

## RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# German Youth and Systemic Racism: How Conceptions of National Identity Relate to Critical Consciousness

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## ABSTRACT

This study focused on national identity conceptions and critical consciousness (CC) of systemic racism among adolescents with varying racialisation experiences, namely in terms of being perceived as 'foreigner', regardless of citizenship or self-identification (foreigner objectification). Specifically, we examined how heritage-based versus pluralistic national identity content relates to adolescents' critical interpersonal and structural anti-racist action through critical awareness of racialised inequities and critical anti-racist motivation. Our sample comprised 743 9th grade students ( $M = 15.04$  years) in Thuringia, Germany. Path analyses revealed that across adolescents, pluralistic national identity content was not associated with critical awareness, but positively associated with motivation, which in turn was positively related to interpersonal and structural action. Heritage-based national identity content was negatively associated with interpersonal action for students experiencing low foreigner objectification and displaying high national attachment. In contrast, it was positively related to structural action for adolescents experiencing high foreigner objectification, and to interpersonal action when adolescents displayed low national attachment. Thus, adolescents' national identity and CC development are intertwined. While our results suggest that pluralistic conceptions of national identity are linked to adolescents' anti-racist action through critical anti-racist motivation, their potential to contribute to a holistic CC development may be limited given the lack of an observed association with critical awareness. More research is needed to disentangle various notions of pluralistic identities and examine whether and under which conditions these may relate to adolescents' critical awareness of racialised inequities. Furthermore, our results underscore the importance of continuously reflecting on heritage-based national identity conceptions and countering their exclusive nuances.

## 1 | Introduction

Systemic racism is a pervasive issue in today's societies, reproducing and reinforcing inequality, division, and systemic harm to racially minoritised individuals. In Germany, the death of Oury Jalloh, a Black man, in police custody in 2005 and the right-wing terrorist attack in Hanau in 2020, and their insufficient police and judicial processing, suggest how deeply systemic racism

is ingrained in German society (Rietzschel 2015; Ulrich 2023). To effectively combat racism, it is crucial to understand the factors that influence how young people respond to and act against racialised inequities.

Critical consciousness (CC) theory provides a relevant framework for this purpose, explaining how individuals come to engage in critical action aimed at creating social change through

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critical reflection and critical motivation (Watts et al. 2011). We examine CC of systemic racism in a sample of adolescents with varying racialisation experiences in the context of Germany. We focus on experiences of being objectified as a foreigner, since in Europe racism is linked to ascribed foreignness, often inferred from skin colour, names or accent (Ball et al. 2022).

While CC theory acknowledges the role of social experiences and group processes, that is, processes relevant to social identity, in its development (Kiang et al. 2021), it lacks a systematic incorporation of social identity (Watts et al. 2011). Despite some work linking ethnic-racial identity and CC development (e.g., Mathews et al. 2019), little is known about how other social identities, such as national identity, relate to adolescents' CC development.

Although national identity representations varying in terms of their inclusiveness were found to differentially relate to intergroup outcomes, such as prejudice and negative attitudes toward racially minoritised individuals (e.g., Reijerse et al. 2013), less is known about how they relate to engagement in social change. Connecting research on social identity, and national identity in particular (e.g., Reijerse et al. 2013), with research on CC development (Heberle et al. 2020), we investigate how different representations of who is considered prototypical of German national identity relate to CC of systemic racism among adolescents with varying racialisation experiences in Germany. Specifically, we examine associations between heritage-based national identity representations, linking national identity to ancestry or culture vs. pluralistic national identity representations, depicting various subgroups as representative of national identity, with two forms of anti-racist action, that is, interpersonal and structural action, through critical awareness of racialised inequities (as indicator of critical reflection) and critical anti-racist motivation.

## 1.1 | Critical Consciousness Development in Adolescence

CC theory, rooted in the work of Paulo Freire, posits that individuals from marginalised groups can liberate themselves and others from oppression through conscientização (consciousness-raising)—a dynamic process that combines critical reflection of oppressive systems and their impact on individuals' realities and lifeworlds, with transformative action, challenging the status quo and fostering more equitable societies. Contemporary CC research, primarily concerned with the development and impact of CC in adolescence includes three key components (Heberle et al. 2020; Watts et al. 2011): Critical reflection is commonly conceptualised as critical awareness of societal inequities (i.e., adolescents attributing social inequalities to structural rather than individual causes), thus capturing a distinct aspect of Freire's broader conceptualisation of critical reflection (Diemer et al. 2015). Critical motivation encompasses the interest and perceived ability to change such conditions, while critical action describes actions aiming to create social change and eliminate oppression (Heberle et al. 2020; Watts et al. 2011). CC has been linked with positive social-emotional and academic outcomes for youth from marginalised groups (Heberle et al. 2020).

Adolescence may be a crucial period for CC development, characterised by the development of socio-cognitive skills that

enable a deeper analysis of social conditions, including increased reflection on personal and others' experiences and life worlds (Pinedo et al. 2024). This period is furthermore marked by a growing need for self-exploration and autonomy, enabling an active search for information, connecting with diverse individuals, and becoming involved in organisations. Together, these aspects form a solid foundation for taking critical action (Diemer et al. 2021).

CC theory, originally developed to understand resistance to oppression in more marginalised individuals, has been studied less among more privileged youth. Achieving more equitable societies also requires those benefiting from unjust systems to acknowledge injustices and develop skills for change. More privileged youth, in particular, need to focus on recognising others' oppression rather than their own (Jemal 2017). Thus, the question arises, whether the CC framework is appropriate for understanding the thoughts and actions of relatively privileged individuals or whether key assumptions need to be adapted (Diemer et al. 2016). CC development appears linked to one's societal positioning along various intersecting dimensions of privilege and marginalisation (Patterson et al. 2021). Encouraging classroom discussions of societal issues predicts sociopolitical efficacy more for Students of Colour than for White students (Godfrey and Grayman 2014). Studies also revealed mean critical reflection differences, with more privileged individuals displaying either more (Diemer et al. 2019) or less critical reflection (Schwarzenthal et al. 2022), highlighting the importance of expanding our understanding of CC-related processes among individuals with different societal positioning. Our study addresses this knowledge gap by examining CC among adolescents more or less/not marginalised in terms of racialised injustice, exploring how critical awareness of racialised inequities and critical anti-racist motivation are associated with two domain-specific forms of critical action: interpersonal and structural anti-racist action.

Prior research often defined critical action as strategic personal or collective engagement targeting the root causes of oppression (Watts and Hipolito-Delgado 2015). Yet, a recent study suggests that anti-racist action (as domain-specific approach of critical action) may also include interpersonal actions as individual, reactive responses to racism, as it happens in the moment, such as calling someone out when discrimination takes place (Aldana et al. 2019).

