National Narrative and Social Psychological Influences in Turks’ Denial of the Mass Killings of Armenians as Genocide

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This article sheds light on the nature of the Turkish denial of Armenian mass killings. A survey study investigates Turkish students’ construals (i.e., attributions of responsibility and perceived severity of harm) of Turkish massacres of Armenians at the beginning of the 20th century. The results demonstrated a high correspondence between participants’ individual construals and the Turkish official narrative of the events. Structural equation modeling indicated that in-group glorification, perceived in-group threat, and positive attitudes toward war predicted less acknowledgment of in-group responsibility, which in turn predicted less support for reparations of the harm inflicted on Armenians. The study highlights the influence of government-sponsored national self-images in the production and endorsement of legitimizing narratives of the in-group’s violence. The findings call for research that examines the combined influence of psychological and societal mechanisms on people’s beliefs about in-group actions.

Genocide is the most serious crime against humanity. Accordingly, allegations of genocide have significant legal and moral consequences for perpetrator groups,

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which vehemently resist and oppose the charges. Probably, the best-known case of denial is the Turkish refutation that the mass killings of Armenians at the beginning of the 20th century amount to genocide.

The late 19th and early 20th century marked the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of Young Turks’ regime, which sought to modernize and to “turkify” the Ottoman state into a modern Turkish nation (Hovannissian, 1997; Jorgensen, 2003). Ottoman Armenians were considered a minority group like other non-Muslim populations in the Ottoman Empire. During this period, the Ottoman and the Young Turk regimes targeted Ottoman Armenians in acts of mass violence culminating in the atrocities of 1915. Scholars of Armenian origin (e.g., Dadrian, 2003; Hovannisian, 1997), most international scholars (Bloxham, 2005; Melson, 1992; Nazer, 1968), and a few Turkish historians (e.g., Akçam, 2006) claim that about a million Armenians (estimates vary between 600,000 and 2,000,000, see Jorgensen, 2003) perished as a result of direct and unprovoked massacres by the Turkish military which intended to exterminate the Armenians of the Ottoman empire. Armenians and most international sources refer to the massacres in 1915 as the first genocide of the century, whereas Turks refer to the same events as inter-communal warfare (Lewy, 2005). Turkish governments since 1923 have firmly denied a genocide of Armenians by Turks (Jorgensen, 2003). The long-term effects of these events—both psychological and political—are highly visible today, a century after the massacres. Turkey and Armenia have never had diplomatic relations, and the border between the two countries is currently closed. The Turkish denial of the atrocities elicits rage, hatred, and resentment among Armenians (Kalayjian & Shahinian, 1998; for a review on psychological effects of genocide see Pearlman, 2013).

Acknowledgment of responsibility and reparative actions by perpetrator groups are essential elements of reconciliation in the aftermath of mass violence (Staub, 2006, 2013; Vollhardt, 2013). In contrast, legitimizing narratives of in-group’s perpetuated violence serve to deny in-group responsibility (e.g., Sibley, Wilson, & Robertson, 2007) and reduce support for reparations for harm, thus undermining intergroup reconciliation. Understanding the processes that produce and maintain legitimizing narratives is imperative in order to find ways to address those narratives. Guided by this goal, the current study provides insights into Turks’ construals of the mass killings of Armenians at the beginning of 20th century (see also Bilali, Tropp, & Dasgupta, 2012). The study examines the nature of denial embedded in the Turkish official narrative and the extent to which group members endorse this narrative. Then, the article investigates the influence of social psychological factors (in-group glorification, in-group threat, and attitudes toward violence in war) that perpetuate legitimizing narratives, as well as the role of these narratives in reducing support for reparations of harm.
The Role of Moral Disengagement in Legitimizing Narratives: Individual and Collective Processes

Bandura (1999, 2002) identified a variety of mechanisms by which people accept and legitimize violence and inhumane conduct done to others. These mechanisms, known as moral disengagement, include: (1) moral justification of the act, (2) denial, displacement, or diffusion of responsibility, (3) disregarding or minimizing the negative consequences of the violent acts, and (4) attribution of blame to the victim or circumstances. Moral disengagement strategies vary along at least two dimensions of construals of violence: attributions of responsibility for the harm inflicted (e.g., blaming the victim or the circumstances) and perceived severity of harm (e.g., minimization of the negative consequences of the harm done by the in-group). Originally developed to describe processes at the individual level, these mechanisms are also applicable to group members’ judgments about their groups’ conduct in war (Cohrs, Maes, Moschnier, & Kielman, 2003), or reactions to in-groups’ historical harm doing (Leidner, Castano, Zaiser, & Giner-Sorolla, 2010).

