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After the Genocide: Psychological Perspectives on Victim, Bystander, and Perpetrator Groups

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Interest in the aftermath of genocide and mass violence has increased in the last few years, and some researchers in various subdisciplines of psychology have begun to address this urgent social issue. Genocide and mass violence continue to influence intergroup relations, conflicts, and policy attitudes. Nevertheless, these topics are still understudied. We introduce this issue by providing a brief overview of the scarce psychological research on the aftermath of genocide among members of former victim, perpetrator, and bystander groups. Although this distinction is too simplistic to explain individual behavior during genocide and its aftermath, we hold on to it as a framework for organizing existing scholarship, and because of the ongoing relevance of these social representations in discourse on this topic. The introduction concludes with an overview of the issue and its organization, including a brief summary of each article.

More than 60 years ago, the United Nations defined genocide as a crime with the intention to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Since then, social scientists and historians have contributed significantly to our understanding of genocide: by explaining its roots, describing its dynamics, and discussing its consequences (Fein, 2002; Newman & Erber, 2002; Staub, 1989). The UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide created important tools for punishing perpetrators of genocidal crimes; however, it failed to prevent genocide in the decades thereafter. This is why researchers studying genocide are confronted not only with historical cases such

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as the Armenian genocide (1915–1917) and the Holocaust during World War II, but also with more recent events such as genocides in Cambodia in the 1970s, Bosnia in 1992–1995, Rwanda in 1994, Darfur, and others.

These recent cases are not the only reason why genocide affects present-day politics and intergroup relations. Historical genocide continues to deeply impact relations between nations and between ethnic groups. For example, the Armenian Genocide Resolution, recently passed by the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, has led to tensions in American−Turkish relations (McKinnon & Champion, 2010); and the Katyn Forrest massacre remains the greatest obstacle in Polish−Russian relations, for example, shaping Polish reactions to the recent air disaster in Smolensk (Hunter, 2010). These are only two of many cases in which collective memories of genocide and cultural trauma in general (Alexander, Eyerman, Giesen, Sztompka, & Smelser, 2004) shape collective identities and political responses of ethnic groups and nations, such as in Israel (Zertal, 2005), Germany (Fulbrook, 1999), or Armenia (Miller, 1999). National identities are built around symbolic commemorations of the past and the narratives of victims as well as of perpetrators. Motivated denial of these memories sometimes serves to restore moral self-image among national groups that were once involved in a genocide as bystanders or perpetrators. Accordingly, such denial was used as a strategy to build national identities in Poland (Steinlauf, 1997), Ukraine (Bartov, 2007), Rwanda (Lemarchand, 2009), and several other countries. At the same time, postgenocidal guilt and forgiveness are equally important for understanding current relations between Germans, Poles, and Jews in Europe; Turks, Armenians, and Azeris in the Caucasus region; Tutsis and Hutus in East Africa; as well as many other groups around the world (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004). In sum, the impact of historical genocide and mass violence on current social and political issues cannot be underestimated, and it is heavily influenced by psychological reactions among members of former victim, bystander, and perpetrator groups. The aim of this issue is to highlight the role that psychology has to play in explaining intergroup relations, policies, and other social issues shaped by genocidal pasts.

Psychological Research on Genocide

Genocide as a significant social issue has been tackled by some psychologists. Books such as "The roots of evil: The origins of genocide and other group violence" by Ervin Staub (1989), "The Nazi doctors: Medical killing and the psychology of genocide" by Robert J. Lifton (1986), "Man's search for meaning" by Viktor Frankl (1984), and "The altruistic personality" by Samuel and Pearl Oliner (1988) became key readings in the field of genocide studies, inspiring researchers from several disciplines. The history of genocides, and particularly of the Holocaust, has also stimulated basic social psychological scholarship. In addition to research on obedience (Milgram, 1974), the atrocities committed during World War II have

