



# On the Perils of Glorifying the In-group: Intergroup Violence, In-group Glorification, and Moral Disengagement

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## Abstract

The moral disengagement strategies that individuals use when appraising misdeeds committed by their in-groups (e.g., nations) are discussed, with a particular focus on the process of dehumanization of the victims. The glorification of the in-group is identified as a main determinant of the use of such strategies, which, in turn, affect behavioral intentions related to punishment of perpetrators and reparations to victims. It is further discussed whether such moral disengagement strategies are prompted by a need to prevent the emergence or diminish the impact of negative emotions (such as shame and guilt) that are likely to be experienced by the individuals because of their connection with the in-group. Possible policy implications of this analysis are suggested.

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Many scholarly papers on intergroup relations begin by stating how much of the suffering and violence perpetrated daily, all over the world, is the consequence of a clash between collective identities, usually ethnoreligious or national. This paper evolves from the same premise, recognizing that collective violence has characterized the human experience for as long as we have had historical or archeological records (Kelly, 2005). And, of course, it continues today. But, this need not be an inescapable fact. Let me come clean and state from the start that I am a social constructivist.

I reject essentialistic views according to which intergroup conflict and violence are considered an inescapable part of human nature. Neither do I subscribe to the view that competition for actual resources (Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood, & Sherif, 1961) accounts for the pervasiveness and perniciousness of this kind of conflict. Both an essentialistic and a rational-choice view of intergroup violence prompt resignation. Viewing it as the end product of a series of cognitive and motivational processes, on the contrary, triggers an effort to research and intervene. We ought to understand these processes in order to modify them, and make them work for peaceful rather than violent ends. Essentially, we will have to outsmart ourselves.

Now that I have laid out my perspective, let me specify what I intend to look at. The focus of this contribution is on the psychological correlates of individuals' appraisals of violence committed by their in-group against an out-group. Misperception and distrust seem to characterize even the most benign intergroup situation (Brewer & Brown, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and these, of course, grow when conflict is present, both in a manner that may be justified by the actual state of affairs, but also exponentially, as people become fearful and anxious, and complexity of thinking gives way to a less cognitively taxing black and white perception of the social reality. What is considered appalling behavior one day, becomes less so the next; it becomes justifiable as the conflict goes on, and as people learn of atrocities, actual or alleged, suffered or committed. *Our* misdeeds are presented as reactions to *theirs*; we deny that they happened at all, or we call them by another name; torture becomes forceful interrogation; the dead civilians of an air raid become collateral damage. We are not fighting an enemy, we are engaged in a battle against evil; we killed them, but we did not kill people, we killed subhuman creatures. These are commonly referred to as moral disengagement strategies (Bandura, 1990; Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975), and it is the latter in particular, dehumanization, that is the focus of this contribution.

I begin by explaining that moral disengagement strategies are likely to emerge particularly when the individual, in virtue of their association with a collective, is psychologically threatened by the misdeeds committed by such a collective. After reviewing empirical evidence in support of such a claim, I elaborate on the link between the use of such strategies and the experience of negative emotions, and conclude with a discussion of the potential applications of the insights we gain from social psychological research.

Throughout this paper, I will refer to misdeeds, wrongdoing or violence committed by the in-group, interchangeably. One may argue that some forms of violence are not crimes from a legal perspective, as they are carried out according to the law of war. I recognize this fact and that these specific forms of violence may require a lesser use of moral disengagement strategies by both the perpetrators and their fellow in-group members who are not directly responsible. However, pure examples of this form of violence are extremely rare, as military operations of any kind lead to destruction, suffering and death of people who are noncombatant. Although to a certain extent this is considered acceptable in the law of war, I would argue that coming to terms with this reality requires some psychological work to explain, justify, morally disengage from it.

