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Why does identity matter? A Two-Path Model to Intergroup Forgiveness via In-group Bias and Outgroup Blame

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Abstract. *In-group and superordinate identities are key predictors for intergroup forgiveness, albeit with opposite effects. To investigate the identity-forgiveness relationship, we included perceived compatibility between in-group and superordinate identities as a predictor; and tested in-group bias and outgroup attributions of responsibility as mediators. As respective parties of an armed conflict in Turkey, Turkish majority and Kurdish minority respondents (N = 227) were interviewed in Turkey and Belgium. The results supported the path through in-group bias for all groups: in-group (Turkish/Kurdish) identity was associated with more bias and in turn less forgiveness; superordinate (Turkish citizenship) identity was associated with less bias and in turn more forgiveness. Compatibility, however, was associated with less bias only for the Kurdish minority. The path through outgroup blame was significant only for the Turkish majority: in-group identity predicted more outgroup blame and in turn less forgiveness. Theoretical and practical implications of these pathways to forgiveness are discussed.*

Keywords: Identity compatibility; intergroup forgiveness; in-group bias; outgroup blame; in-group identity; superordinate identity

In today's world, most countries are plural societies composed of different ethnic, racial or religious groups between whom there are pervasive cleavages, and often a past history of intergroup conflict or a potential for it (Neuberg et al., 2014). Intergroup conflicts affect those countries devastated by prolonged (armed) conflict between different groups and those more developed countries, for instance with an inflight of refugees. Even when the conflict is over, the hostility between groups remain, creating the potential for future conflicts. Recently, researchers, recognizing the value of intergroup forgiveness for reducing the negative effects of such transgressions, have studied its antecedents (e.g., McLernon, Cairns, & Hewstone 2002; Van Tongeren, Burnette, O'Boyle, Worthington, & Forsyth, 2014 for review).

Across several studies, ingroup identity emerges as a constraining factor for intergroup forgiveness: the more people identify with their ingroup, the less likely they are to forgive outgroup who they think perpetrated a harmful act towards them (Van Tongeren et al., 2014). Studies also show that if groups perceive themselves as part of a common overarching identity, superordinate identity (Gaertner & Dovidio 2000), this may facilitate intergroup forgiveness (Van Tongeren et al., 2014). There are two important research lacunas in the literature. First, whether superordinate identity is perceived compatible versus conflicting with the ingroup identity has not been studied. Secondly, the processes through which identity influences intergroup forgiveness have not been empirically established.

To address these issues, this study focuses on ingroup identity, superordinate identity and perceived compatibility between these two as predictors for intergroup forgiveness. Two paths are proposed to mediate the identity-forgiveness relationship: favouring the ingroup over the outgroup (i.e., ingroup bias) and attributing the whole responsibility of harm to the outgroup (i.e., outgroup blame). This study focuses on the ongoing conflict between the Kurdish minority, as one of the biggest disadvantaged minorities in Turkey, and the Turkish majority group members. Moreover, since the intergroup conflict between Turks and Kurds often spread to European countries, we investigate to what extent Turks and Kurds in diaspora (i.e., Belgium) have similar attitudes towards forgiveness in Turkey.

The context: The Turkish-Kurdish conflict

Kurds make up 15-20% of the whole population (KONDA 2006; Sirkeci 2005). The conflict between the Turkish majority and the Kurdish minority groups can be traced back to foundation of Turkish Republic in 1923. After the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the new Turkish state was founded on the ideals of national unity, with Turkish as the national language and the ethnic Turks as the founders of this new state. The recognition of different minority groups or their cultural rights has been largely neglected for a long time in Turkey. The current armed conflict between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the state dates back to 1980s. Nearly 30.000 people have been killed in this conflict, which mostly took place in the southeast part of Turkey.

The intergroup conflict between Turks and Kurds often spreads to European countries. We focus on Belgium, as an exemplary case where immigrants from Turkey are one of biggest immigrants groups, making up 1.5% of the population. Although there is not much research, or statistics thereof, about different ethnic groups who migrated from Turkey to Belgium, the intergroup conflict between Turks and Kurds often shows itself in Belgium through riots and protests ("Belgium Kurds" 2013; "Riot in Belgium" 2010). It would thus be interesting to investigate across both countries to what extent similar processes predict intergroup forgiveness concerning the conflict in Turkey.