According to CC literature, critical reflection and critical motivation are important conditions for adolescents' critical action. Freire (1970) originally theorised reflection and action as inseparable, complementary components: Once marginalised individuals reflect critically about oppressive systems, they will inevitably take transformative action. Action will lead individuals to critically reflect on the consequences of their actions, suggesting a reciprocal and complex relationship (Watts et al. 2011). Recent CC perspectives suggest integrating a sense of agency or critical motivation, where individuals believing their efforts lead to desired outcomes are prompted to act (Watts et al. 2011). While some studies support this, showing that more marginalised youth (e.g., Black and Latinx youth in the United States) reflecting on social inequities and perceiving their capability in political processes are more likely to engage in critical

action (Bañales et al. 2020; Diemer and Rapa 2016), others find no significant link between critical reflection and action (Tyler et al. 2020).

## 1.2 | National Identity Content and Critical Consciousness

According to the social identity approach (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner et al. 1987), people define themselves in terms of their group memberships. Social identities have emotional significance, so that self-esteem is linked to the group's fate (Reicher et al. 2010). Thus, belonging to a group has consequences for individuals' experiences and behaviour and may constitute an important driver of attitudes and political behaviour, such as critical action. Social identity is indeed related to collective action (van Zomeren et al. 2018) or solidarity (Subašić et al. 2008).

Two social identity perspectives offer insights into the implications of national identity viewed as a superordinate group encompassing various nested subgroups (superordinate level, Turner and Reynolds 2012) for attitudes and political behaviour. According to the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner and Dovidio 2000), superordinate identities promote positive intergroup relations because when individuals perceive themselves as part of a shared group, they view former outgroup members as part of their own in-group, resulting in more favourable attitudes toward them. There is broad empirical support for this model in various settings and for different superordinate groups (e.g., Huo et al. 1996; Nier et al. 2001). The ingroup projection model highlights how the impact of a shared group identity varies based on members' construction and perception of the superordinate identity (Mummendey and Wenzel 1999). Accordingly, individuals project their subgroup's characteristics to the superordinate category, viewing their ingroup relatively more prototypical than other outgroups. This may lead to the perception that the outgroup deviates from the superordinate group's prototype, resulting in more negative attitudes toward the outgroup (Wenzel et al. 2007). There is empirical evidence in different intergroup contexts for this assumption (Lie and Verkuyten 2012; Reese et al. 2012). A more complex representation where different subgroups are represented as equally prototypical of the superordinate category should have positive consequences for intergroup relations (Mummendey and Wenzel 1999). Indeed, activating a complex superordinate category (i.e., European) among German participants improved attitudes toward Polish people (Waldzus et al. 2003).

Applying the ingroup projection model to national identity, a more complex national identity representation may be associated with better intergroup relations. Previous studies on national identity conceptions underscore the relevance of how boundaries are demarcated and which groups are considered prototypical (Pehrson et al. 2011). Research has traditionally explored ethnic versus civic definitions of national identity. Ethnic definitions tie belonging to ancestry, often leading to second-class citizenship for those not conforming to the prototypical image, while civic definitions link national identity to shared values and political participation, embracing all individuals

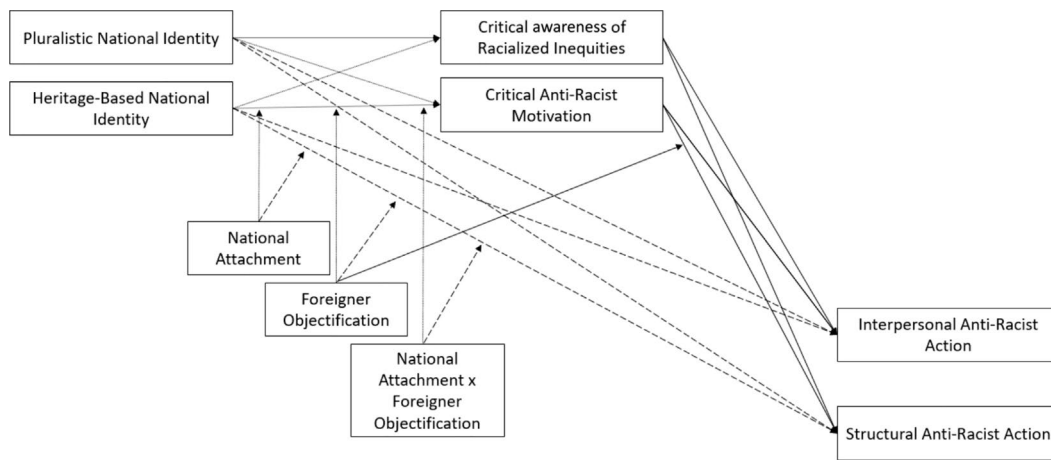
adhering to these values (Devos et al. 2020). Studies among racially majoritised individuals across different national contexts suggest that ethnic definitions of national identity relate to negative attitudes and prejudice toward racially minoritised groups, while civic definitions of national identity are associated with less prejudice and, at times, more positive intergroup attitudes and behaviour (Reijerse et al. 2013; Wakefield et al. 2011). Prior research furthermore suggests national identity content to be associated with political behaviour. For instance, exclusive national identity content (where only White Americans were included in the national ingroup) was associated with more support of hostile policies toward racially minoritised individuals, while inclusive national identity content (where different subgroups were equally included) was linked to support for welcoming policies among racially majoritised individuals in the United States (Doucerain et al. 2018). Similarly, Pehrson et al. (2011) found non-indigenous Chilean students more likely to support policies promoting indigenous representation in politics when seeing them as integral to Chilean identity and equal citizens.

When studying national identity content, the strength of national attachment may also play a role. Previous research suggests that individuals are more likely to be influenced by the norms and content associated with an identity when they strongly identify with that particular identity (Meeus et al. 2010).

There is less research on the implications of national identity representations among racially minoritised individuals. When looking at effects on CC of systemic racism, dynamics may differ considerably, since the outcome variables involve reflecting on and acting against one's own oppression rather than about the oppression of others. For racially minoritised individuals, perceiving national boundaries as impermeable represents a persistent experience of identity denial, which has been linked to decreased psychological well-being (Mukherjee and Perez 2021). Yet, perceiving group boundaries as impermeable may also increase their willingness to engage in collective action benefiting their own ingroup (Mähönen and Jasinskaja-Lahti 2015). Thus, one may speculate that heritage-based national identity content, in which national identity is tied to ancestry and culture, may be positively associated with critical action. On the other hand, when racially minoritised individuals hold a more pluralistic national identity representation, where individuals perceive themselves to equally belong to the nation, this perception may serve as the very reason to strive for justice in the face of persistent inequities (Devos et al. 2020). Thus, pluralistic national identity content may likewise be positively associated with critical action.