also influenced research on intergroup discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), dehumanization (Bandura, 1999; Kelman, 1973), delegitimization (Bar-Tal, 1990), moral exclusion (Opotow, 1990), and role-based aggression (Zimbardo, 2007). In several social psychology textbooks, the Holocaust is presented as a result of basic psychological processes of stereotyping, prejudice, conformity, and social identity (e.g., Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2006; Hogg & Vaughan, 2004; Smith & Mackie, 2007). Nevertheless, within the field of psychology, genocide in and of itself remains a rather marginal and understudied issue. This is due, at least in part, to the methodological and practical challenges of studying this topic, which does not lend itself easily to experimental research or even to survey research, and which requires integrating historical sources and other materials and methods that are less commonly used in current (mainstream) psychological research.

The Perpetrator–Victim–Bystander Triangle in Research on Genocide

Most scholars distinguish three major social roles in genocide: perpetrators, bystanders, and victims (Hilberg, 1993). However important these social categories are, they do not provide sufficient information about individual behavior and the multiplicity of roles in times of genocide. These roles are indeed complex and often not as clear-cut as the literature suggests. For example, some members of perpetrator groups perceive themselves as victims (Čehajić & Brown, 2010), while many victims retaliated against perpetrators in armed struggle (Robins & Jones, 2009), and many bystanders were also victims (Steinlauf, 1997) while others were violent co-perpetrators (Gross, 2001). In addition, some individuals even occupied all three roles during the same genocide (Bauman, 2000; Perechodnik, 1996). Acknowledging these contradictions and complexities, we continue to use the bystander–perpetrator–victim triangle because most psychological research on genocide and its aftermath addresses these distinct social roles (e.g., Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009; Staub, 1989; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005), and this framework can be used to organize existing research on this topic. However, it is important to view these distinctions merely as social representations of positions in genocide, and not as explanations for individual behavior of those to whom these roles are ascribed. Several contributions in this issue discuss the fluidity of these roles that needs to be kept in mind when using these seemingly entitative (see Lickel et al., 2000) terms.

Psychological Research on the Aftermath of Genocide

While some seminal work by psychologists and other social scientists has addressed how genocide evolves (see Newman & Erber, 2002), in recent years there has been an increasing interest in the aftermath of genocide and mass violence. This has been stimulated by attempts to redress historical injustices and human

rights abuses, for example, through international war crime tribunals or truth and reconciliation commissions (Barkan, 2000). Psychology can contribute a lot to these discussions, which have practical implications for reconciliation and the prevention of violence. Nevertheless, research in this area is still scarce.

Psychological research on the aftermath of genocide can also be organized along the social roles of previous victim, perpetrator, and bystander groups. This research is located in various subdisciplines of psychology such as social, clinical, and community psychology. In the following, we provide a brief overview of topics that have been studied in this underresearched field, and point to unexplored areas that are addressed in this issue.

Psychological Research among Perpetrator Groups in the Aftermath of Genocide

Recent research on psychological consequences of genocide among perpetrator groups has focused on positive and negative appraisals of historical victim groups. Descendants of perpetrator groups tend to exonerate their ancestors' misdeeds. When explaining historical crimes, descendants of perpetrator groups often use biased attributions. They perceive historical crimes as caused by situational factors and as unstable, and the perpetrator groups as highly variable (Doosje & Branscombe, 2003). This bias in explaining historical genocide fits to the pattern of ethnocentric explanations of intergroup behavior, known as the ultimate attribution error (Pettigrew, 1979). Another exonerating strategy among descendants of perpetrator groups is to blame historical victims for their fate (Lerner, 1980). In a similar vein, Imhoff and Banse (2009) showed that reminders of ongoing Jewish suffering after the Holocaust elicit implicit anti-Semitic resentment among contemporary Germans. Thus, prejudice may serve as a strategy to distance oneself from ingroup responsibility for historical genocides. Other distancing strategies are even more direct. For example, Germans who read about atrocities committed by their nation during the Holocaust perceived this period as more remote—and this temporal distancing reduced feelings of collective guilt (Peetz, Gunn, & Wilson, 2010).

