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## ON THE ISSUE OF DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF "NATIONAL IDENTITY": THE HISTORY OF FORMATION

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### Abstract

This article aims to analyze the process of national identity formation, which is considered a pivotal concept in contemporary social and humanitarian sciences. The authors explore various dimensions of national identity, ranging from its historical roots to its present-day developmental trends. The focal point of this study revolves around elucidating the determining factors behind the formation and evolution of national identity, as well as its distinctive nature. Consequently, the article not only appeals to researchers but also to a wide readership interested in sociology, history, and cultural studies.

**Methods:** In this article, we will delve into three distinct approaches to comprehending identity – philosophical, psychological, and sociological. Each of these perspectives brings a different lens to the study of identity, shedding light on its complexities and nuances. Through the use of methods such as systematic review, historical analysis, and literature analysis, the authors have critically examined the views of various scholars on the concept of national identity. By exploring these different approaches, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of identity and how it shapes our sense of self and belonging.

**Keywords:** *identity, national identity, social identity, psychology*

### Introduction

One's identity is what makes them stand out from society. This term is frequently used by modern individuals and appears to have a clear meaning. However, the concept of identity is not as straightforward as it may seem. In today's society, it is challenging to find a concept that is as widely utilized and actively discussed as "identity". It is an integral part of nearly all social and humanitarian sciences. Additionally, in the current context of complex and contradictory globalization

processes, identity has become an increasingly relevant and critical issue. Identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses the distinct characteristics and individuality of each person. It includes various aspects such as nationality, religion, language, culture, gender, age, social status, and others. Moreover, identity plays a crucial role in shaping one's personality and determining their position in society.

In contemporary socio-humanitarian studies, the notion of "identity" is subject to

numerous interpretations and diverse meanings. This poses challenges in defining its essence and encompassing its broad range of semantic content. Additionally, questions and difficulties arise regarding the epistemological and methodological status of identity.

### Results Analysis

Despite being formally coined in the field of science in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the origins of the concept of “identity” can be traced back to ancient philosophy. Throughout the years, the understanding of identity has been shaped by philosophical ideas that relate to its metaphysical significance, particularly in relation to distinguishing oneself from others. It was the infusion of mathematical knowledge that propelled the term into widespread recognition within a metaphysical context. Initially, the term “identity” encompassed the idea of “self-identity,” which solely held a philosophical connotation when exploring the complexities of identity and differentiation.

Ancient philosophers played a significant role in exploring the concept of personal identity. Socrates emphasized the importance of self-knowledge as the foundation of wisdom. He employed the method of irony and dialogue to encourage individuals to question their beliefs and pursue truth. Building upon Socrates’ teachings, his student Plato developed a theory of ideas, postulating the existence of a realm of eternal and unchanging ideas, one aspect of which pertains to identity. On the other hand, Aristotle (1976) delved into the problem of intensional identity, asserting that “the soul is in a certain sense everything”. According to him, the interrelation between the soul and the object of knowledge determines our identity.

Gottlob Frege (2009), a renowned German logician and philosopher, explored the concept of identity, referring to it as “identitas.” In his analysis, he emphasized that identity exists as a relationship between objects or, more specifically, between each object and itself. By establishing the notion of objects being identical, Frege illuminated their interchangeability in cognitive processes, as well as the potential for attributing them to corresponding concepts.

The well-known French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1995) explored the issue of identity

from a hermeneutic perspective, highlighting the dual nature of this concept. According to Ricoeur, identity entails both sameness with others (“identity”) and self-identity over time (“self”). To capture the interplay between identity and self, Ricoeur introduced the concept of “narrative” identity, which he defined as “an identity that can be constructed through the act of storytelling”. This specific type of identity allows individuals to weave their past, present, and future experiences together into a cohesive whole. It is not characterized by permanence or absolute self-identity, but rather by a dynamic process of continuous reinterpretation and retelling.