### **The Dynamic of Moral Disengagement**

In the early 1990s, among the various humanitarian tragedies unfolding all over the world, that of Somalia was perhaps the most salient to citizens

in the West. Images of starving, dying people, mostly children, were widely broadcasted, and put on the front pages of national newspapers. Confronted with these unbearable images, public opinion in the USA, as elsewhere, grew increasingly supportive of a military intervention to stop the tragedy. In 1992, Operation Restore Hope began with a United Nations-sponsored coalition of military forces sent into Somalia. Although all military interventions are driven by many complex and interrelated motivations, in this case more than others, commentators pointed to the role of the shocking images and the outrage they created: the citizenry came to feel that it was too much to bear, and were convinced that something should be done. Politicians reacted to the groundswell of sentiment from their constituencies, and likely feeling the same outrage, took action to reduce the suffering of the Somalis. And, in turn, to protect our own sense of self-worth and psychological equanimity, which depends on our view of ourselves as moral beings. We empathized with the victims, felt their suffering, perceived their humanity. We were morally engaged.

The Somalia case was an example in which we witnessed the suffering of other human beings for which we held no apparent responsibility; others were perpetrating atrocities, displacing and killing people by the thousands. In other circumstances, however, it is our own group, usually our country, or our ethnic or religious group, that holds responsibility for the suffering of others. It is these contexts that are the primary focus of this analysis. I contend that while several psychological variables explain and moderate our reaction to witnessing the suffering of other human beings, these reactions are profoundly influenced by the dynamics that are specific to the collective-identity context in which they unfold.

### *What is special about us being responsible?*

In order to understand the psychological correlates of witnessing inter-group violence, it is important to acknowledge that our sense of self is not solely based on our individual identity. We are members of social groups from which we derive social identities that, in varying degrees, hold relevance to the self as a matter of our personal history. I am Italian, European, a social psychologist, and so on. Such identities are not simply roles that we play in certain context; they are constituent parts of what we are, and they guide most, if not all, of our behavior. These ideas are at the core of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and have framed much of the research that social psychologists have conducted over the past three decades in the attempt to understand group processes and intergroup relations.

If a constitutive part of our sense of self is derived from our belonging to social groups, then it follows that the highs and lows of those groups become, to a certain extent, our highs and lows as well. Our view of ourselves as moral beings is threatened when we are confronted with past

or present misdeeds committed by our group against others. As is the case for threats to our sense of self at the individual level, the threats that we experience by virtue of our collective self need to be mitigated.

To illustrate, I do not lose much sleep over the fly that I crush, or the trout that I fish out of the river. I am not made uncomfortable by these actions or when I see my child doing the same. However, I do feel pain when learning that my countrymen have bombarded a foreign town and killed hundreds of civilians, or read about our abhorrent colonial past, or about my government's Secret Services torturing prisoners. I do feel pain, unless, by a psychological trick, I can think of these victims the way I think of the fly or the trout, that is, denying them the status of fully fledged human beings. I cannot deny the facts, or change the brutal history, but I may be able to change the way I think about it.

Compelling empirical research on how we deal with psychologically threatening information has recently emerged. The agenda of the social sciences is partially dictated by societal phenomena, and since the early 1990s, the climate in the international arena has changed significantly. For a variety of reasons, ranging from the immediate spread of information – especially images – to the evolution of international law, the global village has become less able to bear the sight of a member beating his family – this trend, it may be argued, was partially reversed due to the events of 9/11. The sacrosanct principle of state sovereignty and nonintervention in another state's domestic affairs has been challenged, and, with the increased availability of information, the reprehensible actions of other countries as well as our own are increasingly on stage, to be seen and discussed. These changes have also modified the dynamic of domestic politics, with minorities also realizing their capacity to make their past and present mistreatment known, and therefore to also challenge the moral standing of the majority.

Although such trends are quite evident, we should not conclude that the states of denial so vividly described by Cohen (2001) have come to an end. 'Hence you become convinced, I might be better off not thinking and opt not to know – perhaps I am better off leaving the task of thinking and doing and establishing moral norms in the hands of those who might *know better*,' says Israeli novelist David Grossman about the atrocities of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (*New York Magazine*, May 13, 2007, 30). Denial is still possible, of course, and it is likely to remain the first and foremost psychological defense individuals use when dealing with such disturbing information. It is precisely when denial fails that moral disengagement strategies come into play.