Antecedents of Intergroup forgiveness

Identity. One of the basic assumptions of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner 1986) is that people who identify with a group are more likely to positively differentiate this ingroup over outgroups in terms of attitudes and behavior (i.e., ingroup bias). Ingroup identification, the theory predicts, does not necessarily lead to derogation of an outgroup (e.g., Brewer 1999). In on-going or post-conflict situations, however, ingroup identification would not only be connected to ingroup bias, but also would be considered antithetical to any positive evaluations or behaviors towards the outgroup (Brown, 2000). Studies show that ingroup identification predicts reduced intentions for intergroup forgiveness (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi & Lewis, 2008) and increased outgroup attributions of responsibility for harm-doing (Bilali, Tropp & Dasgupta 2012; Licata, Klein, Saade, Azzi & Branscombe 2012).

Superordinate Identity. According to Common Ingroup Identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio 2000), if members of different groups perceive themselves as an inclusive superordinate group, rather than as two completely separate groups, the former outgroup members would now be seen as ingroup members and the bias against them should lessen. Several field and laboratory studies show that naturally-occurring or induced identification with a superordinate identity- that is inclusive of the ingroup identities- reduces ingroup bias (Davidio, Gaertner, & Saguy 2007) and blame for harm-doing (Licata et al., 2012) and increases positive behaviors such as intergroup forgiveness (Čehajić, Brown, & Castano, 2008; Noor et al., 2008).

Compatibility versus Conflict. A superordinate identity is not always perceived all-embracing, and when it is not, it does not lead to the expected positive outcomes (e.g., Pehr-

son, Brown, & Zagefka, 2009). It is important to consider whether the ingroup identity is perceived compatible with the superordinate identity. There are various ways of studying compatibility. First, one might consider the correlations between ingroup and superordinate identities, ranging from negative (e.g.,Cinnirella, 1997) to positive (Noor et al., 2008), to no correlation. By looking at Protestant and Catholic groups in Northern Ireland, Noor and colleagues (2008) found that for Protestants, identifying with the religious sect (ingroup identity) and with Northern Ireland (superordinate identity) were positively correlated but not for Catholics, and only for the latter superordinate identity was related to enhanced intergroup forgiveness.

Secondly, representations of a superordinate identity can be studied. If national identity as a superordinate identity is defined as exclusive of immigrants –i.e., an ethnic representation of national identity- it exacerbates prejudice (Pehrson, Vignoles, & Brown, 2009). Finally, one can study perceived compatibility more directly by asking to what extent people perceive compatibility vs. conflict between these two identities. Sindic and Reicher (2009) studied Scottish participants' attitudes towards the English: perceived compatibility between Scottish and English identity predicted less separatist attitudes. They have not looked at English people's attitudes towards Scottish people.

In the present context, Turks and Kurds have their ethnic ingroup identities, Turk and Kurd respectively; they also share a superordinate identity, i.e., citizenship of Turkey. We expect that stronger ingroup identity (Turkish for Turkish majority and Kurdish for Kurdish minority group) should be associated with increased ingroup bias and outgroup blame, and with decreased intergroup forgiveness while stronger superordinate identity should be associated with reduced ingroup bias and outgroup blame and increased intergroup forgiveness. As for the compatibility, the Turkish citizenship identity, as a superordinate identity, strongly connotes the Turkish ethnic origin; much like German superordinate identity connotes the German ethnic origin. Among Turks, ingroup and superordinate identities should thus be perceived more compatible than those among Kurds. Moreover, the meaning of perceived compatibility changes for the two groups. We reason that for Kurds, perceived compatibility between these two identities may suggest inclusion (feeling included) in the superordinate identity and be related to enhanced intergroup forgiveness. For Turks there are two plausible outcomes: (1) as these two identities are potentially compatible, further increases in perceived compatibility might be negligibly small, in that case it would be less relevant for intergroup forgiveness; or (2) further increases in perceived compatibility might indicate endorsement of a more exclusive understanding of the superordinate identity, which then should be related to reduced intergroup forgiveness.