Descendents of perpetrator groups, however, do not always seek to exonerate the crimes committed by their group during genocide. On the individual level, children and grandchildren of Nazi perpetrators have participated in dialogue groups with descendents of Holocaust survivors (Bar-On & Kassem, 2004), and on the institutional level several German institutions oppose historical denial through educational efforts and exhibitions (Opotow, 2011). Historical gestures by politicians such as the German Chancellor Willy Brandt kneeling in front of the Warsaw Ghetto Memorial in 1970, Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski apologizing on behalf of the Polish people in 2001 for the Jedwabne massacre, or British prime minister Tony Blair's statement in 1997 about the Irish Potato Famine are some visible examples of public apologies and expressions of guilt for

historical harm doing. Although not all apologies are perceived as sincere (Blatz & Philpot, 2010), they often become milestones in reconciliation after genocide. They are also an important strategy to restore the group's positive self-image as moral (Shnabel et al., 2009)—an image that is severely threatened by a genocidal past.

Positive appraisals of historical victim groups often result from aversive emotions felt by members of the perpetrator group (however, see Imhoff & Banse, 2009, for backlash effects). Emotions such as collective guilt, shame, remorse, or regret were found in several studies in response to reminders of crimes committed by ingroup members—sometimes even historically very distant ingroup members (e.g., Brown & Čehajić, 2008; Doosje, Branscombe, Spears & Manstead, 1998). Both negative and positive appraisals of victim groups are caused by essentialist ingroup perceptions. Those who believe that they share the same essence with historically distant perpetrators of genocide should feel obliged to compensate for injustice; however, the same essentialist perception also leads to denial of ingroup responsibility. This paradoxical impact of essentialism on collective guilt sheds some light on the psychological limitations of post-genocidal reconciliation (Zagefka, Pehrson, Mole, & Chan, 2010).

After years of research on perpetrator groups' emotional response to the past (see Wohl, Branscombe, & Klar, 2006) it is still unclear how common moral reactions to historical atrocities are, and it is still difficult to predict societal reactions to information about historical misdeeds of one's ancestors. The focus on antecedents and consequences of collective guilt constrained researchers' interest in the content of representations of past atrocities. What is still missing in the literature is a detailed analysis of how specific depictions of past crimes among perpetrator groups are linked to emotions and behavioral intentions toward historical victim groups.

Psychological Research among Victim Groups in the Aftermath of Genocide

Research among victim groups in the aftermath of genocide includes studies with immediate survivors, with descendants of survivors (second or third generation), and with members of the victim group who are at least one generation removed from the events.

Immediate survivors have been studied primarily in clinical psychology. Most of this research has focused on the consequences of trauma. This includes negative outcomes such as posttraumatic stress disorder and revenge (e.g., Field & Chhim, 2008; for a meta-analysis of studies among Holocaust survivors see Barel, Van IJzendoorn, Sagi-Schwartz, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010), but also (though less frequently) positive phenomena such as resilience, meaning-making, coping, and posttraumatic growth, which includes altruism (Gasparre, Bosco, & Bellelli, 2010; Suedfeld, 2000; Vollhardt, 2009). While a lot of this research has been conducted among Holocaust survivors in Israel and in the United States, some

scarce research also exists on survivors of the Armenian genocide (Kalayjian & Shahinian, 1998; Kalayjian, Shahinian, Gergerian, & Saraydarian, 1996), the Cambodian genocide (Field & Chhim, 2008), and the Guatamalan genocide (Gasparre et al., 2010). As for more recent genocides, there are a number of studies on survivors of the Rwandan genocide (e.g., Kanyangara, Rimé, Philippot, & Yzerbyt, 2007), and some research among Bosnian survivors (Witmer & Culver, 2001). Notably, a lot of the existing research is published in psychiatric journals and takes a rather medical than social-constructivist approach to exploring these phenomena.

