity (Vignoles et al., 2006). For example, it has been shown that supporters of various British football teams often make references to the sense of self-continuity that they gain from their allegiance to a particular club (Condor, 1996). Yet the ways in which groups can provide a sense of self-continuity are likely to differ between types of groups and between cultures. For example, research has shown that European Canadians are more likely to use essentialist approaches when asked to reflect on their personal continuity, whereas indigenous Canadians are more likely to use narrative approaches (Chandler & Proulx, 2008). Further research is needed to examine a broader range of ways and contexts in which groups provide feelings of self-continuity. For instance, it would be interesting to examine feelings of self-continuity (threat) and nostalgia among immigrants and how these feelings affect their in-group and out-group attitudes and behaviours.

A second, and related, issue is that our research was conducted solely in the Netherlands. It is therefore unclear whether similar findings would be observed in other national contexts. However, the relevance of identity continuity for group dynamics has been demonstrated in various other European countries, such as Italy and Spain (Sani et al., 2008, 2009), England (Jetten & Wohl, 2012; Vignoles et al., 2006), and Scotland (Jetten & Hutchison, 2011). Moreover, recent work conducted in England and Ireland has highlighted the importance of group-based nostalgia for intragroup dynamics (Wildschut et al., 2014). In addition, there have been similar discourses in various European

countries on protecting national identity continuity against sociocultural changes, such as immigration and potential mergers (see e.g., Jetten & Hutchison, 2011; Jetten & Wohl, 2012; Reicher, 2008; Verkuyten, 2013). Thus, it is likely that similar processes operate in contexts outside the Netherlands but this does not mean that the particular national context is not important.

For example, while the Netherlands, like most countries, allows people to acquire national citizenship, it has been suggested that there is a strong ethnically rooted imagination of nationhood in public discourses (e.g., Duyvendak, 2011). This is in line with our finding that native Dutch people more strongly endorse an ethnic than a civic understanding of national identity, and that only the former is related to national identification. There are countries (France, United States) in which there is a stronger emphasis on a civic understanding of nationhood, and this could yield different results. In addition, our findings on identity continuity may not generalise to countries with a strong negative history, such as Germany. In these countries people may be more inclined to emphasise identity discontinuity as a means of distancing themselves from this negative past (Bilewicz, 2007; Sahdra & Ross, 2007).

Third, continuity should not be equated with stability, and a sense of self-continuity does not imply the absence of change. Social identities are not fixed but subject to challenges and changes. Although our findings indicated that essentialist continuity more strongly satisfies the need for collective self-continuity, continuity might also be derived from a narrativist understanding in which the story of the group is constructed as a chain of linked circumstances that connect the past with the present. This means that people can derive a sense of social identity continuity by constructing a continuing story of their in-group that includes changes, transitions, and turning-points. Specifically, although our findings indicated that the endorsement of narrativist continuity did not predict self-continuity when tested simultaneously with essentialist continuity, the bivariate correlation between these constructs was significant (Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2014a, Study 2). It is possible that a narrativist understanding of national identity is more effective in fostering collective self-continuity and group identification in countries with a more civic representation of national identity. This should be examined in future studies.

A fourth point is that our research focused on the relationship between collective self-continuity and the cognitive, rather than affective, dimension of group identification. It has been argued that affective aspects of identification are more intimately linked to identity motives (Riketta, 2008). However, Vignoles and colleagues (2006) have shown that the cognitive dimension of identification was more strongly influenced by the motives for continuity, distinctiveness, and meaning, whereas the affective dimension was more strongly related to self-esteem, efficacy, and belonging. Yet continuity was a significant predictor of both the cognitive and the affective dimension. Prospective work could further explore the relevance of collective self-continuity for both affective and cognitive dimensions of group identification.