Moral disengagement mechanisms are a product of the interplay of psychological processes and social influences (Bandura, 1999). Psychologically, the in-group’s misdeeds threaten group members’ morality and self-worth. Striving to maintain a positive social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), group members distort current and historical events in ways that portray the in-group in a favorable light (Baumeister & Hastings, 1997; Doosje & Branscombe, 2003). When confronted with reminders of in-group’s misdeeds, to protect in-group’s positive image and avoid feelings of guilt (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004), group members often legitimize the in-group’s actions by either minimizing the consequences (Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006), denying in-group’s responsibility (Iyer, Leach, & Crosby, 2003), or dehumanizing the victims (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006; Kofta & Slawuta, 2013).

These mechanisms do not only operate at the individual level, but also at the collective level. Bandura (1999) noted that moral disengagement mechanisms are rooted in social structures and shaped by societal institutions. Political elites, institutions, and societal conditions determine what historical memories citizens are faced with (Olick & Robbins, 1998). Each nation’s history highlights events that preserve a positive image of the nation while downplaying or “silencing” negative episodes in the nation’s history (e.g., Liu et al., 2009; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). These historical memories produced by the elites are disseminated to all group members through the educational system, media, museums, hymns, rituals, as well as reinforced in the images that citizens are encountered with in their everyday lives, including public monuments, street names, coins and banknotes. Thus, the legitimization of past misdeeds must be understood not only as a psychologically driven process, but also as collectively driven.
Moral Disengagement in the Turkish Narrative of the Mass Killings of Armenians

Until recently, the discussion of the Armenian issue has been a taboo in Turkey (Akçam, 2006). Successive Turkish governments since the beginning of the Turkish Republic have produced an official narrative about the events of 1915 as well as a national consensus on the issue (Necef, 2003). National education in Turkey is highly centralized and viewed as a state affair (Kaplan, 2006); since 1924, the Ministry of Education approves all school textbooks in Turkey (Ulgen, 2010). Through these textbooks, the schools expose millions of Turkish youth to the same version of history. To assess how Turkish citizens learn about these events, I examined the narrative of Armenian massacres in Turkish primary education (8th grade) and high school (11th grade) history books, ‘History of the Turkish Revolution and Ataturkism’ (*T.C. İnkılap Tarihi ve Atatürkçülük*).

Each history book devotes only one to three pages to the events of 1915. These sections emphasize the expulsion of the Armenians from their lands (i.e., the law of deportation), while denying the atrocities committed against them. According to these textbooks, Armenians, encouraged by external governments (particularly Britain and Russia), rebelled against the Ottoman Empire; they fought on the side of the enemy (i.e., Russia), and attacked the Muslim population in Anatolia. In fact, the textbooks state that it was Armenians who carried out massacres against the Turkish people in Anatolia, which in turn led the Young Turk government to take extreme measures to deport the Armenian population in order to protect Ottoman territories and the Muslim population (see also Uras, 1988). Furthermore, these texts note that despite the government’s precautions to ensure the safety of Armenians during the deportations, many Armenians died due to the difficult conditions of World War I (e.g., starvation or attacks by armed groups). When officials committed abuses against Armenians, those officials were brought to trial. (For a detailed analysis of the representation of Armenians in Turkish history textbooks since the beginning of the Turkish Republic see Ulgen, 2010.)

The interpretations of this period of history in Turkish textbooks include accounts that may be interpreted as psychological justifications or excuses to deflect responsibility (see also Türközü, 1986): (a) blaming Armenians for treason or for attacking Turkish-Muslim populations; (b) claiming that violent acts were in self-defense (protection from territorial loss and/or protection of the Turkish population that was being targeted by Armenian banditry); (c) shifting responsibility to external factors and third parties (claiming that Armenian deaths were a result of hardship); (d) claiming benevolent motivations behind the deportations (stopping the inter-communal warfare). These interpretations exemplify how moral disengagement mechanisms operate at the level of collective narratives. Three targets of attribution can be readily identified: the in-group (i.e., denial of responsibility), the out-group (i.e., blaming the victim), and situational factors (i.e., blaming third
parties or circumstances). The next section assesses the social psychological processes that produce and maintain this narrative, as well as the role of this narrative in legitimizing opposition to reparations of harm.