I was recently in Bosnia–Herzegovina during the commemoration for the anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, during which it is estimated that 8,000 Muslim men were executed by Serbian military forces in the summer of 1995. The night after the ceremony my friend and colleague Sabina Cehajic, a Bosnian social psychologist, was translating for me the

postings by lay people on the Web site of a Serbian newspaper. In a typical posting, the author would admit that Srebrenica happened (after initial denial, most Serbians today acknowledge that it happened), but quickly shifted the attention to the suffering endured by Serbs during the 1990s wars, World War I, World War II, and many other battles and wars all the way to the 1389 battle against the Turks so central to Serbian national mythology (Anzulovic, 1999). Amid postings that asked for apology and expressed shame, it was advantageous comparisons of this sort that seemed to be the moral disengagement strategy of choice. Perceiving the victims of these crimes as not-quite-human is another way in which this can be achieved.

*Adding insult to injury: The dehumanization of our victims*

When listening to survivors of the Nazi concentration camps tell their story, it is customary to hear an explanation of the abominable suffering and humiliation inflicted upon them explained in terms of the monstrous psyche of the German soldiers. How else could one account for such behavior? I remember one of my mentors describing his participation in a television debate on the Holocaust, and his disappointment at not being able to put forward his message, namely that the specifics of a situation may account for a large portion of such abominable behavior. He remarked how difficult it is to try to convey a social psychological account when one is confronted with a survivor, as one's words inevitably sound exculpatory, and thus insulting (J.-P. Leyens, personal communication, 1997).

My mentors would have had it much easier if the survivor had been Primo Levi, an Italian Jew who survived the concentration camps, but was filled with shame at being a survivor (cf. Shapiro, 2003), and committed suicide in 1987. In *If This Is a Man*, he writes: '... the degradation imposed on the prisoners was not a matter of cruelty, but a necessary process: for those operating the gas chambers not to be overwhelmed by distress, victims had to be reduced to sub-human objects beforehand.' The point, of course, is not to deny that cruelty played a role in those events. Rather, it is to recognize that the situation in which individuals find themselves has a tremendous impact on behavior, as classic research in social psychology has shown (e.g., Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973).

The context described by Levi is unique in human history, but we should not think that the process he describes is exceptional. In fact, excluding a person from the human community is a much more common process than we would like to think (Bar-Tal, 1990; Kelman, 1973, 2001; Opatow, 1990). Scholars have argued that such exclusion from the human community, at times evidenced by actual signs as in the infamous yellow stars that Jews were obliged to identify themselves with, is a preparatory step toward mass violence (e.g., Staub, 1987, 1990). Recent research findings suggest that it may also be a strategy individuals make use of when they learn of violence against an out-group perpetrated by one's group.

Several years ago, my colleague Roger Giner-Sorolla and I became interested in investigating the processes that accompany people's appraisals of their in-group's misdeeds. Specifically, we were interested in investigating dehumanization of the victims of the in-group as a psychological defense mechanism. Could it be the case that we add insult to injury, and that to safeguard our psychological equanimity we come to perceive the victims of the in-group's actions as less than human?

We reasoned that, say, British citizens should feel threatened by information depicting the British colonization of the Australian continent as having disastrous consequences for the aboriginal population. And that if this were the case, they may be motivated to perceive Australian Aborigines as not quite human. How to measure dehumanization is, of course, the first problem one is confronted with when attempting to test hypotheses such as these. In the absence of a high-conflict situation, we know that relatively few people will express such derogatory views of others – at least in Western societies, social desirability and political correctness are at play. Accordingly, to measure the perception of Australian Aborigines among British, we turned to an emerging body of social psychological literature on *emotional infrahumanization*.

