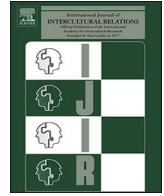


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Guilt norms regarding historical violence and implications for intergroup relations in France

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines how guilt norms regarding past French colonization in Algeria (one of the North African countries referred to as the Maghreb) are linked to collective guilt and other negative group-based emotions, contemporary intergroup attitudes towards immigrants of the former colonies and their descendants (French Maghrebians), and conciliatory behaviors. Seventy French students, with no past family relationships regarding colonization, answered questions measuring both injunctive and descriptive collective guilt norms for the in-group (what French people should feel and actually feel, respectively), as well as the injunctive guilt norms for two out-groups (what English and Turkish people should feel for their own country's violent past). Results revealed strong injunctive and descriptive no-remorse norms for the in-group as well as an injunctive no-remorse norm for the English out-group. The Turkish out-group, on the contrary, was expected to feel particularly guilty for the Armenian genocide. Both in-group norms were linked to less expression of all negative group-based emotions and to less intention to compensate. Moreover, the injunctive, but not the descriptive, no-remorse norm for the in-group predicted more prejudiced attitudes and less signing a petition asking for apologies. Unexpectedly, the injunctive pro-remorse norm for the Turkish out-group predicted less intention to compensate, more prejudiced attitudes, and less conciliatory behavior. These results show that emotional norms in response to the colonial past of one's nation may prevent people from feeling any negative group-based emotions and may contribute to upholding negative relationships with compatriots of Maghrebian (i.e., North African) descendants.

“When, if ever, does one draw a line under the horrors of history in the interest of truth and reconciliation? How far should one go in remembering the past in order to heal the present?”

Title of a portfolio of prints by the Colombian artist Carlos Motta.

The title of the work by Carlos Motta suggests that the collective memory of a country's violent history (e.g., its colonial past) plays an important role in contemporary intergroup relations (see also [Volpato & Licata, 2010](#)). Furthermore, it suggests that the call for “turning the page,” and for “finishing with repentance which is a form of self-hatred [...]” (former French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the University of Mentouri, Constantine, Algeria in December 2007, and the evening of the presidential election, on May 6, 2007, respectively) may not be favorable to reconciliation with the former colonized and their descendants. Additionally, these official declarations are likely to produce a normative vision of French colonial history which is consigned to oblivion and for which one does not need to feel ashamed and remorseful (i.e., suggesting a no-remorse norm as appropriate and desirable). The present

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paper is aimed at exploring whether emotional group norms, particularly injunctive and descriptive collective guilt norms, regarding the French colonization in Algeria and which are triggered by a specific national context relate to the expression of group-based emotions regarding the past misdeeds, to intentions to repair the damages, to prejudice towards Maghrebians, and to conciliatory behaviors.

The French colonization of Algeria

The French colonization of Algeria which lasted from 1830 to 1962 was one of the longest European colonial periods on the African continent. Algeria has also been the only French settlement colony organized as a French province (contrary to the other Maghrebian countries colonized, such as Tunisia or Morocco). The conquest war beginning in 1830 was terribly violent (with the so-called “enfumades”—operations consisting of filling with smoke the caves in which indigenous people had found refuge, but also destruction of villages, massacres of tribes, etc.) and was followed by destruction of culture, traditions, economic livelihoods (e.g., agricultural lands expropriation, workforce exploitation) and local political networks (i.e., organizations that once ensured food redistribution in times of scarcity, see Stora, 2004). In 1881, the “Code de l’Indigénat” ratified the unequal treatment of Algerian Muslims (e.g., separate tribunals and distinct sanctions) and denied them French citizenship. As Stora (2004) put it, the French settlers “[...] are unanimous in defending their privileges that renders the smallest French civil servant superior to any Arab. Their unity is due to their common fear of the Muslim majority” (p. 88). The colonial period was also marked by various violent events (e.g., bloody repression of the manifestation organized by Algerian Muslim claiming the end of colonization during May 1945) until its peak during the war of independence (1954–1962); although the period featured violence and the massive use of torture, it was called, as late as 1999, a simple “order maintenance operation.”