**Historical Memory and a Nation’s Self-Image**

A nation’s conception of itself (i.e., its self-image or national narrative) is grounded in its historical memory. Historical memory is essential for the formation of communities such as ethnicities and nations, which can exist as imagined communities only through selective remembering and forgetting of past events (Anderson, 1991). Nations remember their triumphs and heroes, but their crimes and atrocities not as well (Bilali & Ross, 2012). Historical memory is produced and disseminated in narrative forms through societal institutions, such as the educational system, public symbols, media, etc. (Liu & László, 2007). Historical narratives are central to the formation of national self-images. National self-images are self-perpetuating as they drive schema-consistent interpretations of past and current events (Hirshberg, 1993), which in turn keep self-images alive.

The current study examines how social psychological factors (in-group glorification, national threat, and attitudes toward war) that reflect different aspects of a nation’s narrative drive construals of historical events.

**In-group glorification.** In-group glorification is a central dimension of nationalistic attachment (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989), and drives the silencing or moral justification of historical misdeeds. Recent studies (Leidner et al., 2010; Roccas et al., 2006) suggest that in-group glorification, rather than group attachment, elicit the typical negative effects of in-group identification (e.g., out-group derogation, legitimization of the in-group’s wrong doing). In-group glorification refers to the endorsement of glorified national images. Glorified self-images position the in-group as superior to others, a notion that undergirds nationalistic ideologies. Such glorified images serve to establish a positive national identity. For instance, at the birth of Turkey, glorified national images helped overcome Western biases of Turks as a “barbaric people” and replaced these images of barbarism with those of civilization and modernity (Zarakol, 2010). Denials of the mass killings of Armenians are entangled with the foundational myths of modern Turkish identity (Ulgen, 2010). Admitting to the Armenian genocide undermines Turkey’s foundational narrative as a civilized and modern nation (Ulgen, 2010; Zarakol, 2010).

I hypothesize that the more Turks glorify their nation, the more they will endorse in-group favoring constructions of the Armenian massacres (in line with the official narrative of the events), which in turn will predict less support for reparations of the harm against Armenians.
In-group threat. Historical memories serve to identify one’s current foes and allies, as well as identify and anticipate future threats (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Historical experiences elicit sensitivity to various threats. Sometimes a threat becomes central to a group’s narrative and self-concept. Bar-Tal and Antebi (1992) proposed a new construct, siege mentality, to refer to the “mental state in which members of a group hold a central belief that the rest of the world has highly negative behavioral intentions toward them” (p. 633). Siege mentality implies chronic perception of threat toward the in-group; it is embedded in the group’s image of itself and the world, and it is grounded in historical experiences (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). Exemplifying a siege mentality, Turkish social science and history textbooks portray internal and external threats to the country’s territorial integrity (Çayir, 2009). Such sensitivity to threat is known as the “Sèvres Syndrome,” named after the Treaty of Sèvres, through which the territories of the former Ottoman Empire were almost divided among the Allied Powers at the end of WWI. Although the Treaty of Sèvres was never ratified, Turks have seen various pre- and post-treaty struggles through the siege mentality lens, which has also shaped Turkey’s policies today (Aydin, 2004). A National Public Opinion Survey conducted in 2006 in Turkey revealed that 78% of Turks believed that the West wants to ‘break up Turkey like they broke up the Ottoman Empire’ (as cited in Göcek, 2011, p. 98). The Sèvres Syndrome fuels Turkey’s self-image as the “oppressed nation” (mazlum millet; Ulgen, 2010), and reaffirms the belief that it faces territorial threats. For instance, Turks perceive current Western interests in minority rights as attempts to undermine Turkish sovereignty (Zarakol, 2010). Similarly, Turks portray the events of 1915 as an issue of territorial sovereignty rather than one of minority rights (Ulgen, 2010).

The literature on intergroup threat demonstrates that perceived threats toward the in-group are associated with prejudice and negative attitudes toward out-groups (e.g., Bizman & Yinon, 2001; Stephan & Stephan, 1996). Perceived national threats also predict public support for aggressive foreign policy and domestic security policies (e.g., Herrmann, Tetlock, & Visser 1999; Huddy, Feldman, & Weber, 2007). However, the above discussion suggests that perceived national threats might not only influence the attitudes toward ongoing conflicts, but also toward past conflicts. I hypothesize that the more Turks perceive their country to be threatened by internal and external groups, the more they will endorse legitimizing construals of Armenian massacres, which in turn will reduce support for reparation of harm.