Clinical research on the aftermath of genocide also includes work on transgenerational trauma and the question whether trauma symptoms are passed down to descendants of survivors. While qualitative and psychoanalytic research has found some evidence to support this idea (e.g., Gruenberg & Rosental, 2007), meta-analyses of quantitative studies among the second and third generations conclude that there is not sufficient evidence of widespread transmission of trauma symptoms (Sagi-Schwartz, van Ijzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2008; van Ijzendoorn, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2003).

The scarce social psychological research on the aftermath of genocide and mass violence among victim groups has focused on forgiveness and reconciliation (e.g., Shnabel et al., 2009; Staub, Pearlman, Hagengimana, & Gubin, 2005) as well as on attributions and construals of the events (Doosje & Branscombe, 2003; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). For example, some research has examined how a more inclusive categorization of the Holocaust (i.e., as a crime against humanity) reduces the level of guilt that is assigned to the perpetrator group and increases willingness for forgiveness among members of the victim group (Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). Other research has focused on emotional needs among members of the victim group, showing that fulfilling the need for empowerment may increase the willingness for reconciliation among members of victim groups (Shnabel et al., 2009). In addition, several studies illustrate how collective memories and reminders of ingroup victimization through genocide can strengthen ingroup-serving behaviors (Wohl, Branscombe, & Reysen, 2010) and affect current conflicts by legitimizing what is perceived as defensive violence (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). In a way, these phenomena can be viewed as the transmission of trauma and societal trauma symptoms on the collective level (see also Alexander et al., 2004; Volkan, 2001).

Some research has examined interventions that may gradually bring about reconciliation with members of the perpetrator group. These interventions focus on social modeling and understanding of the influences that contribute to mass violence (Paluck, 2009; Staub et al., 2005) and, above all, on contact and dialogue (Albeck, Adwan, & Bar-On, 2002; Maoz & Bar-On, 2002). However, these studies also show that these encounters are faced with many challenges, and that backlash is common (e.g., Bar-On & Kassem, 2004; Bilewicz, 2007).

In sum, there is only scarce social psychological research among descendants of victim groups in the aftermath of genocide, and most of the existing research in social and in clinical psychology has focused on trauma and destructive consequences. Therefore, more research is needed on positive phenomena after genocide and mass violence, such as altruism and solidarity with other victim groups that may be facilitated through inclusive perceptions of similarity and shared fate (Vollhardt, 2009; see also Suedfeld, 2000).

Psychological Research among Bystander Groups in the Aftermath of Genocide

Even less research addresses the problem of bystander groups in genocide, their construals of the past, and emotions in response to the events. It is well known that during genocide, bystanders' behaviors allow and even encourage perpetrators to commit atrocities, and that perpetrators' actions significantly affect bystanders' attitudes toward victims (Monroe, 2008; Staub, 1989). Bystanders include not only those who are physically present during genocide, but also distant spectators who did not intervene early enough and thereby allowed genocidal acts to occur (Staub, 2002) – such as Americans during the Holocaust or the international community during the genocide in Darfur. The responsibility of bystanders of genocide, broadly discussed in social sciences (Vetlesen, 2000), has not been extensively studied by social psychologists.

One of the rare studies focusing on bystander descendents who live where the atrocities occurred found that they expressed great interest in the history of genocide in their hometown (Wójcik, Bilewicz, & Lewicka, 2010). Collective memory of Polish people living in the area of the former Warsaw ghetto focused mainly on the Jewish Holocaust, although the Jewish population and their material heritage had disappeared from the city landscape. The extent to which bystanders' descendents experience collective guilt for their ancestors' passivity depends on the extent to which they are able to take the perspective of historical victims and perpetrators—but this does not affect people who strongly identify with their ingroup (Zebel, Doosje, & Spears, 2004). Thus, reconciliation between descendants of bystanders and victims of genocide is difficult. Focusing on the past makes the historical bystander role salient (Bilewicz, 2007) and likely threatens the bystander group's moral image (Shnabel et al., 2009).