Two paths to intergroup forgiveness: Ingroup bias and Outgroup blame as Mediators

Ingroup and superordinate identities are established predictors for intergroup outcomes including intergroup forgiveness (Van Tongeren et al., 2014). However, no study to our knowledge tested potential mediators for the identity-forgiveness relationship. According to social identity theory, social identity might affect intergroup outcomes either through favoring the ingroup or through derogating the outgroup (Brewer 1999; Brown 2000).

Regarding the former path, several studies demonstrate support for the identity-bias relationship: In group identity increases positive evaluation of the in group over outgroup, while superordinate identification reduces it (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). But why should ingroup bias be associated with intergroup forgiveness? In group bias helps maintenance of self-esteem to achieve a positive social identity (Brown, 2000) but it has also instrumental and social functions such as changing group status via collective action (Scheepers, Spears, Doosje & Manstead, 2006). If so, ingroup bias might be expected to affect intergroup outcomes especially when groups feel under threat (Scheepers et al., 2006). In an intergroup

conflict where groups might feel under threat, then, ingroup bias might predict intergroup forgiveness. As the routes towards forgiveness and collective action are considered antithetical (Dixon, Tropp, Durrheim, & Tredoux. 2010; Greenaway, Quinn, & Louis, 2011) and bias would increase collective action, ingroup bias should be related to less forgiveness.

For the other path through outgroup blame, there is support for both the relationship between identity and outgroup blame and that between blame and intergroup outcomes (Licata et al., 2012; Bilali et al., 2012). Ingroup identity predicts placing more responsibility on outgroups which is then used to legitimize negative intergroup attitudes. Licata and colleagues (2012), looking at the Christians in Lebanon, showed that ingroup identification as Christian predicted placing more responsibility on the outgroup Muslims; while superordinate identification as Lebanese predicted placing less responsibility on Muslims; and in turn outgroup blame predicted more negative intergroup attitudes. They did not test intergroup forgiveness as the outcome or consider both groups' attitudes towards each other.

Overall, we propose a two-path model to explain the relationship between ingroup and superordinate identities and intergroup forgiveness: through increasing ingroup bias and/or outgroup blame. The question of whether the effect of perceived compatibility on forgiveness would be explained by the same paths is exploratory as there is not much research on the topic. However, to the extent that perceived compatibility leads to positive intergroup outcomes (Sindic & Reicher, 2009) and that it means inclusion to the superordinate identity, at least for the minority group, it should lead to increased intergroup forgiveness through reduced in group bias and outgroup blame.

Method

Respondents

A total of 227 Turkish and Kurdish group members in Turkey (Turk n = 40, 20% female; Kurd n = 75, 33% female) and in Belgium (Turk n = 46, 52% female; Kurd n = 66, 29% female) participated in the study in 2012. Their age ranged between 17 to 51 years (two-thirds younger than 34). Most were highly-educated (51% university students or graduates) from big cities. We selectively focused on big cities. Istanbul hosts the largest group of the Kurdish minority in Turkey, an estimated 2 million (KONDA, 2006). Similarly, Turkish and Kurdish immigrants in Belgium are concentrated predominantly in urban areas.

Measures

Ingroup and Superordinate identities. Respondents indicated separately to what extent they felt committed to their respective ingroup (Turkish identity for Turks, Kurdish identity for Kurds) and to Turkish citizenship identity (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *very strongly)*. Both identities were uncorrelated for Kurds, and significantly correlated for Turks, $r(85) = .51$, $p < .001$.

Perceived compatibility. It was measured with a single item adapted from Verkuyten and Martinovic (2012): 'to what extent being Turk (Kurd for Kurds) and Turkish citizen is compatible or incompatible?' (seven-point scale from 1= *very incompatible* to 7 = *very compatible)*. For Kurds, it was significantly correlated with Turkish citizenship, $r(137) = .22$, $p = .009$. For Turks, it was significantly correlated with both Turkish citizenship, $r(85) = .32$, $p = .003$ and Turkish in group identity, $r(85) = .43$, $p < .001$

Ingroup bias. It was measured using a feeling thermometer: respondents indicated their overall feeling toward their own group as well as toward outgroup on a scale ranging from 0 (*extremely unfavorable*) to 10 (*extremely favorable*). Ingroup bias was then calculated by subtracting outgroup from in group ratings, higher scores indicating higher ingroup bias. This is a widely-used measure of ingroup bias (e.g., Schmid, Hewstone, Tausch, Cairns & Hughes, 2009). The correlation between ingroup bias and outgroup attributions was significant for Kurds $r(141) = .25$, $p = .002$, and trend significant for Turks, $r(86) = .19$, $p = .079$.