Attitudes toward war. Warfare occupies a central place in people’s representations of history (Liu et al., 2009). Nations not only justify wars they fight, but sometimes they also view them as desirable (just war theory; see Walzer, 1992). Each nation links its greatness to war—countries remember and glorify wars of independence, which citizens associate with ideas of honor and sacrifice
and judge to be central to their country’s existence (Hedges, 2002). Embedded in national symbols (e.g., national heroes and anthems), war becomes part of the national culture. Glorification of war is particularly common in militaristic societies such as Turkey. Historical and cultural processes have led to the internalization of militarism in Turkish society through the creation of societal narratives that draw connections between masculinity and military service, as evident in the common expression that “every (male) Turk is born a soldier” (Altinay, 2004). When war is morally justified, specific instances of war and violence and their negative consequences for the enemy are more likely to be deemed acceptable and justifiable. I predict that Turks’ positive attitudes toward war will be related to increased legitimization of Armenian massacres and to less support for reparations of the harm committed.

**Overview of the Current Study**

The current study investigated Turks’ construals of Armenian massacres by assessing perceived severity of harm and legitimizing narratives along three dimensions of attributions of responsibility (in-group vs. out-group vs. external). First, the study examined whether Turkish participants perceive the events as in-group perpetration (as compared to intercommunal warfare or even in-group victimization); in addition, it assessed the extent of perceived harm inflicted on each group as well as the endorsement of the legitimizing narrative along dimensions of attributions of responsibility. Then, the study investigated social psychological influences (in-group glorification, in-group threat, and attitudes toward war) on these construals. Lastly, using structural equation modeling, the mediating role of legitimizing attributions between social psychological factors and support for reparation of harm inflicted on Armenians was examined. I hypothesized that higher in-group glorification, more positive attitudes toward violence in war, and heightened perceived threat toward the in-group would lead to increased endorsement of legitimizing narratives (i.e., less in-group responsibility, more out-group and external responsibility), which in turn would decrease willingness to repair the harm inflicted on Armenians.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants were 93 Turkish students studying in the United States (41 women, 49 men, 3 participants did not report their gender). The data was collected as part of a broader survey research on this topic (e.g., see Bilali et al., 2012, Study 1); here, I have included only data from participants who completed all scales used in this study. All participants were Turkish citizens recruited from the Turkish foreign student population at various universities in the United States. Participants were contacted via Turkish student associations. Participants’ age
ranged from 22 to 49 years \((M = 29.2, \ SD = 4.93)\). Overall, respondents had lived for the most part in Turkey (years in Turkey: \(M = 22.89, \ SD = 5.43\)), and in recent years lived in the United States (years in the United States: \(M = 5.10, \ SD = 4.49\)).

All participants completed a survey online in Turkish. The study was introduced as investigating views of historical events involving intergroup violence. Participants were told that they would be asked questions about a period of violence in their group’s history, particularly the violent conflict with Armenians between the 1880s and 1920s. The word *genocide* was purposely not used in order to avoid reactive responses or drop outs.

**Measures**

*In-group’s role in violence: perpetrator or victim?* To assess how participants construe the violent events, a 3-point multiple-choice item asked participants to identify the victim and the harm doer. The three choices included: (a) Armenians were the victims, Turks were the harm doers; (b) Turks were the victims, Armenians were the harm doers; and (c) Both groups harmed each other equally.

*Perceived severity of harm.* Additionally, to assess whether participants view the in-group as a perpetrator or a victim, several items measured the perceived severity of harm inflicted on each group. In two open-ended questions, participants were asked to provide an estimate of the number of Armenian [Turkish] casualties inflicted by Turks [Armenians] during the violence between the 1880s and 1920s. In addition, four close-ended items were used to assess perceived severity of harm inflicted on the in-group versus out-group in 1915: perceived severity of harm caused by the in-group was assessed with two items asking participants to estimate (1) the number of Armenians killed by Turks in 1915, and (2) the number of Armenians forcefully displaced from their villages by Turks in 1915. The perceived severity of harm caused by the out-group was assessed in a similar way by asking participants to estimate (1) the number of Turks killed by Armenians in 1915, and (2) the number of Turks forcefully displaced from their villages by Armenians in 1915. Participants rated the severity of harm using 6-point scales consisting of the following estimate ranges (the ranges were chosen so that Turkish official estimates fall in the middle of the scale): (1) less than 100,000 people killed; (2) 100,001 to 300,000; (3) 300,001 to 500,000; (4) 500,001 to 700,000; (5) 700,001 to 900,000; (6) more than 900,000.