## 1.3 | National Identity and Racism in Germany

Our study is closely linked to matters around racism, migration and belonging in the specific context of Germany. Historically, German politics disregarded the normative aspect of migration, upholding an ethnic national identity rooted in ancestry through citizenship regulations, restricting immigrants' political engagement (Hanewinkel and Oltmer 2017). Amendments to naturalisation laws in 1999 enabled the acquisition of German citizenship, marking a shift in perceptions of national identity. Reflecting this shift, surveys on the perceived



**FIGURE 1** | Conceptual study model.

importance of various characteristics for being ‘truly’ German revealed that the significance of German ancestry decreased from 48.2% in 2003 to 38.1% in 2013, with language proficiency (96.8%) and possession of German citizenship (78.9%) emerging as more inclusive identity attributes (Canan and Foroutan 2016). In a recent qualitative study, Dittmann and Kopf-Beck (2019) found that heritage-based conceptions of national identity are particularly prominent in the German context. These conceptions often include attributes associated with an ethnic national identity, such as nativism, but extend beyond this by emphasising culture and language. In this sense, they resemble a cultural identity described by Reijerse et al. (2013), which has been linked to stronger exclusionary attitudes toward racially minoritised individuals. However, in contrast to the latter conceptualisation, Dittmann and Kopf-Beck (2019) found that heritage-based conceptions can sometimes encompass respect for various cultures, suggesting they may not be *inherently* exclusive. Additionally, their study identified other important aspects of German national identity, such as legal requirements for citizenship, ideology-based concepts related to democracy, and certain traits perceived as ‘typically German’. Finally, research suggests that people with and without personal/parental migration experience consider attributes such as ‘German ancestry’, ‘speaking German’ or ‘possession of German citizenship’ to be equally significant for German identity (Canan and Foroutan 2016).

Aligned with ethnic conceptions of national identity, racism in Germany targets those perceived as immigrants, excluding them from being considered German. This includes, in particular, individuals perceived as Muslim, Roma, Sinti, and Black people (DeZIM 2022). While the term ‘race’ is taboo in contemporary Germany, as it is not understood as a social construct but as a pseudo-scientific biological category, ‘migration background’ is recorded in official statistics and is racialised (Moffitt and Juang 2019). There is criticism concerning the use of this category as it masks diverse experiences and identities and reinforces imagined differences without unpacking relevant factors such as discrimination experiences (Vietze et al. 2022). To measure marginalisation in terms of racialisation experiences more precisely, we draw on the concept of foreigner objectification, which captures the extent to which adolescents experience being perceived as a

‘foreigner’ regardless of citizenship or self-identification and may reflect identity denial (Juang et al. 2021). We study associations between national identity content and CC of systemic racism among adolescents experiencing varying levels of foreigner objectification<sup>1</sup>.

#### 1.4 | The Present Study

Our pre-registered study (<https://osf.io/rndgb/>) examined the relation between pluralistic versus heritage-based national identity content and interpersonal and collective anti-racist action through critical awareness of racialised inequities and critical anti-racist motivation among adolescents with varying racialisation experiences (Figure 1). Our study contributes to the current literature by (1) connecting different fields of research, namely social and national identity as well as CC development, (2) including adolescents with varying racialisation experiences, (3) examining different forms of anti-racist action, and (4) studying CC in the relatively understudied context of Germany.

First, we examine whether critical awareness of racialised inequities and critical anti-racist motivation predict interpersonal and collective anti-racist motivation, expecting positive associations irrespective of foreigner objectification, that is, a main effect of critical awareness on critical interpersonal and structural action (H1). Potential differences between adolescents with varying racialisation experiences will be examined exploratory by testing whether foreigner objectification moderates any of these paths. Second, we examine the link between pluralistic vs. heritage-based national identity content and adolescents’ CC of systemic racism. For those experiencing less or no foreigner objectification, pluralistic national identity content is expected to positively (H2a) and heritage-based national identity content negatively (H2b) relate to the CC facets, with a stronger link for those reporting stronger national attachment (H2c). Third, as CC theory (Watts et al. 2011) and empirical research suggest critical reflection and motivation to be important conditions of adolescents’ critical action, we examine whether pluralistic and heritage-based national identity content is indirectly related to anti-racist action through critical awareness of racialised inequities and anti-racist



motivation, expecting an indirect link for adolescents experiencing less or no foreigner objectification (H3). Given scarce research literature on national identity content outcomes among racially minoritised individuals, associations between national identity content and CC, national attachment as a potential moderator and indirect effects through critical awareness of racialised inequities and anti-racist motivation will be examined exploratory among adolescents experiencing higher levels of foreigner objectification.

As CC development is linked to one's societal positioning (Patterson et al. 2021), we included gender and socioeconomic status (SES) as control variables. SES was measured by the number of books in the home and student's school track. The number of books in a home serves as an indicator of cultural capital, which reflects a component of SES and describes a cultural and linguistic competence comprising a 'familiarity with the dominant culture' (Bourdieu 1973, 494). It may be specifically relevant when studying adolescents, as schools, as societal institutions, may favour students based on cultural capital, reproducing societal inequities (Sieben and Lechner 2019). Specifically, books at home, as objectified cultural capital, have been described as potential learning stimulation, fostering skills and knowledge, such as academic language proficiency, which are crucial for school success (Heppt and Stanat 2020; Evans et al. 2010). Prior research has found substantial relations to students' academic achievement, as well as other SES indicators, underscoring its appropriateness for capturing students' SES (Eriksson et al. 2021; Heppt et al. 2022). Furthermore, in the German educational system, school track is closely linked to students' SES. Specifically, as SES increases, a larger proportion of students enrol in academic tracks leading to higher education, while a smaller proportion pursue vocational tracks aimed at preparing for skilled work (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2020).