Outgroup blame. Respondents indicated in an open-ended format whom they thought

were responsible for the conflict. An inspection of the analyses by three independent experts yielded three response categories: own group, outgroup or external forces like Europe or America. Since we were especially interested in the outgroup evaluation path, in the analysis, we only used a dummy-coded attribution measure: blaming outgroup vs. others. Among Kurds, 78% placed responsibility on Turks, while among Turks only 21% blamed Kurds[1].

Intergroup forgiveness. It was measured by 5 items (Moeschberger, Dixon, Niens & Cairns, 2005). Example items were 'It is important that my group never forgives the wrongs done to us by the other community' (reverse coded), 'only when the two groups in Turkey learn to forgive each other can we be free of political violence'. Answers were given on a seven-point scale (*strongly disagree-strongly agree*). Scale was reliable: Turks $\alpha = .79$, Kurds $\alpha = .69$.

Controls. Age ($M = 26$, $SD = 7$), gender (34% female) and education (42% high school, 51% university) were dropped from the analysis as they did not have significant effects.

Results

A four-group path model was estimated (Turks in Turkey, Kurds in Turkey, Turks in Belgium, Kurds in Belgium) using Mplus 5.21 (Muthén & Muthén, 2009). For model modification, comparison, and evaluation, formal indices of global and local fit were complemented with conventional fit indices (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The final model (see Figure 1) had a good fit: $\chi^2(25) = 19.65$; $p = .77$; RMSEA = .00; CFI =1.00. Most hypothesized effects were set equal across groups, which did not yield a significantly worse model fit compared to the unconstrained model $\Delta\chi^2(23) = 17.20$, $p = .80$, supporting the presence of similar effects across groups.

The path through ingroup bias. For both the minority and majority groups, ingroup identity was associated with increased ingroup bias, while superordinate identity was associated with reduced ingroup bias (Figure 1).

Perceived compatibility between these two identities led to less ingroup bias but only for

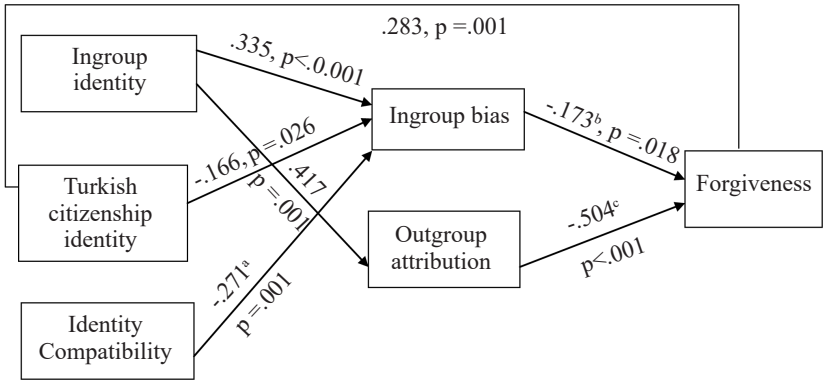


Figure 1. The two-path model to intergroup forgiveness

Note. The model shows standardized effects for the final model. Unless indicated otherwise, the effects are equal across all groups. [a] Only significant for Kurdish groups [b] Not significant in Turks in Belgium [c] Only significant for Turkish groups

[1] Few respondents mentioned more than one group as responsible parties. Since these cases were too few, they were re-analyzed; and depending on their explanations, they were either categorized into one of the groups (e.g., outgroup) or left missing. Four primary parties as outgroups (Kurds, Turks, the state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party) were further distinguished as blaming people (Turks/Kurds) versus the state/PKK. But this distinction did not have a significant effect and was thus dropped from the analysis.

the Kurdish minority. This effect could not be set equal across the minority and majority groups, on the basis of a significantly worse model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 8.25$, $p = .041$. Finally, ingroup bias was related to reduced intergroup forgiveness for all groups except for Turks in Belgium. This effect could not be set equal across all groups, on the basis of a significantly worse model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 7.87$, $p = .048$.