*Attributions of responsibility.* A series of close-ended questions assessed participants’ construals of the massacres of 1915 along dimensions of attributions of responsibility. The items were constructed using statements reflecting the Turkish official narrative of the events of 1915. The statements were chosen to vary
along three targets of attributions: (a) placing the responsibility on the out-group (3 items), (b) placing responsibility on external factors (i.e., situational factors and third parties; 5 items), and (c) placing responsibility on the in-group (i.e., acknowledgment vs. denial of responsibility; 3 acknowledgment and 3 denial items). All items were assessed on 6-point scales (1 = strongly disagree; 6 = strongly agree). A sample item that places responsibility on Armenians is: “The Turkish decision to evacuate Armenians in 1915 was a reaction to Armenian revolt and territorial loss.” A sample item that places responsibility on third parties is: “Most Armenian casualties in 1915 were due to unfortunate circumstances such as epidemics and starvation.” A sample item that places responsibility for the massacres on Turkish government is: “The Turkish evacuation of Armenians was an act premeditated to achieve the destruction of the Armenian people.”

In-group glorification. Three items adopted from Roccas et al. (2006) assessed the degree to which participants glorified their in-group. These items included: “The Turkish nation is better than other nations in almost all respects,” “Relative to other nations, we are a very moral nation,” and “It is disloyal for Turks to criticize Turkey” (α = .83, M = 2.32, SD = 1.21). These items, and the rest of the items presented below, were measured on six-point scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

In-group threat. Two items were constructed to assess perceived divisive threats toward Turkey (as embedded in the national narrative). These items were: “Many countries and groups have hostile intentions toward Turkey” and “There are many groups, inside and outside Turkey, that aim to make Turkey disintegrate” (α = .97, M = 4.39, SD = 1.40).

Attitudes toward war. To assess attitudes toward war, six items were adopted from the violence in war subscale of the Revised Attitudes towards Violence Scale (Anderson, Benjamin, Wood, & Bonacci, 2006). These items included: “War can be just,” “Any nation should be ready with a strong military at all times,” “Violence against the enemy should be part of every nation’s defense,” “Killing of civilians should be accepted as an unavoidable part of the war,” “Our country has the right to protect its borders forcefully,” and “A violent revolution can be perfectly right.” The last item was dropped due to low item-scale reliability. The 5 items were averaged to form a scale that had very good reliability (α = .85, M = 3.5, SD = 1.27).

Support for reparation. Two items assessed support for reparation for the atrocities of 1915. The items were: “Turkey should make reparations for the killings of Armenians in 1915” and “I believe that I should take part to help repair the damage done to Armenians” (α = .68, M = 2.47, SD = 1.49). The latter item
Understanding Denial

was adopted from Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, and Manstead’s (1998) collective guilt scale.

Results

Turks’ Construals of Armenian Massacres: Perpetrator or Victim?

In line with the official framing of the events as an inter-communal warfare, the majority of the sample (65%) believed that both groups have harmed each other equally. Twenty-three participants (25% of the sample) believed that Armenians were the victims and Turks the harm doers; and nine participants (10% of the sample) believed that Turks were the victims while Armenians were the harm doers.

To assess the relative harm perceived to be inflicted on Armenians by Turks, as compared to the harm inflicted on Turks by Armenians, paired samples t-tests were conducted with each indicator of harm as the dependent variable (i.e., number of casualties and people displaced). In both open and close-ended items, participants estimated a higher number of Armenian casualties (open-ended measure: $M = 425,035$, $SD = 349,154$; close-ended measure: $M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.41$) and displaced Armenians ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.57$) compared to the number of the Turkish casualties (open-ended measure: $M = 202,124$, $SD = 260.770$, $t(56) = -5.85$, $p < .001$; close-ended measure: $M = 1.80$, $SD = 1.19$, $t(75) = 2.48$, $p = .015$) and of the displaced Turks ($M = 1.57$, $SD = 1.11$), $t(73) = 7.46$, $p < .001$. Overall, the Armenian casualty estimates in this sample matched Turkish official statistics of “slightly less than 600,000” (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.).

