JOURNAL OF SOCIAL ISSUES

A Journal
Society for the
Psychological Study
of Social Issues

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The Aftermath of Genocide: History as a Proximal Cause

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The current volume represents a crucial first step in examining how past genocidal attacks continue to affect present intergroup relations, and what psychology can offer to help heal the wounds and prevent future violence. Studying the social psychology of genocide's aftermath, in all its messy, real-world complexity, has not been as popular a topic in the intergroup relations literature. This volume begins to correct that neglect, presenting models for how to incorporate both basic theory and historical context into research on the aftermath of intergroup violence. Future work continuing in this tradition should also continue to seek out multidisciplinary collaborations to study genocide's aftermath.

The current volume represents a crucial first step in examining how past genocidal attacks continue to affect present intergroup relations, and what psychology can offer to help heal the wounds and prevent future violence. It is difficult to exaggerate the worth or seriousness of this topic. Yet social psychologists—even those focused on understanding prejudice and intergroup relations—have tended to shy away from studying genocide's aftermath in all its messy, real-world complexity. This volume begins to correct that neglect, presenting models for how to incorporate both basic theory and historical context into research on the aftermath of intergroup violence.

In this commentary, we highlight a common theme that threads through all of the articles: how past relationships between members of victim and perpetrator

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groups shape contemporary group identity and intergroup attitudes. For victim groups, conflicting motives lead to ambivalence about remembering versus distancing themselves from the past. By contrast, perpetrator group members tend to seek distance from the past or even to deny that any atrocity occurred. But either response, embracing, or running from the past creates continuing effects. The past continues to cast a shadow on the present. We conclude with a call to arms—or, more accurately, a call to link arms through multidisciplinary collaborations to study genocide's aftermath. We suggest that social psychologists seek out research partners ranging from the clinical psychologists on another floor, to the historians and political scientists across campus, to local scholars and activists situated within nations affected by past genocidal conflicts.

The Past and the Present

Social psychologists' emphasis on proximal situational causes, manipulated within carefully constructed laboratory conditions, is deeply embedded in the field's ethos. This approach has been highly successful as social psychologists have deftly shown the surprising explanatory power of the immediate situation. Iconic research in intergroup relations, such as Sherifs' (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961) work on boys in a summer camp and Tajfel's (1970) minimal group experiments, has revealed how intergroup conflict can be created absent any historical hostility or a prior group identity, between groups created on the thinnest of pretexts. Such approaches have not only allowed for tightly controlled tests of causal hypotheses, but the development of broadly applicable theories that show considerable utility for understanding real-world conflicts.

The current volume does not reject these past approaches; indeed, the authors represented here make ample and appropriate use of theories that were developed via controlled studies with experimentally created groups. At the same time, this volume stands as a needed corrective, calling for social psychologists to test and refine theories that were painstakingly developed in the laboratory within real-world contexts with a history of extreme intergroup conflict. Why? Because as social psychologists well know, context matters. In intergroup relationships, context incorporates not only proximal variables, but a past that becomes the lens through which current intergroup identities, emotions, narratives, and relations are perceived (e.g., Brown, Gonzalez, Zagefka, Manzi, & Čehajić, 2008; Wohl, Branscombe, & Klar, 2006).

While we are not calling on psychologists to become historians, a central theme revealed in the current volume is that the *past lives on in the present*. In other words, even the ancient past can represent a proximal cause, because group members' beliefs about the past strongly influence their current intergroup attitudes and behavior. In many cases, this perceived past (i.e., group members'

beliefs and narratives about the past) stretches back much further than a recent genocidal attack to centuries and even millennia of intergroup tensions and periodic bouts of violence.

All articles in this volume explore the psychological relationship between past and present, revealing mechanisms by which the past, whether through remembrance or defensive denial, reverberates in the present. Proximal events, some of which outsiders might view as trivial, can initiate extreme reactions because they resonate with narratives about the past. For example, an intergroup incident that symbolically evokes past conflict can reactivate threat and suspicion that elicit intense hostility. Unfortunately, when the past reasserts itself in the present, both perpetrator and victim groups experience threats (though in different forms) that spark defensive reactions, creating obstacles to reconciliation.