## 1 | Methods

### 1.1 | Participants and Procedure

Data were collected as part of an applied research project aimed at developing a self-assessment tool on diversity-related norms and practices, and was approved by the Ministry of Education in the federal state of Thuringia, Germany. Our recruitment strategy centred on schools with a high percentage of students being subjected to various forms of racism. The data collection encompassed all 9th grade students and took place during school hours. Beforehand, parents were informed that the applied research project focused on 'diversity in schools', aiming 'to identify school practices that help students from diverse backgrounds feel comfortable and learn effectively'. The questionnaire included questions on various topics such as 'how comfortable children from different backgrounds feel at school and how the school approaches diversity'. We also obtained parental consent and the assent of the adolescents. The sample included 743 students in 53 classrooms at 23 secondary schools. Adolescents were on average  $M=15.04$  years old ( $SD=0.74$ ), 44.8% identified as female, 4.2% as non-binary, and 51% as male. Of all adolescents, 8.1% reported that they were born outside

Germany, with the most frequent country of birth being Syria ( $n=15$ ), Afghanistan ( $n=11$ ), and North Macedonia ( $n=5$ ). In addition, 6.5% of adolescents reported that either or both of their parents were born outside Germany, with Vietnam ( $n=5$ ), Russia ( $n=5$ ), Kazakhstan ( $n=6$ ) being most frequently mentioned. About half (50.9%) of the adolescents attended a vocational track school preparing for skilled work, 15.9% an academic track school preparing for higher education, and 33.2% an integrated secondary school offering both tracks.

## 1.2 | Measures

When German versions were unavailable, measures were translated into German by the research team. Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale from (1) *No, this is not true* to (5) *Yes, this is true*, unless stated otherwise. A full list of items can be found under <https://osf.io/rndgb/>.

### 1.2.1 | Heritage-Based Versus Pluralistic National Identity Content

We created nine items based on Doucerain et al. (2018) and the Social Survey Program items, which have been successfully used in Germany (Shulman 2002). Adolescents rated the extent to which they perceived different groups to be 'truly German' on a 5-point scale from (1) *Very German* to (5) *Not at all German*. One item ('People who were born in Germany') was taken out as it correlated  $<0.3$  with all other items. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) revealed two factors, with three items loading on Factor 1: Heritage-Based National Identity, linking German national identity to heritage/culture/whiteness (e.g., 'People who have German parents and grandparents') and five items loading on Factor 2: Pluralistic National Identity, depicting various subgroups as representative of German national identity (e.g., 'People from Germany's diverse population'). A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) supported this factor structure ( $\chi^2[9]=77.94$ ,  $p<0.001$ , RMSEA=0.065, CFI=0.95, TLI=0.92, SRMR=0.06). Reliability analyses indicated  $\omega=0.67$  for the subscale Heritage-Based National Identity, and  $\omega=0.83$  for the subscale Pluralistic National Identity.

### 1.2.2 | Critical awareness: Perceived Racialised Inequality

We utilised a 5-item scale adapted from Schwarzenenthal et al. (2024), using the term cultural background rather than heritage culture. The scale was originally adapted from Diemer et al. (2017) by adding items that capture inequities specifically based on the cultural background in Germany. A sample item is 'People with certain cultural backgrounds are less likely to get a good job'. Internal consistency was good,  $\omega=0.88$ .

### 1.2.3 | Critical Anti-Racist Motivation

We utilised four items adapted from Rapa et al. (2020) to measure domain-specific rather than general critical motivation, for

example, 'I see it as my responsibility to stand up against racism and discrimination so that things in society improve'. Internal consistency was good,  $\omega = 0.89$ .

#### 1.2.4 | Anti-Racist Action

Adolescents were asked how often they had done different actions in the last year on a scale from (1) *Never* to (5) *At least once a week*. For *Interpersonal Anti-Racist Action* four items (e.g., 'defended a friend who was insulted or not treated fairly because of his cultural background') adapted from Schwarzenthal et al. (2024) to measure previously occurring behaviour rather than behavioural intentions were used. Internal consistency was good,  $\omega = 0.82$ . For *Structural Anti-Racist Action*, we adapted six items from Aldana et al. (2019) to fit to the German context, replacing 'race, ethnicity, discrimination, and/or segregation' with 'racism and discrimination', for example, 'participated in a demonstration against racism and discrimination'. Two items were added to measure social media action. An EFA indicated two factors: (1) Structural Action, (2) Structural Action Using Social Media. Two items showing cross-loadings were removed. To reduce complexity, we only included items from factor 1 in further analyses. A CFA showed good model fit,  $\chi^2(2) = 5.46$ ,  $p = 0.07$ , RMSEA = 0.05, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.96, SRMR = 0.02, internal consistency was good,  $\omega = 0.87$ .

#### 1.2.5 | Foreigner Objectification

We utilised the 5-item Foreigner Objectification Scale (Armenta et al. 2013) adapted by Juang et al. (2021) for the German context (e.g., 'Someone commented on my language skills or was surprised about it'). The response scale ranged from (1) *Never* to (4) *More than 4 times*, internal consistency was acceptable,  $\omega = 0.76$ .

#### 1.2.6 | National Attachment

We utilised three items based on Leszczensky and Santiago (2015), for example, 'I feel strongly attached to Germany'. Internal consistency was good,  $\omega = 0.90$ .

#### 1.2.7 | Control Variables

Control variables were age, gender (male [1] vs. other [0]), percentage of students with personal/parental migration experience in a classroom, and SES, indicated by school track (academic track [1] vs. other [0]), and number of books in the household on a 5-point scale from (1) *None or very few books* to (5) *More than 200 books* (Bos and Kuiper 1999).

## 2 | Results

### 2.1 | Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29) and Mplus 8.8 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2017). The proportion of missing values ranged from 0.0% to 0.4%; see

Table 1. Little-Test was non-significant,  $\chi^2(39) = 37.68$ ,  $p = 0.53$ , suggesting that missing values are missing completely at random. To deal with missing values in our main analyses, full-information maximum likelihood estimation was used, which takes into account all available data (Enders 2010). ICCs ranged from 0.01 to 0.14 at the classroom level (Table 1). Given our focus on identity-related processes at the individual level, we accounted for the nested data structure in our main analyses using the TYPE = COMPLEX option in Mplus rather than opting for a multilevel model. Adolescents with personal or parental migration experience reported significantly more foreigner objectification ( $M = 2.18$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ) than adolescents without personal or parental migration experience ( $M = 1.25$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ),  $t(124.19) = -12.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , suggesting our foreigner objectification measure is a meaningful indicator of racialisation experiences in the German context. Means and standard deviations of, and correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 1. Given significant correlations between the main study variables and control variables, all control variables were included in our main analyses. Further preliminary analyses according to our pre-registration can be found in the Supporting Information Materials.

### 2.2 | Hypothesis Testing

To test our hypotheses, we ran path models in Mplus 8.8 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2017) using the MLR estimator. We first tested main effects and (partial) mediation (Model 1), including the national identity content variables and national attachment as predictors, critical awareness of racialised inequities and anti-racist motivation as mediators, and the control variables as covariates. Given the complexity of our model, we then tested two- and three-way interactions as specified below by introducing interaction terms one by one. Only significant interaction terms were retained in the final interaction effects model (Model 2). Predictors without meaningful zero points were grand mean-centred before analyses. Model fit was assessed using the  $\chi^2$  test, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardised root mean square residual (SRMR), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI). Model fit was considered good when the chi-square test was non-significant,  $RMSEA < 0.06$ ,  $SRMR < 0.08$ , and CFI and TLI  $> 0.90$  (Hu and Bentler 1999; Kline 2005).