In the late 1990s, Jacques-Philippe Leyens and his team at the Université catholique de Louvain, Belgium, conducted a series of normative studies investigating what it is that people think that make humans unique. Amid the usual suspects (language, intelligence), it was found that certain emotions are also attributed to humans to a much greater extent than to animals. These are called secondary emotions and include love, shame, guilt, or hope. The other emotions, called primary emotions, are seen as characterizing humans and animals alike. Examples are pleasure, anger, fear, and attraction (for a review, see Leyens et al., 2000). This taxonomy has been since used in a variety of studies that yielded support to Leyens's original conjecture, namely, that out-group members are seen as less likely to experience secondary emotions, that is, the emotions that are uniquely human (Leyens et al., 2000). 'We love but they "love", we grieve but they "grieve";' writes philosopher Raymond Gaita (2000) describing people's tendency to consider the inner life of people belonging to a different ethnic group as lacking the same depth that characterizes our own inner life.

Other forms of dehumanization exist, such as the denial of human nature to others (Bain, Kashima, & Haslam, 2006). In a recent review, Haslam (2006) proposes that the denial of uniquely human characteristics (more sophisticated, acquired features) and of human nature (innate, shared with other living creatures) lead to, respectively, a bestialization and a reduction of the other to an automata, respectively. Both strategies can be used to exclude a group from the member of the human, moral community (e.g., Opatow, 1990), but the former seems to be particularly applicable to intergroup, and specifically interethnic conflicts (Haslam, 2006).

It was thus Leyens et al.'s measure of infrahumanization that we used to investigate our hypothesis regarding the effect of learning about atrocities committed by in-group members toward members of another group. A first study was conducted at the University of Kent (Great Britain), in which we randomly assigned participants to one of two experimental conditions. In one condition, which we called high impact, they learned that the arrival of the British in Australia had a dramatic impact on the life of Aborigines, notably causing a sharp decrease in their population due to military operations by the British as well as diseases introduced by the British settlers. In the low-impact condition, on the contrary, participants read that although a decline in the number of Aborigines happened shortly after the arrival of the British, the number subsequently stabilized to a level similar to that prior to the arrival of the British.

After reading about the varied histories (according to the condition) of the relationships between the British and the Aborigines, participants indicated to what extent they estimated the capacity of Aborigines to feel a series of emotions. The emotions presented to them varied in the degree to which they were considered uniquely human (as derived from previous normative studies).

What did we find? In both conditions, the more uniquely human the emotion was, the less our participants thought that Aborigines could experience it. However, and in line with our predictions, in the high-impact condition this tendency was stronger. Compared to participants in the low-impact condition, those participants who learned that the British colonizers decimated the Aborigines were more inclined to see them as not quite human (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006). We replicated those findings in two additional studies. One was a conceptual replication of the first study, in which white Americans learned about the effects of the arrival of the white man in North America on the Native American population. In this case, we observed an enhanced infrahumanization of Native Americans among those participants who had been confronted with a narrative that stressed the quasi-extirpation of the Native Americans by the white newcomers. Participants were all Anglo-Saxon, Caucasian, and born in the USA, that is, people who, by virtue of their national identification, were expected to feel a connection with the original settlers (see Abdel-Nour, 2003, for a discussion of such a connection from a philosophical point of view).

Following the rationale that a shared collective identity with the perpetrators is a key component of the psychological processes that we deem responsible for the hypothesized effects, we also measured the extent to which British and American participants in the two studies identified with their in-group. It seemed reasonable to expect that the more people identify with their group, the more they would feel threatened by the information provided to them in the high-impact condition. As it turns out, things are more complex than that. At least in the contexts we

are concerned with, a simple measure of identification with the nation (e.g., 'Being British is an important part of my identity') may not be appropriate.