In addition to philosophers, psychologists have also extensively explored the concept of identity. Presently, within sociological, ethnological, and political science discourses, identity is understood as a subject category utilized to depict individuals and groups as relatively stable and cohesive wholes. In psychology, dating back to the establishment of psychoanalysis by Z. Freud, identity has been associated with concepts like “I”, “ego”, and “self”. These concepts encompass the distinctive attributes of an individual’s psychological development and mental state across different life stages. In this context, identity serves as a framework for studying and analyzing various aspects and connections between individuals and social groups.

The concept of “identity” was originally coined by the American psychologist E. Erikson and later gained popularity in various other academic disciplines. Erikson’s theories were heavily influenced by the pioneering works of Z. Freud, making him a devoted follower and relying extensively on the ideas of the father of psychoanalysis. Erikson’s theory explores the notions of ego-identity and group identity, where ego-identity pertains to one’s individualistic definition of self, synonymous with personal identity, and group identity enables an individual to categorize themselves as a member of a specific group.

In his book “Identities: Youth and Crisis,” E. Erikson (1996) analyzes racial segregation in the United States and concludes that many countries with a colonial past are striving for a “more inclusive identity”. He observes that there is a current struggle in many nations for a more encompassing identity, which was

historically the driving force behind revolutions, reformation, as well as the establishment of churches and empires. This quest for a broader identity has now evolved into a factor in global rivalries. Revolutionary ideologies offer the youth of these nations the promise of embracing a new worker-peasant consciousness to transcend their tribal, feudal, or colonial histories. Emerging nations are asserting claims over territories and markets, while the concept of world space is expanding to incorporate space as the universal technological identity medium.

However, Erikson also posits that even within a more inclusive identity, individuals tend to perceive others through specific categories such as adult and child, man and woman, employer and employee, leader and follower, majority or minority. Human relationships inherently reflect role distinctions and inherent ambiguities. Therefore, Erikson proposes a reformulation of the golden rule: individuals should conduct themselves in a manner that fosters both their own identity and that of others.

M. Serif, a Turkish-American psychologist, played a pioneering role in studying group and intergroup behavior. Initially, he conducted research focusing on unemployed individuals. Eventually, his investigations delved into the dynamics of group behavior and the impact of intergroup relations on individual lives and activities. From 1949 to 1966, he helmed the Institute of Group Relations at the University of Oklahoma. His studies encompassed various factors, ranging from interactions among schoolchildren to interethnic conflicts. The concept of identity served as a crucial tool in defining group affiliation. According to his theory, intergroup behavior emerges as a psychological phenomenon when individuals from different groups interact, considering their respective group identities, be it through individual or collective factors.

It should be noted that in Sherif's works, social identity is portrayed as the complete opposite of personal identity, holding a subordinate position in relation to it. Notably, through group manipulations, friendships were dismantled and replaced with intra-group relationships. Sherif (1968) strongly believes that by observing a person's inter-

action with members of a specific group, one can gain a deeper understanding of their personal identity. He argues that by examining the significance of an individual's reference groups, their values, and their position within those groups, we can ultimately gain insight into the extent to which their ego is involved in different relationships.

The 1960s witnessed a crucial shift in the history of the development of the concept of identity. Once an abstract philosophical notion, identity became a pivotal concept within the humanities. It expanded as a new notion frequently utilized by researchers delving into multiculturalism, philosophers exploring the individual's place in the contemporary world, and scholars examining nation-building processes amidst the collapse of colonial systems, as well as cultural transformations in the era of globalization. Various approaches emerged in studying this phenomenon, including structuralism, poststructuralism, postmodernism, and constructivism. Over the years, renowned scholars such as Benedict Anderson, Jean Baudrillard, Claude Levi-Strauss, Irving Neumann, and others dedicated their research to comprehending the intricate nature of identity.