Model 1 and Model 2 showed good model fit; see Tables 2 and 3. Deviating from our pre-registration, age and percentage of students with personal/parental migration experience in a classroom were excluded from our main analyses due to problems with model identification caused by the number of parameters to be estimated being higher than the number of clusters (classrooms). Analyses including all control variables can be found in the Supporting Information Materials. We found no differences in significance and direction of associations between the full and the reduced models for any paths relevant to the hypotheses.

First, we examined whether critical awareness and anti-racist motivation positively predict interpersonal and structural anti-racist action across adolescents (H1). As expected in H1, Model 1 reveals that critical awareness and anti-racist motivation were positively associated with interpersonal and

TABLE 1 | Descriptive statistics of the study variables and control variables.

Correlations Variable	Missing values	ICC	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<i>Individual level</i>															
1. Heritage-based national identity content	0.0	0.02	3.76 (0.71)												
2. Pluralistic national identity content	0.1	0.04	3.23 (0.71)	0.112**											
3. Critical awareness of racialized inequities	0.0	0.04	2.55 (0.89)	−0.024	0.071										
4. Critical anti-racist motivation	0.1	0.09	3.66 (1.05)	0.036	0.328**	0.105**									
5. Interpersonal anti-racist action	0.1	0.04	2.28 (0.92)	0.011	0.131**	0.159**	0.441**								
6. Structural anti-racist action	0.3	0.07	1.27 (0.60)	0.098**	0.081*	0.147**	0.253**	0.358**							
7. National attachment	0.0	0.05	3.84 (0.94)	0.178**	−0.020	−.163**	−0.170**	−0.217**	−0.084*						
8. Foreigner objectification	0.0	0.14	1.39 (0.58)	0.083**	−0.138**	0.045	0.059	0.245**	0.231**	−0.123**					
9. Number of books in household	0.0	0.11	2.90 (1.29)	−0.051	0.161**	0.055	0.108**	0.037	−0.007	−0.031	−0.141**				
10. Age	0.3	0.11	15.04 (0.74)	0.066	−0.093*	−0.017	0.007	0.043	0.129**	−0.029	0.220**	−0.130**			
11. Gender (male [1] vs. other [0])	0.4	0.01	0.51 (0.50)	0.019	−0.106**	−0.008	−0.331**	−0.214**	0.020	0.176**	0.083*	−0.104**	0.095		

(Continues)

TABLE 1 | (Continued)

Correlations Variable	% Missing values	ICC	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
<i>Classroom level</i>															
12. Percentage of students with family history of migration in classroom	0.0		0.15 (0.13)	0.000	-0.248	0.028	0.287*	0.633**	0.622**	-0.337*	0.768**	-0.392**	0.381**	-0.026	
13. School track (academic track [1] vs. other [0])	0.0		0.16 (0.37)	0.118	0.221	0.284*	0.359**	-0.141	0.033	-0.010	-0.183	0.452**	-0.235	-0.299*	-0.040

Note: \* $p < 0.05$  \*\* $p < 0.001$ .

structural anti-racist action. As part of *exploratory analyses*, we tested whether foreigner objectification moderates any of these paths. As Model 2 shows, the association between critical awareness and structural anti-racist action was moderated by foreigner objectification. Specifically, the association was significantly positive for adolescents experiencing high ( $b = 0.15$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ) or medium levels of foreigner objectification ( $b = 0.06$ ,  $p = 0.029$ ), but non-significant for adolescents experiencing little/no foreigner objectification ( $p > 0.05$ ), inconsistent with H1.

We then tested whether pluralistic national identity content is positively (H2a) and heritage-based national identity content is negatively (H2b) associated with any of the CC facets among adolescents experiencing less/no foreigner objectification, by testing main effects between national identity content and the CC facets, and interaction effects with foreigner objectification. Associations among adolescents experiencing high levels of foreigner objectification were studied exploratorily. Model 1 shows that pluralistic national identity content is positively related to critical anti-racist motivation, but not the other CC facets across all adolescents, partially supporting H2a. No significant main effect of heritage-based national identity content on any CC facets was found. However, Model 2 revealed that foreigner objectification moderated the association between heritage-based national identity content and structural anti-racist action. Specifically, the association was positive for adolescents experiencing high ( $b = 0.16$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) or medium levels of foreigner objectification ( $b = 0.07$ ,  $p = -0.013$ ), but non-significant for adolescents experiencing low levels of foreigner objectification ( $p > 0.05$ ), inconsistent with H2b.

Furthermore, we tested whether associations between national identity content and the CC facets were stronger among adolescents experiencing low/no foreigner objectification and high national attachment (H2c) by testing two- and three-way interactions between national identity content, national attachment, and foreigner objectification on the CC facets. Associations among adolescents experiencing high levels of foreigner objectification were studied exploratorily. Regarding pluralistic national identity content, none of the two- or three-way interactions including pluralistic national identity content were significant, inconsistent with H2c. However, regarding heritage-based national identity content, Model 2 revealed a significant 3-way interaction in predicting interpersonal anti-racist action. Specifically, for adolescents experiencing low/no foreigner objectification, heritage-based national identity content was negatively related to interpersonal anti-racist action when adolescents reported medium ( $b = -0.16$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) or high national attachment ( $b = -0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), but unrelated when they reported low national attachment ( $p > 0.05$ ), consistent with H2c. Furthermore, for adolescents experiencing medium levels of foreigner objectification, heritage-based national identity content was positively related to interpersonal anti-racist action when adolescents reported low national attachment ( $b = 0.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), negatively related when adolescents reported high national attachment ( $b = -0.17$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and unrelated for adolescents reporting medium national attachment ( $p > 0.05$ ). Finally, for adolescents experiencing high levels of foreigner objectification, heritage-based national identity content was more positively