In the political science and social psychological literature, a distinction between nationalism and patriotism has long been discussed (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; see also Brewer, 1999; Staub, 1997). While patriotism is generally considered a healthy attachment to one's nation, nationalism is characterized by an uncritical aggrandizing of the in-group at the expense of other groups, which are thus considered inferior. In the words of George Orwell (1945): 'A nationalist is one who thinks solely, or mainly, in terms of competitive prestige.' Recently Sonia Roccas and her colleagues have refined this distinction into a more broadly applicable scale that distinguishes between in-group attachment (akin to patriotism) and in-group glorification (akin to nationalism) (Roccas, Klar, & Liviatan, 2006). These measures were first used in a study conducted around the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and showed that, among Israelis, in-group attachment was negatively related to justificatory processes for Israeli mistreatments of Palestinians and positively to self-reported guilt. In spite of being correlated with attachment, in-group glorification showed the opposite relationship to both of these variables. The more in-group glorification, the more justification of the wrongdoings, and the less guilt.

The same measure was used in a recent study that I conducted together with Bernhard Leidner and Patrycja Slawuta, which focused on the ongoing war in Iraq. We presented our participants with an alleged newspaper article that discussed a case very similar to the Abu-Ghraib scandal, in which US personnel (*versus* Iraqi themselves, in another experimental condition), were responsible for the torturing and eventual death of several Iraqi prisoners. After participants had read the article, we measured attachment to and glorification of the USA, we asked participants to indicate the extent to which they experienced a series of emotions when learning about the events, and we asked them to estimate to what extent the family members of the victims experienced a series of negative emotions. Furthermore, we measured explicit dehumanization of the victims group, and asked them about punishment of the perpetrators and reparations to the victims. The goal was to empirically test a model in which moral disengagement strategies (minimizing the negative emotions experienced by the victims' family members and dehumanizing them) mediated the effect of in-group identification on support for different forms of justice (punishment and reparations).

The outcome of this investigation conveys two important messages. First, the identity of the perpetrator (in-group versus out-group) makes a difference in the assessment of the victims and their suffering, with in-group perpetrators leading to more defensive responses, particularly among high in-group glorifiers. Second, the relationship between these variables are different depending on whether it is the in-group or the out-group that

commits the atrocities. Specifically, when the perpetrator is the out-group the relationship between the variables is not very systematic, but when the perpetrator is the in-group a coherent and meaningful model representing the psychological process emerges, supporting the mediating role of moral disengagement strategies in the relationship between in-group glorification and support for retributive and restorative justice. Controlling (statistically) for in-group attachment and political affiliation, in-group glorification is positively related to the use of two moral disengagement strategies – that is, the higher the glorification the greater the explicit dehumanization of the victims and the downplaying of the suffering of the victims' family members. In turn, explicit dehumanization is negatively related to the support for restorative justice (reparations), and the downplaying of the suffering of the victim's family predicts negatively both restorative and retributive justice (punishment of the perpetrators) (Leidner, Slawuta, & Castano, forthcoming).

In-group glorifiers' defensive responses also emerged in their communication about the events. When asked to summarize in writing the events described in the fictitious article, in-group glorifiers who read about the USA (in-group) being responsible for the torture and death of several Iraqis (as compared to those who read about an out-group being responsible) tended to minimize the events, as indicated by a greater use of negative connectives (e.g., *however, but, although*) and a lesser use of positive connectives (e.g., *and, because*). They also used words that minimized the intentionality of the actions and the perception of causality (Slawuta, Leidner, & Castano, forthcoming).

In a nutshell, dehumanization and minimization (i.e., two moral disengagement strategies) are more likely to be used by those who glorify the in-group, and, in turn, are associated with a lesser intention to provide reparations to the victims and to punish the perpetrators.

The research reviewed above reveals that people's reaction to witnessing or being told about the suffering of others depends on whether or not the in-group is responsible for such suffering (for a recent replication of these findings, see Cehajic, Brown, & Gonzales, forthcoming). Furthermore, when the in-group is responsible, not all individuals react in a similar manner. Although the research is in the early stages, it seems clear that the nature of the identification with one's group moderates such a reaction. I will return to this issue when discussing the implications of these findings. Before doing so, I want to go into a bit more detail about the psychological mechanisms that underlie the research findings just reviewed.