Since the early 1990s, there has been a significant transformation in the approaches to studying identity. A pivotal figure in this evolution is the renowned German psychologist Heiner Keupp (2002), who introduced his groundbreaking concept of "patchwork identity" or patchwork, heterogeneous identity. This concept has completely revolutionized the conventional understanding of identity by portraying individuals not as closed and static beings, but rather as adaptable chameleons that can change and conform to the demands of their social environment.

Adhering to the principles of patchwork identity, individuals strive to attain strategically advantageous positions that align with the expectations and success criteria of those around them. This new perspective proposed by Keupp signifies that identity is no longer solely a concern for the younger generation; rather, it becomes an ongoing, biographically open process that spans all stages of life. Such a notion reshapes our perception of identity, emphasizing its continuous development and fluid nature.

The allure of embracing a patchwork identity lies in the transformative and creative energy it bestows upon individuals. It engenders a sense of ingenuity and versatility, urging people to explore different facets of their identity while maneuvering through life's endeavors. This ability to adapt and evolve within an ever-changing world fuels an individual's personal growth and perpetuates a sense of intellectual stimulation.

The concept of identity holds significant importance in the fields of philosophy and psychology. Scholars worldwide agree that identity can be understood in two dimensions — our connection with ourselves and our perception of the world around us.

Initially, psychoanalysis was the primary perspective through which identity was explored. The notion of personality and self-identity was developed within this framework. However, as time passed, identity expanded beyond the realm of psychoanalytic theories. Researchers began examining this phenomenon from interactionist and cognitive perspectives, focusing on the study of personality development mechanisms within society.

The formation of one's identity relies heavily on the influence of society and its members. Scholars contend that the development of an individual's identity is intricately connected to their interactions with the surrounding environment and other individuals. This notion further emphasizes the inextricable link between social identity and personal identity, which can be shaped by external factors such as religious and cultural values, social standing, group associations, and more. Therefore, let us shift the focus of our discourse towards the subject of social identity.

N. Ivanova (2004) defines social identity as "a dynamic, lifetime formed in the course of interaction and active construction of social reality of the system of social constructs of the subject, which affects his value and semantic sphere and behavior". In the author's understanding, identity is an individual category associated with a person's social role, position or status. It is divided into three main levels of self-categorization: basic, medium and broad. The basic level is expressed in self-perceptions and personal identity.

Group self-categorization, or the middle level, is expressed through representations of group membership and social identity. Finally, the broad level of identity is represented by representations of the self as a human being and human identity.

According to its content, social identity can be divided into: ethnic, national, state, cultural, gender, religious, civil, etc. This interconnectedness between the self and others is emphasized by scholars like M. Bakhtin (1979) and S. Žižek (1999), illustrating how humans navigate their identities through comparison and interaction with others. This inherent inclination towards comparison reflects our nature and highlights the importance of understanding oneself in relation to the broader social context.

In the process of self-identification, individuals often engage in a dichotomy of "self-other" as described by Russian sociologist L. Gudkov (2004). This negative identity formation involves defining oneself through opposition to another, manifesting as a rejection of qualities or values associated with the "other." Such a phenomenon encapsulates a self-definition through the negation of characteristics perceived as alien or threatening, underscoring the complexity of identity construction through contrast and distinction.

Sociologists view identification as a socially influenced process that is subject to ongoing evolution. French researcher C. Dubar (1994) introduces the concept of "identification form," suggesting that the development and operation of these forms are shaped by two concurrent mechanisms: individual-biographical mechanisms enabling individuals to construct self-identities and socio-structural mechanisms that legitimize identities attributed by others. This dual mechanism approach underscores the intricate interplay between individual agency and external social forces in shaping identity.

In the contemporary context marked by cultural blending and the emergence of multicultural societies, a thorough examination of national identity stands paramount. It is essential to acknowledge that national identity, like other forms of social identity, is inherently interconnected with various facets of an individual's self-concept. As E. Hobsbawm (1998) aptly noted, it would be erroneous



to presume that national identity, if present, overrides or holds greater significance than other forms of self-identification. In reality, national identity coexists and intertwines with multiple layers of personal identification, illustrating the complex and multifaceted nature of individual identities.