Overview of this Issue

This issue aims to fill some of the gaps in this scarce area of research and to bring together perspectives from various subdisciplines in psychology (primarily social and clinical) to better understand the consequences of genocide for current communities and for intergroup relations in different parts of the world. The articles cover a wide range of methods, theoretical approaches, as well as geographical

and sociopolitical contexts. Drawing on the established historical distinction of social roles during genocide (Hilberg, 1993), this issue is divided into sections on (1) psychological processes among perpetrator groups and (2) psychological processes among victim groups in the aftermath of genocide. The last section deals with (3) interventions and reconciliation between groups that have experienced genocide—processes that include victim, bystander, and perpetrator perspectives.

Destructive and Constructive Psychological Processes among Perpetrator Groups

Different forms of moral disengagement and denial of responsibility are dominant reactions to the ingroup's involvement in inhumane actions (Bandura, 1999). In the first section of this issue, two papers explore such destructive processes. Rezarta Bilali (2013) presents social psychological strategies used by Turks to defend their social identity in the aftermath of the Armenian genocide. Bilali (2013) also finds that the level of perceived ingroup responsibility and support for reparations is low. This corroborates analyses presented by Leach, Zeinnedine, and Čehajić-Clancy (2013). In their review of research on collective emotions after genocide and mass violence in the context of colonialism in Africa, Asia, Australia, and the Americas, they find that self-critical reactions to ingroup atrocities are scarce. Feelings of responsibility do not seem to be a dominant reaction among perpetrator groups.

Two other contributions give insight into conditions under which perpetrator groups might come to terms with their burden of historical responsibility, and engage in more constructive responses that contribute to redress and positive intergroup relations. In the context of pogroms committed by Poles during WWII, Kofta and Sławuta (2013) show that focusing on cultural similarities between victims and perpetrators might elicit collective guilt among groups accused of historical crimes. Imhoff, Wohl, and Erb (2013) provide evidence for another guilt-inducing process. In the context of two genocides committed by Germans in the past (of Herero in Namibia and Jews during the Holocaust), they show that awareness of the victims' continuous suffering elicits moral emotions among members of the perpetrator group. These emotions are more pronounced and lead to greater willingness for reparations when the perpetrators' actions are perceived as intentional.

Processes among Victim Groups: Clinical and Social Psychological Perspectives

While the section on processes among perpetrator groups addresses primarily the social psychological perspective, the second section in this special issue, on victim groups, also includes two contributions from a clinical perspective. These articles deal with the more immediate aftermath of genocide, specifically

with trauma symptoms and healing among survivors. Kaplan (2013) presents a qualitative analysis of interviews with orphans after the Rwandan genocide. From a psychodynamic perspective, she explores their affect regulation as well as factors in their environment that shape their responses and recovery process. Pearlman (2013) argues that in most postgenocide contexts, healing must occur not only on the individual level, but primarily through community-based interventions. She reviews models of community healing after genocide in Bosnia, Rwanda, and other contexts of mass violence and focuses on interventions that provide respect, information, connection, and hope (RICH), all of which are expected to contribute to healing from the massive trauma of genocide.

The two articles that deal with consequences of historical genocide among the victim groups address this issue from a social psychological perspective. Two contributions examine how collective memories of the Holocaust among Israeli and American Jews affect present-day intergroup relations and policy attitudes. Rather than merely focusing on the destructive outcomes of historical trauma, the authors also demonstrate constructive responses that promote peaceful intergroup relations. Klar, Schori-Eyal, and Klar (2013) discuss four lessons that can be drawn from the Holocaust. They show that two of these ("never be a passive victim" and "never forsake your brothers") have fed into the Israel–Palestinian conflict, while two alternative lessons ("never be a passive bystander" and "never be a perpetrator") have motivated humanitarian aid and peace activism in Israel. In an experimental study among Jewish Americans, Vollhardt (2013) shows that inclusive construals of the Holocaust give rise to prosocial attitudes and behavior toward other victims of genocide if both the ingroup's and outgroup's distinct victimization are acknowledged.