**TABLE 2** | Results of the path analysis for Model 1 (main effects model).

	Dependent variables											
	Critical awareness of racialised inequities			Critical anti-racist motivation			Interpersonal anti-racist action			Structural anti-racist action		
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>
Intercepts	−0.04	0.04	0.369	−0.06	0.05	0.245	2.33	0.03	<0.001	1.27	0.02	<0.001
Predictors												
Pluralistic national identity content	0.09	0.06	0.139	<b>0.49</b>	0.06	<0.001	0.03	0.05	0.575	0.02	0.05	0.664
Heritage-based national identity content	−0.02	0.06	0.793	0.02	0.05	0.675	0.01	0.04	0.888	<b>0.06</b>	0.03	0.020
National attachment	<b>−0.15</b>	0.04	<0.001	<b>−0.17</b>	0.04	<0.001	<b>−0.10</b>	0.03	0.001	−0.01	0.03	0.795
Foreigner objectification	0.07	0.05	0.163	<b>0.18</b>	0.07	0.010	<b>0.31</b>	0.05	<0.001	<b>0.21</b>	0.07	0.004
Critical awareness of racialised inequities	/	/	/	/	/	/	<b>0.10</b>	0.04	0.004	<b>0.08</b>	0.03	0.032
Critical anti-racist motivation	/	/	/	/	/	/	<b>0.36</b>	0.03	<0.001	<b>0.12</b>	0.02	<0.001
Control variables												
School track (academic track (1) vs. other (0))	<b>0.24</b>	0.07	0.001	<b>0.40</b>	0.12	0.001	<b>−0.30</b>	0.07	<0.001			
Gender (male (1) vs. other (0))										0.004	0.002	0.064
R <sup>2</sup>	<b>0.04</b>		0.001	<b>0.16</b>		<0.001	<b>0.28</b>		<0.001	<b>0.13</b>		0.001

Note: Model fit was good,  $\chi^2(5) = 2.789$ ,  $p = 0.733$ , RMSEA = 0.000, 90% CI [0.000; 0.037], CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, SRMR = 0.009. All continuous predictors were grand-mean centred. An empty cell indicates an assumed association of 0. Unstandardised path coefficients are displayed. Significant path coefficients are printed in bold.

related to interpersonal anti-racist action the less national attachment was reported ( $b_{\text{low national attachment}} = 0.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $b_{\text{medium national attachment}} = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), but unrelated for adolescents reporting high national attachment ( $p > 0.05$ ).

To examine H3, (conditional) indirect effects were tested using bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals, drawing 10,000 bootstrap samples. Specifically, we tested whether national identity content indirectly relates to interpersonal or structural anti-racist action through critical awareness or anti-racist motivation among adolescents experiencing less/no foreigner objectification by testing indirect effects, and whether mediation effects are moderated by foreigner objectification

(moderated mediation). No *conditional* indirect effects based on foreigner objectification were found. However, there was an indirect effect from pluralistic national identity content to interpersonal anti-racist action ( $b_{\text{specific indirect}} = 0.17$ , 95% CI [0.13; 0.25]) and structural anti-racist action ( $b_{\text{specific indirect}} = 0.06$ , 95% CI [0.04; 0.08]) via critical anti-racist motivation across adolescents, partially supporting H3.

### 3 | Discussion

We examined how heritage-based versus pluralistic national identity conceptions relate to CC of systemic racism in a sample of

TABLE 3 | Results of the path analysis for Model 2 (interaction effects model).

	Dependent variables											
	Critical awareness of racialised inequities				Critical anti-racist motivation				Interpersonal anti-racist action			
	<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>		<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>		<i>b</i>	SE	<i>p</i>	
Intercepts	−0.04	0.04	0.369		−0.06	0.05	0.245		2.33	0.03	<0.001	
Predictors												
Pluralistic national identity content	0.09	0.06	0.139		<b>0.49</b>	0.06	<0.001		0.02	0.05	0.659	
Heritage-based national identity content	−0.02	0.06	0.793		0.02	0.05	0.675		0.01	0.04	0.716	
National attachment	<b>−0.15</b>	0.04	<0.001		<b>−0.17</b>	0.04	<0.001		<b>−0.11</b>	0.03	<0.001	
Foreigner objectification	0.07	0.05	0.163		<b>0.18</b>	0.07	0.010		<b>0.30</b>	0.05	<0.001	
Critical awareness of racialised inequities	/	/	/		/	/	/		<b>0.11</b>	0.04	0.003	
Critical anti-racist motivation	/	/	/		/	/	/		<b>0.36</b>	0.03	<0.001	
Two-way interaction terms												
Critical awareness of racialised inequities*Foreigner objectification									<b>0.17</b>	0.07	0.021	
Heritage-based national identity content*Foreigner objectification									<b>0.15</b>	0.05	0.003	
Heritage-based national identity content*National attachment									−0.03	0.05	0.612	
National attachment*Foreigner objectification									0.02	0.05	0.635	
Three-way interaction terms												
Heritage-based national identity content*Foreigner objectification*National attachment									<b>0.15</b>	0.06	0.008	
Control variables												
School track (academic track (1) vs. other (0))	<b>0.24</b>	0.07	0.001		<b>0.40</b>	0.12	0.001		<b>−0.30</b>	0.07	<0.001	
Gender (male (1) vs. other (0))									<b>0.005</b>	0.002	0.034	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<b>0.04</b>		0.002		<b>0.26</b>		<0.001		<b>0.28</b>		<0.001	

Note: Model 2 showed good model fit,  $\chi^2(19) = 35.493$ ,  $p = 0.012$ , RMSEA = 0.034, 90% CI [0.016; 0.051], CFI = 0.967, TLI = 0.912, SRMR = 0.029. All continuous predictors are grand-mean centred. An empty cell indicates an assumed association of 0. Unstandardised path coefficients are displayed. Significant path coefficients are printed in bold.

adolescents with varying racialisation (foreigner objectification) experiences in Germany. Specifically, we examined how pluralistic vs. heritage-based national identity content relates to adolescents' interpersonal and structural anti-racist action through critical awareness of on racialised inequities and anti-racist motivation.