Hobsbawm, a well-known researcher of nationalism, refuses to recognize language and ethnicity as the main characteristics of the nation. According to his point of view, protonationalism, that is, national consciousness, is expressed primarily through religious affiliation, not language. Before the introduction of universal primary education, every nation spoke a multitude of dialects that did not form the basis of its culture and national identity. A single standard language, according to the author, is created artificially on the basis of one of the dialects, the choice of which influences political goals or is determined by prestige. Self-identification through language is characteristic only of the educated class and may be closely related to nationality, spreading from the educated group with the greatest social weight, mainly through printed literature, which gives stability and sustainability. The language of the ruling class or the cultural elite also becomes mass-produced through the system of world education and administrative procedures, that is, at a later time. Therefore, the languages of peoples emerge through the state and not the other way around.

Ernest Gellner's notable work "Nations and Nationalism" (1983) has had a profound impact on the study of national identity. Gellner, considered a modernist, attributes the emergence of nationalism to the societal transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution. He highlights the fundamental contrasts between agrarian and industrial societies, particularly in their economic and cultural frameworks. Gellner's perspective underscores the critical role of socioeconomic changes in shaping the development of nationalism as societies transitioned into the modern era.

K. Hübner (2001) emphasizes the indivisibility of the nation, asserting that identification with the nation is an identification with its entirety. According to Hübner, a nation cannot be fragmented, much like one's iden-

tity cannot exist in pieces. He further delves into aspects of national identity such as collective guilt, the nation's past, and the significance of language. Hübner defines language as the essential medium through which every national spirit operates, underscoring its crucial role in shaping and maintaining the nation's identity.

In the context of national identity, the British historian A. Smith (2009) conceptualizes the nation as an "ideal type" characterized by self-naming and self-determination. According to Smith, a nation is a cohesive human community that nurtures shared memories, symbols, myths, traditions, and values while fostering a sense of attachment to a specific homeland. Additionally, members of the nation create and perpetuate a collective public culture, adhere to common customs, and standardized laws. This comprehensive perspective underscores the multi-faceted elements that contribute to the formation and maintenance of national identity according to E. Smith.

National identity encompasses a broad range of meanings and contents including the solidarity of citizens, respect for the fundamental principles and laws of the state, and loyalty to universally recognized principles. G. Kelman (2001) underscores that national identity is perpetually evolving and serves multiple purposes, such as fostering unity and community spirit, establishing a positive self-image, laying the foundation for cultural and religious development, granting rights to land and resources, and validating the group's demands and grievances. This nuanced understanding highlights the dynamic nature and essential functions of national identity according to Kelman.

The post-Soviet countries, like Kazakhstan, face the complex challenge of constructing a unified national identity from their diverse multi-ethnic and multi-confessional populations shaped by the Soviet legacy (Kadyrjanov, 2014). In Kazakhstan, the distinction between Kazakh and Kazakhstani identities underscores the ongoing struggle to define the essence of the national state. The lack of societal consensus on whether the national identity should lean towards Kazakh or Kazakhstani further complicates the journey towards forging a cohesive national identity.

This dynamic highlights the intricate process of identity formation in countries marked by ethnic diversity and cultural plurality in the aftermath of the Soviet era.

### Conclusion

To conclude, the concept of identity holds immense importance in the domains of philosophy, psychology, and social research. Present-day perspectives have underscored its intricate and constantly evolving nature, which is influenced by social, cultural, and

individual dynamics. Scholars delve deep into the process of how identities shape and transform within diverse social contexts, while also analyzing their manifestations in different groups and settings. Despite the considerable scholarly work dedicated to exploring various aspects of national identity, it remains a challenging and underexplored matter. This has prompted a pressing need for a more comprehensive and systematic understanding of identity as a fundamental concept in social philosophy.

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