Interventions and Policy Implications

The third section of this issue addresses implications for interventions and policies in the aftermath of genocide and in the service of genocide prevention. Staub (2013) describes how awareness of cultural and psychological precursors of genocide can serve as a starting point for reconciliation between past perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. He reviews a reconciliation radio program in Rwanda, Burundi, and DRC, as well as other interventions to show how experiential understanding facilitates the emergence of peaceful societies after genocide. He argues that this process needs to be strengthened by institutions and positive socialization. Staub's call for active bystandership resonates with a similar call for civil courage expressed by other psychologists writing about genocide prevention (Zimbardo, 2007), who depict heroic helpers as role models for future generations. Bilewicz and Jaworska (2013) show that exposure to heroic helpers can also change relations between grandchildren of bystanders and of victims of genocide. Extending the needs-based model of reconciliation (Shnabel et al., 2009) to bystander groups,

Bilewicz and Jaworska (2013) discuss how heroic helpers' narratives can restore the group's moral image in encounters between Polish and Israeli students, and how perceived acceptance improves attitudes between these groups.

Overall, these contributions show that the processes of reconciliation between groups affected by historical genocide and prevention of future genocides must be viewed as interconnected. Without reconciliation, victimized groups may choose violent retaliatory actions instead of peaceful solutions to current conflicts, and perpetrator groups may further derogate victim groups and prevent redress. This explains, at least in part, attitudes in recent conflicts in Nagorno Karabakh, DRC, or the Middle East. Thus, understanding psychological processes in the aftermath of genocide can also help us resolve and prevent current political violence and add to our knowledge about these issues (see previous JSI issues edited by Alexander & Levin, 1998; de Rivera & Paez, 2007; Finchilescu & Tredoux, 2010; Muldoon, 2004).

Summary and Conclusion

In sum, this issue brings together novel research and theorizing on the psychological processes that influence individual and collective healing, reconciliation, and intergroup relations in the aftermath of genocide and other forms of mass violence. The issue showcases the potential psychology has — in conjunction with and informed by other disciplines such as history, political science, sociology, and social work — to contribute to our understanding of these processes, and to shape interventions and policies in the aftermath of mass violence. The issue also shows the unique perspective that psychology can contribute to the interdisciplinary and increasingly popular field of collective memory studies (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, & Levy, 2011).

This issue aims to integrate a broad range of perspectives on this area of study in terms of the subdisciplines, theoretical frameworks, and geographical and historical contexts involved. This multiplicity of perspectives is necessary in order to even begin to address the complexity of the subject matter. Accordingly, this issue includes social psychological and clinical perspectives and touches on community psychology and developmental issues. The authors draw on a variety of psychological theories and constructs that can be applied to the aftermath of genocide, such as attribution, intergroup emotions, social categorization, contact theory, and trauma theories, and build on existing findings while also contributing severely understudied perspectives such as on bystander groups or on constructive processes in the aftermath of genocide. The methods range from interviews and grounded theory to surveys, experiments, and intervention research. The contexts explored in this issue include the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, the Armenian genocide, the Herero genocide, and genocidal violence during colonization in

the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Africa. Researchers located in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Germany, Israel, Poland, Sweden, and the United States present studies with samples from Israel, Germany, Poland, Rwanda, Turkey, and the United States and discuss findings from several other contexts.

Even so, this spectrum is still limited, in part due to accessibility of samples. Likewise, authors from Armenia, Cambodia, Rwanda, and other societies that grapple with the experience of genocide and mass violence are missing in this issue. Our hope is nevertheless to document the state of the art in research on the psychological aftermath of genocide and suggest new directions to demonstrate the potential psychology has to contribute to debates and policies around these issues, and to stimulate further debate and research in a variety of contexts.

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