To examine whether in-group glorification, attitudes toward war, and perceived in-group threat explain individual differences in construals of harm, multivariate regression analyses were conducted with these factors as continuous predictors of perceived severity of harm measures. Due to the difference in the number of participants that reported estimates in different question formats (in open-ended format, $n = 57$; in closed-ended items, $n = 75$), two separate multivariate analyses were conducted for each measure type. The two analyses revealed similar results.

For the open-ended measures, in-group glorification was the only predictor of the number of Armenian casualties, such that higher in-group glorification predicted a lower number of casualties inflicted by Turks on Armenians, $F(1, 53) = 5.59$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .10$. Higher in-group threat was associated with a larger number of Turkish casualties inflicted by Armenians, $F(1, 53) = 3.76$, $p = .058$, $\eta^2 = .07$. None of the other effects were significant (all $ps > .5$).

Similarly, for the close-ended measures, in-group glorification predicted more perceived harm inflicted on Armenians by Turks in 1915 ($F(1, 67) = 6.73$, $p = .012$, $\eta^2 = .09$). Higher in-group threat was associated with a larger number of Turkish casualties inflicted by Armenians, $F(1, 67) = 5.32$, $p = .026$, $\eta^2 = .07$. None of the other effects were significant (all $ps > .5$).
\( p = .01, \eta^2 = .09 \) for number of casualties, and \( F(1, 67) = 4.24, p = .04, \eta^2 = .06 \) for number of displaced people), whereas in-group threat predicted a higher number of Turkish casualties inflicted by Armenians, \( F(1, 67) = 4.60, p = .04, \eta^2 = .06 \). All other effects were nonsignificant (all \( ps > .11 \)).

These results suggest that in-group glorification and perceived national threat influence different aspects of construals of harm. The first reduces perceptions of the in-group as a perpetrator by minimizing the harm inflicted by the in-group, whereas the latter amplifies the extent of in-group victimization by influencing the amount of perceived in-group harm.

**The Structure of Legitimizing Mechanisms: Attributions of Responsibility**

To assess the structure of the legitimizing narrative adopted from the Turkish official narrative of the 1915 events, I performed confirmatory factor analyses to compare a three-dimensional attribution structure where each target (i.e., in-group vs. out-group vs. external factors) served as a latent factor, with an alternative one-factor model in which all items loaded onto a common “legitimization” factor. The three-dimensional attribution structure revealed a better fit \( (\chi^2 (62) = 103.54, p < .001, \text{RMSEA} = .08, \text{CFI} = .98, \text{SRMR} = .048) \) than the alternative one-factor structure \( (\chi^2 (65) = 132.46, p < .001, \text{CFI} = .97, \text{SRMR} = .05) \), \( \text{diff} \chi^2 (3) = 28.92, p < .001 \). In the final three-factor model, only one item loaded below .50 on the respective factor; all other items’ loadings exceeded .60. The correlations between the three latent factors were considerably high \( (r > .80) \).

Following the CFA analyses, three composite scales were constructed for each component by averaging the scores of the items loading on each factor. The three in-group responsibility items suggesting denial of in-group responsibility were reverse-coded. The 6-item in-group responsibility (\( \alpha = .87 \)), 3-item out-group responsibility (\( \alpha = .80 \)), and 5-item external responsibility (\( \alpha = .86 \) scales revealed very good reliabilities. To assess whether participants attributed different degrees of responsibility to different target groups, I conducted a repeated measures ANOVA with target of responsibility as the repeated measures factor and amount of responsibility as the dependent variable. The results indicated that Turkish participants placed most responsibility on Armenians \( (M = 4.21, SD = 1.33) \), followed by responsibility on external factors \( (M = 3.89, SD = 1.13) \), and the least responsibility on Turks \( (M = 2.84, SD = 1.27) \), \( F(2, 184) = 23.72, p < .001, \eta^2 = .21 \). All pair-wise differences were significant \( (ps < .005) \).