Another issue to address in future studies is that we measured people's identity motives by self-reported feelings of, for example, continuity and belonging. However, people are not necessarily aware of their identity motives, and it has been suggested that how strongly people implicitly strive to fulfil a particular need may not be the same as how strongly they say they want to fulfil it (Vignoles, 2011). It could be the case that identity motives become more explicit and salient when they are threatened or frustrated, and this activation is likely to result in responses that satisfy these motives. This would mean that the presence of identity motives can be inferred from their predictable effects on in-group defence mechanisms in the context of identity threat. For example, some of our findings show that threats to the continuity of the in-group increase a sense of collective self-continuity that subsequently drives national heritage protectionism and immigrant out-group rejection. Thus, our measure of collective self-continuity has predictive utility. However, strategies for coping with identity threats may be relatively automatic, and future studies should examine self-continuity and other social identity motives using implicit measures.

Other interesting avenues for future research relate to group-based nostalgia. One issue is that we did not explicitly examine nostalgia in relation to collective self-continuity. Future studies could systematically investigate this relation, similar to research on personal nostalgia (Sedikides et al., 2015). Another issue concerns the content of group-based nostalgia. So far, research has only considered nostalgia as a predictor of intragroup and intergroup dynamics, but theoretical and qualitative work has suggested that group-based nostalgia can take different forms and relate to different historical events. Whether nostalgia has positive or negative consequences for group dynamics may depend on how it is defined and understood. That is, people can feel nostalgic for different periods or aspects of their shared past. For instance, native Dutch majority members may express a longing for the time when the country was more tolerant and open towards cultural diversity, which is likely to have positive consequences for their evaluation of immigrants. Furthermore, national nostalgia might also take a more reflective form (Boym, 2001). People who experience reflective nostalgia consider the value of the (remembered) past for present purposes. That is, although they recognise that good things have been lost, they also see that much has been gained, and this experience might have different consequences for attitudes towards out-groups. For instance, there may be neighbourhoods or cities in which native majority members acknowledge losses and profound changes as a consequence of the increasing presence of newcomers, but at the same time feel that this cultural diversification also has brought good things, such as a richer food culture and a wider variety of local shops. Prospective work could examine different types of national nostalgia and their consequences for intergroup relations.

Finally, group members understand their social identity in terms of the collective history and culture, and this affects how they evaluate future developments, such as the presence of cultural and religious others. Importantly, there

can be different, often contested, representations of what constitutes “our shared past or cultural heritage”, and this is important for whether group members evaluate social developments as forming a rupture or continuation of their identity (Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Poppe, 2011, 2012). As such, different representations of essentialist continuity, can be strategically used by politicians to mobilise the electorate in favour of, or against, the presence of immigrant out-groups (Reicher, 2008; Sibley et al., 2008). An example is right-wing politicians using nostalgic language to argue that immigrants threaten traditional values and norms (Mols & Jetten, 2014; Verkuyten, 2013). Future studies could therefore examine these more instrumental uses of national history and the related sense of self-continuity and nostalgic sentiments in justifying the exclusion of immigrants or the rejection of the European project.

CONCLUSION

Social psychologists have mainly focused on the synchronic aspects of social life and have only more recently started to systematically look at temporal dimensions. We are living in a time of rapid changes that go together with an increasing emphasis on historical roots and collective heritage in public discourses throughout Europe. It is therefore timely and relevant to study the ways in which feelings of collective identity continuity have an impact on group processes and intergroup relations. We have made the case that identity continuity plays an important and unique role in how people feel about their national in-group and about social developments and immigrant out-groups. While the importance of identity continuity for group dynamics is becoming more established, much more work needs to be done to unravel the relevant conditions that guide these relationships. For example, it is likely that perceptions of identity continuity have negative consequences for intergroup attitudes when people have an exclusionary (e.g., ethnic) understanding of their group identity, but it is also possible that identity continuity has more positive consequences for intergroup dynamics when group identity (e.g., civic) is more inclusive and open. Furthermore, we know much about nostalgia at the individual level but relatively little about how nostalgia for the group affects social psychological processes and outcomes. If we want to understand the potential drawbacks and benefits of this group-based sentiment we need to know much more about its contents, triggers, and functions. By discovering more about group-based nostalgia and its link with identity continuity, we might gain a better understanding of why there seems to be a tendency to hang on to the past in times of sociocultural change and disruption. In sum, we hope that other researchers will continue to make a contribution to a social psychological understanding of the “presence of the past”.

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