Across adolescents, critical awareness of racialised inequities was related to more interpersonal anti-racist action, while critical anti-racist motivation was related to more interpersonal and structural anti-racist action, supporting H1. The association between critical awareness and structural action was found to differ between adolescents experiencing more versus less foreigner objectification, while none of the other associations was moderated by foreigner objectification. Specifically, critical awareness was related to more structural action for adolescents experiencing more foreigner objectification, but unrelated for adolescents experiencing less or no foreigner objectification, inconsistent with H1. Our results are in line with CC theory (Freire 1970; Watts et al. 2011) and previous empirical findings (e.g., Bañales et al. 2020), suggesting that as adolescents engage in critical reflection and develop interest and motivation for commitment to greater social justice, they are more likely to take various forms of action. Furthermore, our findings suggest that for individuals who are privileged in a system of racialised oppression, critical awareness of racialised inequities may be a precursor of individual responses to racism as it occurs in the moment, but may not be sufficient to foster more strategic personal or collective actions (Aldana et al. 2019). One reason may be that our final set of items utilised to capture structural action (after factor and reliability analysis) demands a higher level of proactivity compared to the interpersonal action items. Specifically, structural action as measured in the present study involves adolescents taking initiative and investing personal resources, such as time, to address societal problems such as racialised inequities and to work toward a more equitable future. This aligns with the definition of proactive behaviour as 'self-initiated, future-oriented, and change-oriented' (Sawitri and Creed 2022, 64). Our findings resemble results of a person-centred analysis of CC in the German context, in which the profile of an 'armchair activist' was identified, characterised by high critical reflection and average critical action (Schwarzenhal et al. 2024). Our results indicate this pattern may be more common among more privileged adolescents. Future research should examine mediating mechanisms that lead critically reflective, more privileged youth to engage in or abstain from critical structural action. Potentially relevant intermediary variables include group-based emotions, that is, emotions being derived from belonging to a certain group, for example, anger over injustice or White guilt (Selvanathan et al. 2018). Overall, our study adds to recent research on CC development in the German context (e.g., Schwarzenhal et al. 2024) by including critical motivation as an important facet of CC, and studying associations *between* CC facets using a variable-centred approach.

Furthermore, we found pluralistic national identity conceptions to be associated with more critical anti-racist motivation. This was found for adolescents experiencing more and less/no foreigner objectification, supporting H2a. Our study extends prior research on pluralistic national identities among racially majoritised individuals, indicating that a pluralistic national identity, in which different groups are perceived

to be equally prototypical, may not only be associated with support for policies promoting a more equitable society (e.g., Doucerain et al. 2018) but also with adolescents' interest and agency to disrupt racial oppression (i.e., critical anti-racist motivation). For racially minoritised individuals, our results suggest that, given systemic racism, pluralistic national identity conceptions may be exactly the reason to strive for more racialised justice (Devos et al. 2020), thus being related to more critical anti-racist motivation. Our conceptualisation of a pluralistic national identity may resemble a dual identity (Dovidio et al. 2016) where a common ingroup is promoted while explicitly recognising subgroups embedded within it. Our study supports previous research indicating that a dual identity (compared to a common ingroup, emphasising commonalities only, thus resembling a colour-evasive approach) may be associated with greater commitment to social change, for example, through greater attention to group-based disparities and motivation to advocate for social change due to the common bond of a shared identity (Dovidio et al. 2016).

However, contrary to H2a, we found no evidence for an association between pluralistic national identity content and critical awareness of racialised inequities, or a moderating effect of foreigner objectification. Pluralistic national identity content may indirectly relate to critical awareness, through variables like intergroup empathy for racially majoritised individuals, that is, heightened imagination of others' perspectives (Batson and Ahmad 2009). On the other hand, our pluralistic national identity measure may have captured various understandings of pluralistic identities, including power-evasive notions, acknowledging and valuing different groups in society equally while ignoring power differences (Neville et al. 2013). Such a tendency would contradict critical awareness of racialised inequities, that is, it is likely to be negatively related to critical awareness. Future research should disentangle the different notions of pluralistic identities and examine the conditions and mediators influencing whether and how various notions of pluralistic national identities may promote critical awareness of racialised inequities.

We also found neither main nor interaction effects (with foreigner objectification) of pluralistic national identity content on interpersonal or structural anti-racist action, inconsistent with H2a. Likewise, no evidence was found for national attachment moderating any of these associations, inconsistent with H2c. However, there was an indirect effect of pluralistic national identity content on interpersonal or structural anti-racist action through critical anti-racist motivation across all adolescents, supporting H3. This underlines the importance of mediating variables like critical motivation between national identity representations and critical action.

Mixed evidence emerged regarding potential negative associations between heritage-based national identity content and CC (H2b) and national attachment as moderator (H2c). Heritage-based national identity content was related to less interpersonal anti-racist action when adolescents experiencing less/no foreigner objectification displayed high national attachment, but unrelated when adolescents displayed low national attachment. In other words, heritage-based national identity content was associated with less effort to intervene in racist

incidents only when adolescents experiencing little or no foreigner objectification felt very attached to Germany. In contrast, heritage-based national identity content was unrelated to critical reflection, motivation and structural action among adolescents experiencing less/no foreigner objectification. Despite some paths being unrelated, which is contrary to our hypotheses, our results overall point to the adverse effects of heritage-based national identity content, as seen in prior research on helping behaviour (Wakefield et al. 2011), prejudice (Meeus et al. 2010) and support for hostile policies (Douceirain et al. 2018) toward racially minoritised individuals. The absence of negative associations with some CC facets may be attributable to the specific heritage-based national identity content scale we used. Previous studies linking heritage-based identity conceptions to exclusionary attitudes or support for hostile policies utilised different measures from those applied in the present study. Specifically, while we assessed participants' perceptions of groups such as 'People with German ancestry' as 'typically German', other studies measured the importance of attributes like 'having German ancestors' or 'cherishing the traditional German lifestyle' to regard someone as German (Reijerse et al. 2013) or the representativeness of 'Only those who are native speakers of English' for American identity (Douceirain et al. 2018). Compared to these measures, the measure utilised in the present study may not be inherently exclusive, aligning with the heritage-based national identity conception described by Dittmann and Kopf-Beck (2019). This may also explain the positive correlation between heritage-based and pluralistic national identity measures in our study.

Moreover, heritage-based and pluralistic national identity content may not be direct opposites, driven by opposing mechanisms in intergroup relations. Instead, heritage-based national identity content (if not coupled with a pluralistic orientation) may be primarily associated with outgroup derogation (e.g., prejudice), while pluralistic national identity content might be more related to greater concern for and prosocial behaviour toward (former) outgroups (Douceirain et al. 2018), including adolescents' CC.

Finally, for adolescents experiencing medium or high levels of foreigner objectification, heritage-based national identity content was unrelated to critical awareness and motivation. However, for these adolescents, it was associated with more *structural* anti-racist action and more *interpersonal* anti-racist action when adolescents displayed low national attachment. These results align with the social identity approach (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner et al. 1987) and previous studies, suggesting that members of marginalised groups may strive for collective action (supporting the own marginalised group) when perceiving impermeable group boundaries (Mähönen and Jasinskaja-Lahti 2015) and recognising injustice, such as discrimination against their group (Stronge et al. 2016). In our study, adolescents perceiving national identity as heritage-based, while not identifying with Germany, may have perceived national boundaries as rigid and inflexible. Coupled with high levels of perceived subtle discrimination as captured in foreigner objectification experiences, this could have stimulated increased engagement for their marginalised group's interests and against racial injustice.