## **Collective Guilt, Collective Shame**

*Guilt*: the fact of having committed a breach of conduct especially violating law and involving a penalty; the state of one who has committed an offense

especially consciously; feelings of culpability especially for imagined offenses or from a sense of inadequacy.

*Shame*: a painful emotion caused by consciousness of guilt, shortcoming, or impropriety; a condition of humiliating disgrace or disrepute.

When individuals witness or learn about the suffering of other human beings, they may experience distress, and may, thus, be motivated to either prevent such distress from arising or to act to reduce it. This seems to be an uncontroversial view (e.g., Bandura, 1990). When the suffering is due to the actions of their own group, that is, when they hold vicarious responsibility for the event by virtue of their association with the perpetrating group, a different, more specific emotional pattern is likely to emerge: feelings of shame and/or guilt may be experienced.

It is reasonable to speculate that the experience of these emotions, or the need to avoid them in the first place, critically affects the way in which the individual perceives and interprets the events, as well as the actions that he may undertake in response. While there is some overlap between the two, the definitions of guilt and shame reported above also capture some of the critical differences between these emotions. These differences have been investigated extensively by psychologists. Specifically, while guilt is associated with the realization that one *has committed a reproachable act*, shame has the additional dispositional attribution: I have committed a reproachable act because I *am a bad person*. As explained by Lewis (1971), in guilt, the self is the source of evaluation, and some specific behavior is the object of that evaluation. In shame, the self is split into a focal object and an internalized observing 'other'.

Building on Lewis's work, Tangney and her colleagues conducted a considerable amount of research investigating the differences between these two emotions (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). What we learned from this research is useful for the purpose of understanding the role that these emotions may have in contexts in which collective identities, rather than personal identities, are operating (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). For instance, these findings suggest that guilt, contrary to shame, has positive consequences; it motivates the individual to repair the wrongdoing. Accordingly, the experience of collective guilt has been found to be positively related to attitudes toward the victims, as well as to intentions to provide reparations (e.g., Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). Not surprisingly, collective guilt (and personal guilt) seems to be dependent on recognizing that the in-group is responsible for the wrongdoings under scrutiny, as well as recognizing the illegitimacy of such actions. This point was elucidated in the previously mentioned study by Roccas and her collaborators in which it was shown that the more in-group members legitimized the in-group actions (through exonerating cognitions), the less they felt guilty (Roccas et al., 2006).

While research on collective guilt has flourished over the past decade (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004), other scholars have argued that it is

inappropriate to speak about guilt for actions for which the individual is not personally responsible, and that in these situations the relevant emotion is shame. The idea that these events should elicit shame, rather than guilt, is based on the reasoning that people have an essentialistic connection to the perpetrator, by virtue of their social identity; having not carried out the actions themselves, they cannot feel the responsibility necessary to experience guilt. One, therefore, would not feel guilty, but rather ashamed for being a member of, say, an immoral group. In the context of post-9/11 anti-Arab sentiments in the USA, Johns, Schmader, and Lickel (2005) asked participants to think of instances in which other Americans showed prejudiced attitudes, and then report on their feelings (guilt, shame, anxiety, etc.) as well as their desire to distance themselves from the (in-group) perpetrator. The findings suggest that it is shame, rather than guilt, that accounts for the desire to distance oneself from negative events. Research has further demonstrated that whether people report feelings of guilt or shame depends on the nature of their connection to the group and its members (Lickel, Schmader, Curtis, Scarnier, & Ames, 2005). To the extent that this connection is based on interpersonal interdependence with group members, as is with a group of friends or sport teammates, it is guilt that emerges in the case of in-group wrongdoings. When the connection is more abstract, based on a shared identity (see the distinction between *common bond* and *common identity* groups, Prentice, Miller, & Lightdale, 1994), and perceived as essentialistic, people report feelings of shame, rather than guilt (for a normative analysis of the link between national responsibility, guilt and shame, from a normative perspective, see Abdel-Nour, 2003. For the broader question of collective responsibility, see May, 1992).