In support of the proposed mediation model, most indirect effects were significant. Indirect effect of ingroup identity on forgiveness through ingroup bias was significant and replicated across all groups, $Z = -2.065$, $p = 0.039$. Indirect effect of superordinate identity and that of compatibility was trend significant, $Z = 1.754$, $p = 0.079$, $Z = 1.904$, $p = 0.057$, respectively. The former was replicated across all groups but Turks in Belgium and the latter was replicated only across Kurdish minority groups.

The path through outgroup blame. For both the minority and majority groups, ingroup identity was associated with increased outgroup blame (Figure 1). Neither superordinate identity nor compatibility was associated with outgroup blame. Outgroup blame was associated with reduced intergroup forgiveness only for the Turkish groups. This effect could not be set equal on the basis of a significantly worse model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(3) = 9.35$, $p = .025$. As for the proposed path, only for the Turkish groups the indirect effect of ingroup identity on forgiveness was significant, $Z = -2.571$, $p = 0.010$.

The model explained more variance in intergroup forgiveness among the Turkish groups, but mainly through the path of outgroup blame. The explained variances for forgiveness, ingroup bias, and outgroup blame among the Turkish groups were 28%, 4%, 14% in Turkey and 26%, 9%, 18% in Belgium. For Kurdish groups, the model explained more variance through the path of ingroup bias. The explained variances for forgiveness, ingroup bias, and outgroup blame were: 10%, 16%, 3% in Turkey and 13%, 23%, 18% in Belgium.

Discussion

What fosters intergroup forgiveness has been an intriguing question to researchers and policy makers alike. Deriving from Common Ingroup Identity Model (Gaertner & Davidio 2000), ingroup and superordinate identities emerge as two important predictors for forgiveness, albeit with opposite effects. This

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Variables for Each Group

	Turk TR	Turk BE	Kurd TR	Kurd BE
		Within group means (SD)		
Ingroup identity	6.03 (1.61)[a]	6.11 (1.61)[a]	6.69 (0.59)[a]	6.06(1.88)[a]
Superordinate identity	6.05 (1.96)[a]	5.91 (1.53)[a]	3.21 (2.17)[b]	2.97 (2.48)[b]
Identity compatibility	5.71 (1.75)[a]	5.02 (2.05)[a]	2.32 (1.59)[b]	3.26 (1.80)[c]
Ingroup bias	0.30 (3.96)[a]	2.41 (3.45)[b]	4.20 (2.96)[c]	4.58 (3.20)[c]
Intergroup forgiveness	5.07 (1.33)[a]	5.17 (1.21)[a]	4.68 (1.48)[a]	5.07 (1.26)[a]
		Percentages		
Outgroup attributions vs. others	28%[a]	15%[a]	80%[b]	76%[b]

Note. The means with a different subscript are significantly different by Bonferroni test at $p < .05$. The percentages with a different subscript are significantly different by Pearson χ^2 at $p < .001$.

study had two major objectives. First, we focused on perceived compatibility between these identities and how it affected intergroup forgiveness. Second, we proposed and found support for two paths to explain the identity-intergroup forgiveness relationship: through ingroup bias and through outgroup blame.

In discussing our findings, four issues seem to be particularly noteworthy.

First, for both minority and majority groups, ingroup identity was associated directly with increased ingroup bias and outgroup blame, and indirectly with reduced intergroup forgiveness. Secondly, for both minority and majority groups, superordinate identity was associated directly with decreased ingroup bias and indirectly with increased intergroup forgiveness. Also, superordinate identity had a direct positive effect on intergroup forgiveness. These findings are in line with the expectations of Common Ingroup Identity model (Gaertner & Davidio, 2000) and replicates previous research focusing on ingroup and superordinate identities as predictors of intergroup forgiveness (Čehajić et al., 2008; Greenaway et al., 2011; Noor et al., 2008). Going beyond them, we also explicate the role of ingroup bias in the link between identities and intergroup forgiveness.