Going back to the colonization era (see Stora, 2004), Algeria has been the country with the greatest immigration to France (in 2008, 13% of immigrants to France came from Algeria; INSEE, 2012a). Furthermore, today’s Algerian immigrants and their descendants report feeling like victims of discrimination (31% among immigrants; and 38% among immigrant descendants; Delage, 2010). They are also among those most affected by unemployment (about 23% in the first generation, and about 25% in the second generation in 2010; INSEE, 2012b). Several historians trace present-day discrimination and racism against Maghrebians and black people to inherited colonial racism (e.g., Bancel, Blanchard, & Lemaire, 2005; Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2009; House, 2006). Indeed, Maghrebians are among the populations most targeted by prejudice in France (e.g., Mahfud, Badea, & N’Gala, 2015; Pettigrew et al., 1998; Sabatier & Berry, 1994). In a study by Mahfud et al. (2015), the more that the French participants perceived a high cultural distance between themselves and Maghrebians, the more prejudiced they were against this group, and this correlation was the strongest one when compared with correlations for the other three minority groups represented in the study (Asians, black Africans, East Europeans).

To understand the enduring and conflicting relationship between French natives and French of Algerian descent and Algerian immigrants, it is thus important to treat these intergroup relations as historically situated and to examine how the historical past resonates in the present. As emphasized by Bonnot, Krauth-Gruber, Drozda-Senkowska, and Lopes (2016), debates around this historical period turn highly sensitive and passionate in France each time it is brought to the fore (e.g., Bancel & Blanchard, 2008; for review of past events related to colonization, such as the attempt of lawmakers to recognize the “positive role” of colonialism, and media coverage surrounding them, see Bonnot et al., 2016). Most recently, during a visit to Algeria, Emmanuel Macron, then candidate for the French presidency in 2017 (now elected President), characterized the French colonization of Algeria as a “crime against humanity.” His discourse has, once again, triggered violent and outraged reactions, mainly from right-wing political parties, because, as the headline of a commentary by the historian Benjamin Stora in the journal *Politics* (Doubre, 2017) suggested, “criticizing the colonial system is criticizing the Republic.”

To our knowledge, social psychology research has neglected to take into account the historical roots of intergroup relations between French citizens of different origins (for exceptions, see Bonnot et al., 2016; Haas & Vermande, 2010). Moreover, there have been very few attempts at envisioning group-based emotions as grounded in emotional norms driving attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Goldenberg, Saguy, & Halperin, 2014; Thomas & McGarty, 2009). Doing so requires the mobilization of various theoretical frameworks (e.g., group-based emotions, social norms, emotional norms, and emotional self-stereotyping), which up to now has rarely been done with regard to the emotional reactions triggered by historical events such as colonization.

Group-based emotions regarding colonization

Group-based emotions, that is, emotions experienced in the name of one’s group even without being directly exposed to the emotion-eliciting event, have been extensively investigated in order to better understand intergroup relations. Reminding individuals of the harmful actions committed by other in-group members in the past has been found to induce various emotional reactions such as anger, shame, guilt, and pride (Allpress, Barlow, Brown, & Louis, 2010; Mari, Andrighetti, Gabbadini, Durante, & Volpato, 2010; Zebel et al., 2007). However, most of the research has focused mainly on the role of collective guilt. Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, and Manstead (1998) were among the first to look at collective guilt elicited in Dutch students when thinking of their country’s colonization of Indonesia. This research has indeed shown that people could feel emotions such as guilt because of what their group has done in the past, even if they did not have any personal responsibility in the events.

Several conditions have been found to be necessary for individuals to feel group-based emotions for their group’s past misdeeds. Individuals must self-categorize as a member of the group and identify with the group that has committed the harm. Furthermore, individuals must acknowledge the responsibility of their group for the harm done (e.g., Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead,

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