Attempting to distinguish between guilt and shame at the collective level is of some theoretical importance, as this distinction allows us to infer the relationship that individuals perceive between themselves, their in-group, and particularly their in-group's past and present actions. This enterprise, however, may be threatened by the limitations of the measurement of emotions – for empirically distinguishing guilt from shame is a difficult task. I am, for example, doubtful with respect to what is truly being assessed by these self-report measures. Even if individuals could clearly distinguish between guilt and shame, do our self-report scales measure the emotional state we are interested in, the willingness of participants to report these emotions, what people think it is appropriate to convey in the given situation, or only a cognitive component of the emotional experience? These, I believe, are important questions that need to be addressed in future empirical research for which the challenge will not simply be to go beyond cognitively mediated expressions of emotions and into physiological measures, but also to be able to identify the fine line between emotions that have much in common and yet produce, if current theorizing is correct, widely different behavioral responses.

To recap, while research has begun to shed light on some of the psychological mechanisms involved in the appraisal of past or present in-group misdeeds, and scholars have made quite a strong case for the fact that individuals, by virtue of their connection to the in-group, are likely to experience a negative emotional state in such situations, much remains to be ascertained. Given the above-reviewed findings showing the important moderating role of in-group glorification, it also seems important to ascertain whether such an effect is related to a different intensity in the experience of these emotions, or a to difference in the type of emotions experienced by individuals who are low or high in in-group glorification.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In this paper, I present a snapshot of social psychological theory and research findings on how individuals react when appraising misdeeds carried out by the in-group. Globalization and the development of information technology have led to an increased availability of information. As a consequence, information about one's nation as well as other nations' misdeeds is more widely available. This has been the cause, and perhaps also the consequence, of the trend in international affairs described at the beginning of this article, consisting of an enhanced accountability of state and nonstate actors for their aggressive and sometime violent policies. The availability of information, however, is not a panacea. Beyond questions regarding the quality and reliability of such information (a matter better addressed by a media expert), as a social psychologist I consider it extremely important to attain a better understanding of the psychological processes at play when an in-group's misdeeds are appraised by the individual. Specifically, I have focused on the effects of this appraisal.

The findings emerging from the research reviewed here begin to shed light on this phenomenon. We have learned that individual differences play an important role in how the information is appraised, elaborated, and, of course, on the outcome variables – that is, the impression, judgment, and behavioral intentions that follow. Although the specific role of emotions is less understood at present, research is being conducted that will help us improve our models and reach a better understanding of their role, which I believe to be of foremost importance. Some of these findings are counterintuitive, and as such they challenge our views and contribute to the advancement of theory. For instance, the findings that show the enhanced dehumanization of victims when one's in-group, rather than the out-group, is responsible for misdeeds. This adding-insult-to-injury effect is demoralizing, but it is better to know about it than not, so we can begin thinking of ways to combat it.

In the end, theory-building in the social sciences is meant to improve the quality of our social life. This means that we have to draw some lessons, and, however immature our thinking on the issues is, we have to attempt

to elaborate intervention strategies and suggest a research agenda that is not dictated only by our intellectual interests, but that also asks the cogent questions our research originated from as well as helped formulate. I have left that task for this last section of the discussion, for it is not an easy one.

One conclusion that we can draw from the theoretical body of work on nationalism, intergroup relations, social identity and, more specifically, from the set of findings reviewed above, is that glorification of the in-group is highly problematic. Once you distinguish between attachment to the in-group and glorification, it is the latter that predicts the use of moral disengagement strategies, and these, in turn, predict behavioral intentions with respect to the pursuit of justice that are, in my view, problematic. I have focused primarily on dehumanization and minimization of the suffering, but of course these are only two among several strategies: moral justification (we do it to prevent greater suffering), the use of euphemism (collateral damage), minimization of the events (this is not really torture). I consider dehumanization particularly heinous and as having longer-lasting consequences, but I do not contend that it is a necessary process in the kind of contexts we examined here.