Together, the research presented in this volume seems to suggest that members of victim groups experience an ambivalent relationship to the past, arising from conflicting motives. For example, justice motives demand remembrance, as well as that other groups (both perpetrators and bystanders) recognize and acknowledge the victim group's suffering (e.g., Schnabel & Nadler, 2008). But remembrance is also painful, posing threats to positive group identity and perceived control over future outcomes. Thus, victimized group members may often feel the contradictory tugs of approach and avoidance. This ambivalent relationship to the past can create tensions in present-day victim ingroup identity and intergroup attitudes (discussed below). By contrast, perpetrator group members have little incentive to acknowledge the past and strong motivation to create psychological distance from, minimize, reframe, or outright deny past harm-doing by their group. The differences in victim and perpetrator groups' relationship to the past create barriers for reconciliation efforts.

Within victim groups, the past lives on most vividly for individuals who directly experienced the trauma of genocidal attack. Kaplan's (2013) article poignantly describes how survivors relive trauma on a daily basis, through flashbacks and posttraumatic stress, leading to difficulty regulating their affective reactions. Survivors require intensive, individualized clinical treatment to reconstruct their lives. But, as Pearlman (2013) suggests, individual treatment must be accompanied by a community psychology approach. This approach links individual treatment to community-based healing to promote reengagement and reconciliation. Such efforts are necessary when trauma results from group processes, and is especially critical when victimized and perpetrator groups continue to live in close proximity.

But even when the temporal and physical distance from past conflict increases, the centrality of past events to victimized groups' identities may be amplified rather than recede. Klar, Shori-Eyal, and Klar (2013) show the continuing, often contradictory effects the Holocaust has on Israelis' contemporary identity, and they document how the Holocaust's influence has intensified rather than decreased

over time. The vast majority of Israelis did not personally experience the traumas of the Holocaust, but this group-based, vicarious victimization experience plays a fundamental role in Israeli identity. Israeli Jews' ambivalent relationship to the past is evident in tensions within contemporary Israeli identity. Holocaust remembrance not only creates solidarity within the group, as well as with other victimized groups, but also strongly motivates Israelis to reject a continuing "victim" identity (e.g., vowing never again to be passive victims). These conflicting responses to past victimization lead to polarized intergroup attitudes and behavior among contemporary Israelis, such as motivating help-giving toward other victimized groups, but also a hard-line stance against groups like the Palestinians, who are perceived as a contemporary threat.

Similarly, Vollhardt (2013) shows how representations of their own group's past victimization influences Jewish students' attitudes and behavior toward other victimized groups in contemporary conflicts (in this case, Darfur). The manner in which reminders of the past are framed can lead to more or less empathy for other victimized groups. Vollhardt finds that victim groups need others to acknowledge their group's particular suffering within more "superordinate," inclusive narratives about genocide as a crime against humanity. The implied denial of the particularity of Jews' victimization in these superordinate narratives about the Holocaust creates defensive reactions among Jews and, in turn, psychological distancing from other victimized groups. By contrast, when others acknowledge the particularity of Jewish suffering in the context of these superordinate narratives, Jewish students show increased desire to help other victimized groups.

Remembering the past can also create tension for current group identity and extreme intergroup attitudes among members of perpetrator groups. However, while victim group members experience conflicting motives to both embrace and avoid the past, perpetrator groups tend simply to distance themselves from the past (Peetz, Gunn, & Wilson, 2010). Just as acknowledging personal past harm-doing represents a threat to a moral and positive self-identity, acknowledging that one's group has caused harm represents a threat to a positive, moral ingroup identity. And just as individuals use a variety of mechanisms to justify harm they personally have caused—by denying or minimizing the damage or by blaming others (e.g., the victim; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007)—research in this volume demonstrates the myriad ways in which members of perpetrator groups minimize or deny harm to protect their group identity.