Interestingly, we found that a higher school track, as an indicator of adolescents' higher SES, was positively associated

with critical awareness of racialised inequities and critical anti-racist motivation but negatively associated with interpersonal anti-racist action and unrelated to structural anti-racist action. These findings align with prior research suggesting that more privileged youth may exhibit higher levels of critical reflection (e.g., Diemer et al. 2019; Flanagan et al. 2014), but are less likely to engage in actions challenging societal inequities (Diemer and Li 2011). One explanation may be that for more privileged individuals, it may be easier to criticise the system without fearing significant negative consequences. However, this may not necessarily translate to taking action to challenge societal inequities (Diemer et al. 2019). This tendency may similarly be related to the adoption of superficial and performative manifestations of CC among privileged individuals, which may serve to uphold the status quo (Heberle et al. 2020). Specifically, these individuals may develop a shallow understanding of societal inequities, not to challenge their privileged status but to reinforce or protect it. It may serve to avoid criticism and to appear progressive, well-intentioned, caring, and generous as in cases of white saviorism (Sondel et al. 2022), without making any real effort to dismantle the underlying oppressive systems. Additionally, the recognition of racialised inequities in society may not necessarily go along with the ability to critically examine and acknowledge one's own role in contributing to these inequities (DiAngelo 2011).

Given that current quantitative measures of CC, like those used in this study, emerged from research on marginalised groups, it is crucial to develop more refined measures that distinguish between performative and genuine manifestations when studying more privileged populations. Additionally, more research is needed to explore how privilege and marginalisation across various dimensions influence the development of both domain-specific and general CC, considering the intersectionality of these identities.

### 3.1 | Limitations

A study limitation concerns the scope of examining associations *between* CC facets. CC theory suggests a reciprocal relationship between facets, like critical reflection and action (Watts et al. 2011). Furthermore, critical motivation has been theorised to mediate or moderate this relation (Watts et al. 2011), although recent studies could not find supporting evidence (Diemer and Rapa 2016). Given our focus on national identity content and the cross-sectional research design, associations among CC components could not be studied in their full complexity. Future research should longitudinally examine possible reciprocal relationships among CC facets.

Additionally, while measures similar to ours are widely used in recent CC literature (see Diemer et al. 2015, for an overview), they may not fully capture the depth of Freire's conceptualisation. For example, while our critical reflection measure captures youths' awareness of structural inequalities, Freire's conceptualisation extends further, encompassing a deeper process of reflecting on how oppressive systems impact individuals' realities and social conditions, including uncovering internalised assumptions shaped by those systems (Freire 1970). Indeed, a binary perspective of critical



reflection, which defines youth as critically conscious based on their identification of structural factors, has been criticised in favour of viewing critical reflection as a process where youth simultaneously consider both structural and individual factors to develop their own understanding of social issues (Golden et al. 2023). Moreover, although one may assume that adolescents' awareness of societal inequities may be indicative of adolescents' critical reflection, this may not always be the case. For example, adolescents might adopt critically conscious perspectives expressed by their peers without engaging in critical reflection themselves. Future research should focus on developing more comprehensive and nuanced measures that reflect the complexities of critical reflection, drawing on qualitative or mixed-method approaches. Additionally, longitudinal research may be essential for capturing the process of critical reflection, using methods such as ecological momentary assessment.

A further limitation relates to our national identity content measure. While designed to be inclusive, it may have reproduced and reinforced imagined differences and white normativity. For instance, it may have reproduced the idea that only certain individuals can be 'truly German' and portrayed a static view of a supposed national culture. Additionally, by specifically referring to heritage-based concepts implying whiteness, while subsuming other groups under broader terms such as 'diverse groups', it may have reinforced the idea of whiteness as normative compared to an imagined 'other' (Rühlmann and McMonagle 2019). It is important that researchers engage in discussions surrounding ethical considerations, focusing on how to prevent the reproduction of problematic ideas while effectively capturing relevant concepts, for example, by conducting debriefing sessions with students.

Furthermore, while the number of books in a household constitutes a straightforward SES indicator, showing strong correlations with other measures and high response rates from students (Heppt et al. 2022; Wiberg and Rolfman 2023), it may oversimplify SES. This measure might exclude other important factors such as economic and social capital and the subjective, personal construction of social class (Long and Renbarger 2023). Additionally, it may not account for other sources of reading material, like libraries, and could perpetuate negative stereotypes and deficit-oriented views. Future research should aim to develop more nuanced and holistic SES measures, incorporating variables that are asset-based and adapted to specific groups and contexts examined (Long and Renbarger 2023).

### 3.2 | Conclusion and Implications

Our study underlines the significance of critical awareness and motivation as crucial precursors of adolescents' engagement against oppression, aligning with CC theory (Freire 1970) and empirical research (e.g., Bañales et al. 2020). Recognising the historical impact of youth in driving change (Brennan et al. 2022), nurturing their engagement in anti-racist endeavours for a more just and equitable future, for example, by fostering critical awareness of racialised inequities and anti-racist motivation in and beyond the classroom, is of great societal importance. However, attention is required given our finding

that critical awareness among racially majoritised adolescents is linked to increased efforts to intervene in incidents of interpersonal discrimination, but not to strategic personal and collective actions aimed at disrupting racialised injustice. Future research should examine how more privileged, critically reflective adolescents come to engage in these latter manifestations of anti-racism.

Furthermore, our study indicates that adolescents' national identity and CC development are intertwined. Promoting pluralistic conceptions of national identity explicitly including individuals with diverse experiences and identities, for example, in media representations or in the classroom, may be beneficial as it may go along with a greater motivation to engage against racism, in turn relating to more engagement in anti-racism. However, given the importance of critical reflection within the CC framework, described as a crucial foundational step in developing critical motivation and action (Freire 1970), the potential of pluralistic identities to holistically support youths' CC development may be limited. Practitioners may promote adolescents' CC development by pairing pluralistic representations of national identity, for example, in classroom discussions on identity, with explicit CC socialisation, for example, providing content about societal power structures. Research indicates that such explicit socialisation is positively associated with adolescents' critical reflection (Bañales et al. 2021; Golden and Byrd 2022; Schwarzenhal et al. 2022).

Finally, our findings highlight the adverse effects of heritage-based national identity content. While anticipated negative associations among racially majoritised adolescents were not fully evident, heritage-based conceptions of national identity, particularly combined with high national attachment, may counteract anti-racist engagement. For a more just and equitable future, continuous reflection on heritage-based national identity representations, including subtle manifestations like microaggressions (Sue et al. 2007) and counteracting its exclusive elements is crucial, especially for practitioners in key societal institutions like media and schools.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

Author elects to not share data.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This marks a deviation from our pre-registration, in which the analysis of group differences based on personal/parental migration experience was specified.

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## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.