**Path Analysis**

Structural equation modeling with Lisrel was used to assess the hypothesized relationships. Bivariate correlations between the variables included in the path model are shown in Table 1. The model included paths from predictor variables
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations among Variables Included in the Structural Equation Model

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<tbody>
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<td>1. In-group responsibility</td>
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<td>2. Out-group responsibility</td>
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<td>3. External responsibility</td>
<td>3.89</td>
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<td>.76</td>
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<td>4. In-group threat</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>-.59</td>
<td>.52</td>
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<td>5. In-group glorification</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>-.60</td>
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<td>.63</td>
<td>.62</td>
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<td>6. Attitudes toward war</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>-.56</td>
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<td>7. Support for reparation</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>-.60</td>
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<td>-.49</td>
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Note. All correlations are significant at \( p < .001 \). Scores on all scales ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Fig. 1. Structural equation model predicting individual differences in Turkish students’ support for reparations for the harm inflicted on Armenians in 1915. Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant paths. *\( p < .05 \), **\( p < .01 \), ***\( p < .001 \).

(in-group glorification, in-group threat, and attitudes toward war) to the mediator variables (legitimizing attributions: in-group, out-group, and external responsibility), and from the mediators to the criterion variable (support for reparation). Due to the limited sample size, the path model included composite scores rather than latent variables. The covariances among the predictors and among the mediator variables were set free. The results revealed an adequate fit of the model, \( \chi^2 (3) = 6.45, p = .09, RMSEA = .11, CFI = .99, SRMR = .03 \). Post hoc modification indices, however, indicated a large negative residual for the link between attitudes toward war and reparations. The addition of a direct path from attitudes towards war to support for reparation improved the model significantly, \( \chi^2 (2) = .35, p = .84, RMSEA = 0, CFI = 1, SRMR = .01 \). The final revised model is shown in Figure 1. The nonsignificant paths are represented by dotted lines. Notably among attributions of responsibility, only in-group responsibility was associated
with support for reparations. The model explained a substantial portion of the variance in support for reparation ($R^2 = .54$).

**Alternative model.** Because the data is cross-sectional and nonexperimental, it is not possible to imply causal inference. Alternative models are also plausible. For instance, it is possible that construals of Armenian massacres along the lines of the official narrative might elicit higher in-group glorification, more perceived in-group threat, and more positive attitudes toward war, which would in turn lead to lower support for reparation of harm. A structural equation model was computed where attributions for the massacres were exogenous variables, whereas in-group threat, attitudes toward war, and in-group glorification served as mediators. The results showed that this alternate model did not fit the data well, $\chi^2 (4) = 16.64, p = .002$, RMSEA = .18, CFI = .98, SRMR = .05. Including direct paths from attributions to support for harm also did not improve the data fit.

**Discussion**

The current study demonstrates a correspondence between collective and individual construals of violence towards Armenians. In line with the Turkish narrative, participants minimized the in-group’s responsibility while placing blame on Armenians and external factors (i.e., the third parties and the grave circumstances of WWI) (see also Bilali et al., 2012). At the same time, participants acknowledged some harm inflicted on Armenians, while also viewing Turks as victims of Armenian violence. Indeed, the majority of the sample (75%) did not construe the events as an instance of one-sided in-group perpetration. Rather, they either endorsed the “inter-communal warfare” interpretation promoted by the Turkish official narrative (65%), or they viewed Armenians as the perpetrators of violence (10% of the sample).

Interestingly, in-group glorification and perceived threat differentially predicted Turks’ construals of harm inflicted during the mass violence. In-group glorification minimized perceived in-group perpetration (i.e., predicted less perceived harm inflicted by Turks), whereas in-group threat elevated the perceived in-group victimization. These results are in line with the idea that in-group glorification is driven by identity-enhancing motives (i.e., perceiving the in-group in a positive light via minimizing in-group perpetration). Additionally, national threat, especially when beliefs about such threat are embedded in the national narrative, might influence perceptions of past violence by enhancing perceived in-group victimization.

The justifications, excuses, and silences embedded in the collective narrative and disseminated by societal institutions constitute a “social reality” for Turkish citizens. However, these collective legitimizations correspond to psychological mechanisms of moral disengagement. At the individual level, higher in-group glorification, higher perceived national threat, and more positive attitudes toward
war in general, predicted the endorsement of narratives that deny in-group responsibility and place blame on the out-group and on external factors for the mass killings of Armenians. Additionally, the endorsement of these legitimizing narratives mediated the relation between social-psychological factors and support for reparative action.