Indeed, as we write, a new French law criminalizing denial of the Armenian genocide has created a serious rift in relations between France and Turkey (LA Times, 2011). Bilali (2013) shows how Turkish students in the United States (despite their experiences outside their own country) adhere to the Turkish government's official position that vigorously denies that Armenians were victims of a Turkish genocide campaign. She further illuminates psychological mechanisms that contribute to this denial, all related to the goal of maintaining a positive group

identity. Importantly, this research illuminates how denial represents not only a way to glorify the ingroup, but also a response to perceived continuing threat from outgroups. Indeed, perceived threat can lead members of perpetrator groups to see themselves as victims rather than as harm-doers. Almost two-thirds of Turkish students in Bilali's sample believed that Armenians and Turks harmed each other equally; more strikingly, a notable minority (10%) believed that the Turks were victims of the Armenians.

It is tempting to view the Turks' denial as a special case, but Leach, Zeineddine, and Čehajić-Clancy (2013) argue otherwise. Their careful review of prior research shows that even when governments officially recognize and apologize for past atrocities toward victim groups, individuals within those nations rarely express strong feelings of shame, guilt, or responsibility, and rarely support reparations. As the past recedes, denial of and distancing from colonialization, mass violence, and genocide increases (e.g., "Why should I feel responsible or pay for atrocities committed by past generations?"). While governments may experience outside pressure to acknowledge past wrong-doing (e.g., as the Turkish government, though still recalcitrant, has been pressured by the European Union), most individuals within these nations or groups may experience little compunction about denying or distancing themselves from the ingroup's past wrongs.

The impulse to deny that one's group has ever caused harm creates a thorny problem for attempts at reconciliation. Put simply, members of perpetrator groups are threatened by reminders that their group has harmed others and, in turn, react defensively. Thus, attempts to raise consciousness about past harm-doing—a crucial first step toward reconciliation and reparation—can backfire. Specifically, Kofta and Sławuta (2013) show that reminders of Polish massacres of Jews during the Holocaust led to increased dehumanization of Jews, unless non-Jewish Poles were first reminded of their cultural similarities with Polish Jews. In the latter case, raising awareness of prior harm-doing led to more positive attitudes and behavioral intentions toward Jews.

Similarly, Imhoff, Wohl, and Erb (2013) demonstrate that Germans readily take advantage of information that allows them to minimize past atrocities. Being told that the victimized group is currently doing well diminishes collective guilt and the perceived need for reparations among perpetrator group members. While this result might suggest that it is crucial to emphasize continued suffering among victim groups, prior research by the first author (Imhoff & Banse, 2009) showed that such reminders can initiate defensive motivations and thereby increase (rather than reduce) prejudice among members of perpetrator groups. Clearly, more research is needed to determine how to short-circuit such defensive reactions. Kofta and Sławuta's (2013) article suggests a moderator variable that could undermine defensiveness: inclusion of the victim group in a shared superordinate category (e.g., they are like us). This suggestion recalls Vollhardt's (2013) cautionary lesson, however, that messages portraying the victim and perpetrator group in one

superordinate category without acknowledging their distinct history and suffering might not benefit the victim group.

Bilewicz and Jaworska (2013) nicely encapsulate the ways in which both victim and perpetrator group members are threatened by the past, as well as how each group's desired relationship to the past creates tensions in current intergroup relations. The topic of Polish complicity in the Holocaust elicits incompatible motives among contemporary Jewish and Polish students (despite their lack of direct experience with the Holocaust), which, without careful intervention, can undermine reconciliation. Bilewicz and Jaworska created a way to avoid defensiveness among Poles, for whom the past threatens a moral self-image and who anticipate hostility from members of the victimized group. Specifically, by inviting Israeli and Polish students to discuss narratives about Poles who heroically helped Jews, both groups were able to approach the past with fewer feelings of threat, leading to more positive intergroup outcomes.