Second, perceived compatibility between these two identities was directly related to less ingroup bias and indirectly to more intergroup forgiveness, albeit only for Kurdish minority groups. To put it simply, to the extent Kurdish minorities perceived their Kurdish and Turkish citizenship identities as compatible, they were less biased and more forgiving. Rather than assuming superordinate identities are all-encompassing in real life, this finding highlights the importance of studying perceived compatibility as a separate empirical predictor and thus contributes to the literature on Common Ingroup Identity model and intergroup forgiveness. For Turkish majority group, on the other hand, perceived compatibility between Turkish and Turkish citizenship did not have a significant effect. This is probably because for Turkish group, these identities were perceived very compatible, and were positively correlated (Noor et al., 2008) and the mean level of compatibility was much higher (Table 1). This finding can be better understood if we make a distinction between identity (in)compatibility and complexity. Identity compatibility, though not received much attention, yields positive interpersonal (Iyer, Jetten, Tsivrikos, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009) and intergroup outcomes (Sindic & Reicher, 2009). Research on social identity complexity, however, regards overlapping identities as less complex and associates it with negative intergroup outcomes (Brewer & Pierce, 2005; Schmid et al, 2009; Verkuyten, & Martinoviç, 2012). Looking at multiple identities from a historical and geographical perspective, certain identities are considered more compatible (e.g., Turkish and Muslim identity, Verkuyten, & Martinovic, 2012) while certain others are considered potentially more incompatible (e.g., Muslim and gay identity, Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). The implication of perceived compatibility for these identities could be different. For potentially compatible identities, perceiving further compatibility might produce less complex identities and thus might be associated with negative intergroup outcomes (as in Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2012). However, for the potentially less compatible identities, like for Kurdish minority identity and Turkish citizenship identity in this study, or the Scottish identity and English identity in Sindic and Reicher (2009), compatibility might suggest inclusion in the superordinate identity and thus would be associated with more positive intergroup outcomes.

Thirdly, we found partial support for the proposed paths. While the path through ingroup bias was significant for all groups, the path through outgroup blame was only significant for the Turkish majority groups. One plausible explanation for this is the subtle agreement among minority and majority group members about who is responsible for the conflict: the majority group. Most Kurds in this study blamed Turks; while few Turks blamed Kurds. Blaming the outgroup was associated with reduced intergroup forgiveness among the majority group but not for the Kurdish minority. In other words, among

Kurds those few who did not blame the majority group were not necessarily more or less forgiving.

Finally, the path towards forgiveness was similar in Turkey and in Belgium. This is probably because immigrants from Turkey in Europe, in Belgium in particular, are strongly attached to their ethnic origin; they stay in closed communities, have strong ethnic ties and follow news and politics from Turkey (Phalet, Baysu, & van Acker 2015).Finding a similar model across Turkish and Belgian contexts externally validates our model and contributes to the understanding of the understudied conflict between Turks and Kurds in Belgium.

There are two main limitations of this study. Both Kurdish and Turkish respondents in this study were highly-educated and thus not representative of the respective populations. Although our findings among educated young people is still of great importance for the resolution of the intergroup conflict in Turkey, future studies should ideally include both educated and uneducated segments of society. An additional limitation of the study is the use of single indicators to assess identities and perceived compatibility. Although single indicator measures of group identification are commonly-used and were proved externally valid (Postmes, Haslam, & Jans, 2013), more elaborate composite measures would be required to see whether the findings generalize to different dimensions or components of group identities.

Overall, this research sheds light on the questions why and how ingroup and superordinate identities affect intergroup forgiveness and why perceived compatibility between ingroup and superordinate identities matters. It also highlights potential pathways to forgiveness for an on-going conflict. The armed conflict between the Kurdish minority and the Turkish majority groups has been going on more than 30 years, during which many people died and so many loved ones and victims were left behind. We hope that the findings of this research contribute to the peace process in Turkey and elsewhere in the world.

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