The current study replicated previous findings (Leidner et al., 2010; Roccas et al., 2006) of the role of in-group glorification on the endorsement of legitimizing narratives. In addition to identity enhancing and image-protective motives that drive the effects of in-group glorification, I suggest that in-group glorification reflects a glorified national image. Taking seriously the self-confirming nature of self-images (Hirshberg, 1993), the glorified image of the in-group should serve as a schema through which past and current events are interpreted (see also Kurtis, Adams, & Yellow Bird, 2010). The self-perpetuating nature of glorified images might protect group members from feeling guilt or shame, leading to denials of the past and to low levels of self-criticism among members of perpetrator groups (see Leach, Zeinnedine, & Čehajić-Clancy, 2013).

In the current study, national threat was used as a specific form of realistic threat. Different from previous literature on intergroup threat, the realistic threat used here had an additional characteristic—it was embedded in the national narrative. Turkish textbooks not only glorify the nation, but they also demand martyrdom to protect it from internal and external threats (Çayir, 2009). Kubal-Camoglu’s (1996) warnings of the dangers of the post-cold war era for the Turkish nation best capture the prominence of the Sèvres Syndrome:

More is being threatened by her internal as well as external enemies who are using the instability created in the global scene as a result of the demise of the bipolar world to re-establish goals as articulated in the Sèvres Treaty of 1919 (p. 305).

The belief in threats to the territorial integrity of the nation might serve to delegitimize genocide accusations as a conspiracy to destroy the nation. Turkey is not a unique case; often, existential threat is an important characteristic of national narratives of victimization (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). Threat is functional for groups as it enhances perceptions of common fate (e.g., Rothgerber, 1997) and elicits moral self-images and delegitimization of one’s adversaries (Bar-Tal, 2003). At the same time, it has the potential of escalating conflict and poses obstacles for conflict resolution, including conflicts in the aftermath of genocide and mass killings.

Positive attitudes toward violence in war legitimize violent actions toward groups perceived to undermine national security. The more war and violence are viewed as normative and acceptable solutions to a nation’s problems, the more likely it is that great harm inflicted on “enemy” populations can be justified. “Doing what is necessary” to protect one’s country implies use of any method, regardless of consequences. Interestingly, in the path analysis, attitudes toward war were the only precursor that had a direct (negative) effect on support for reparations. That is, independent of the interpretation of specific incidents (e.g.,
Armenian massacres), the more people view violence in war to be legitimate, the less they support reparatory actions.

The path model indicated that acknowledgment of in-group responsibility, more than the other aspects of attributions, elicited support for reparations of harm inflicted on Armenians. This result is in line with Cohrs et al.’s (2003) findings that denial of in-group responsibility was the most crucial aspect of moral disengagement mechanisms related to attitudes toward the United States’ war in Afghanistan. However, it is important to note that in this study the three targets of responsibility were highly correlated; there was little unique variance left to account for relations between out-group and external responsibility and the dependent variable.

One important limitation of this study was that the sample included Turks living in the United States. Therefore, it is unclear how the findings of this research generalize to Turks living in Turkey. On one hand, Turks living in the United States are likely to encounter alternative narratives that might provide new perspectives beyond government-sponsored narratives of the events. On the other hand, such narratives might also be particularly threatening to Turks who live outside the country, away from the support of Turkish communities—thereby leading to increased endorsement of the official Turkish narrative.

In concluding, the current research considered the construction of Armenian massacres to be rooted in a broader “master narrative” (see Hammack, 2009) of the Turkish nation. In studying psychological reactions to genocide and mass killing, it is important to consider narratives that go beyond the specific violent acts. Each historical event is situated within a broader representation of a nation’s history (i.e., its national narrative), therefore people’s reactions to historical events should be understood within the context of that national narrative. Additionally, social psychological factors such as in-group glorification, attitudes toward war, and perceived national threat, in addition to their psychological significance, were considered to be markers of this national narrative. Thus, psychologists should go beyond explanations that use only internal psychological processes to also account for the influence of cultural frameworks on social psychological phenomena. This analysis suggests that interventions to address historical mass violence—for instance, to increase acknowledgment of harm and support for amends for the wrong done—might be most effective if they target historical and cultural narratives (Bilewicz & Jaworska, 2013), as well as by introducing new narratives and social norms (Paluck, 2009).

References


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