In his contribution, Staub (2013) provides a more general framework for such reconciliation interventions, as well as for early prevention of genocide. His account also centers around needs and threat, specifically universal human psychological needs for security, effectiveness and control, a positive identity, positive connections to other people, autonomy, and for understanding the world and one's place in it. Under difficult life conditions when these needs are threatened, violence escalates along a continuum and various forces are needed to halt escalation, including positive community institutions, early educational practices to teach children inclusive caring and moral courage, diplomacy, and the development of constructive and inclusive visions for a superordinate group future.

The authors in this volume have all successfully found ways to apply and develop basic psychological theory while taking account of the particular history of relations between real-world (not laboratory-created) groups. We both applaud this feat and urge others to emulate the examples provided here. Sensitivity to historical context will help to ensure that psychologists who want to make a difference in the world (e.g., by promoting reconciliation in the face of severe intergroup conflict) do not apply basic theory inappropriately. While the current volume clearly illustrates the utility of basic theories developed and tested in controlled conditions with minimal groups, it also provides examples of moderator variables that reveal themselves only when researchers take history and culture into account. For example, many articles in this volume support the basic principle that groups seek positive ingroup identities. But, unlike newly created, artificial groups, the specific threats to positive identity differ for historically victimized versus perpetrator groups. Basic theory provides a general framework that can be applied to interventions, but successful interventions also require sensitivity to particularities of the past.

Careful examination of specific cases in which intergroup relations have a history of severe violence or attempted genocide can not only lead to better

intervention, but also to better theories. The needs-based model of reconciliation (Schnabel & Nadler, 2008), for example, represents a general theoretical model derived from careful, historically and culturally informed, analysis of a particular intergroup conflict. Similarly, Glick (2002) developed a general model of scapegoating by analyzing the particular historical circumstances that gave rise to Nazi anti-Semitism, revealing new insights into how scapegoats are chosen.

Social psychologists who are strongly invested in understanding the aftermath or continuation of a particular group conflict may be able to acquire sufficient historical and cultural knowledge on their own to inform new approaches. Alternatively, we encourage collaboration with scholars in other subfields and fields, or with community activists or policymakers grounded in the relevant setting. There are various forms that these collaborations might take, and different yields these collaborations could bear for theory and intervention.

For example, anthropology and sociology are two disciplines that could help psychologists to understand the ways in which particular groups' identities evolved and the current construals of those identities within a culture that has experienced mass violence or genocide. These collaborators may be informative from a distance, such as by providing the literature that psychologists read as they develop their hypotheses, or they might be excellent partners for discussing ways to build historically and politically appropriate complexity into some of the basic models from which psychologists begin. Anthropologists' and sociologists' interviewing skills also represent useful methodological expertise that can be brought to collaborations with psychologists as they test and develop their theories in messy real world contexts.

The complexity uncovered during these collaborations need not translate into theoretical complexity. For example, coming to grips with the historically situated and strategically deployed narratives regarding the conflict's heroes and martyrs (e.g., Bilewicz and Jaworska, 2013) can be commuted into a distilled understanding of different groups' contrasting needs for validation and reassurance. Moreover, collaborating with local activists, historians, and policy makers to construct a timeline of reactions to political, economic, and social developments in the aftermath of a conflict should be thought of as another form of hypothesis development and testing for ideas about the contingencies of trust, threat, or trauma among victim and perpetrator groups.

Collaborations such as these will surely be a two-way street. Scholars from other fields or subfields working on this topic are likely to be interested in social psychologists' research on the social contingency of identity and negative emotions, as well as the non-pathological processes through which identity and negative emotion persist over time. Social psychologists can also offer their unique understanding of the common needs and goals that drive seemingly pathological or self-defeating cycles of violence, and of the narratives, frames, and symbols that change the meaning of communications for different groups. As with any

cross-specialty collaboration, the simple act of communicating ideas to nonspe-cialists can push social psychologists to identify potential boundaries of their theories, spurring further theory development.

The contributions from this current volume are models for the integration of historical, anthropological, political, and other kinds of perspectives with social psychological theory. The integration is methodological as well as theoretical. The authors have constructed an ordered, strong framework on which future research programs can build, serving as a template for a deeper engagement with the aftermath of seemingly incomprehensible acts of mass violence and genocide.

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