If glorification is the problem, and not all readers will agree with this, what is the solution? Two schools of thought are likely to provide different answers to this question. According to one perspective, glorification can be thought of as a psychological defense mechanism *per se*, espoused by certain individuals with certain psychological characteristics. This explanation would be akin to that offered by Jost, Glasner, Kruglanski, and Sulloway (2003) to account for the appeal of political conservatism. According to these authors, political conservatism is psychologically satisfying to certain individuals because of their specific psychological make-up, rather than an ideological choice dictated by people's view of human nature and human society. Whether or not this is a problem in the case of conservatism (which, it should be noted, correlates with in-group glorification) is a matter of opinion, of course. But seeing in-group glorification as uniquely suited to satisfy a specific psychological need would be discouraging, as it would imply that for in-group glorification to be deracinated we would have to intervene in the early stages of human development. And these are unlikely to be changed swiftly, even in the improbable scenario in which we could pinpoint the problematic factors.

Alternatively, or perhaps in addition to the aforementioned perspective, in-group glorification can be seen as a narrative; the outcome of a collective enterprise fueled by social actors and political leaders. To identify such a narrative in the case of a nation is a relatively easy task for a foreigner. A few years ago, shortly after taking up residence in New York, I witnessed *quasi* first-hand the Democratic and Republican conventions, in which presidential candidates are nominated. In both cases, an incessant national glorification characterized all speeches. As I used to point out to my American friends, unless you are American, being told that America is

the greatest among nations is unlikely to positively predispose the rest of the world toward America (as pointed out by a reviewer, one should refer to the USA as opposed to America, but I decided to keep this terminology as it reflects the everyday, if inaccurate, language).

In fact, this may be only one of the negative consequences. The other, of course, is that it fuels, or perhaps creates, the very tendencies that we have identified as being highly problematic. We do not think much of a parenting style that encourages uncritical and self-aggrandizing thinking in the child. Similarly, we should be careful about fostering this kind of thinking at the collective level. The next question, of course, is how to discourage this kind of national self-glorifying discourse.

I stated at the beginning that intergroup conflict is not a natural and immutable characteristic of human life. I similarly do not think that the glorification of the in-group is inevitable, although I acknowledge that it is a powerful tool that can be exploited by unscrupulous individuals. For the link between the individual and the collective is of primary importance (Castano, 2004). It responds to deeply seated psychological needs (Castano & Dechesne, 2005) and it is constitutive of the self (Brewer & Caporael, 1990). For these reasons, an in-group-glorifying discourse may find people receptive, particularly in the case in which a boost to the collective self-esteem is needed due to recent events (Germany after the Treaty of Versailles), or a protracted situation of economic and cultural dominance (see the discussion about the Islamic world by Maalouf, 1998). If there is a hunger, it is not surprising that wannabe leaders will try to satisfy such a hunger in order to boost their political careers. It is said that Milosevic began the ultranationalistic discourse (that led to disastrous consequences for his country) when visiting the Serbian minority in a province of Kosovo, notably in response to faltering support for his leadership. A cursory view of recent US presidential elections confirms that, however polished and embedded into a more acceptable political discourse, similar attempts of building support or salvaging a downward political spiral are not unique to the Balkans.

Given the likelihood that such dynamics will be continuously reproduced, we ought to consider social structures to keep them constantly in check. In the language of political science, I would say that we need a dramatic increase in international governance. Given what we have witnessed in the last decade, this may sound terribly Pollyannaish. Although I have said earlier that in this globalized world people are likely to be increasingly confronted by others about their in-group misdeeds, it is also true that less positive dynamics are on the rise. China and India have stepped up their nationalistic rhetoric, as have Russia and Japan. And the world's superpower has steered severely toward unilateralism under the current Bush administration – due in part to the events of September 11, 2001. These dynamics are not conducive to a considerate appraisal of one's misdeeds.

In the 2004 presidential campaign debate, the challenger John Kerry was derided for suggesting that before the USA intervened militarily it should consult with its allies. Part of the reason for such a derision is the severe limitations characterizing global institutions like the United Nations Security Council, and their obvious malfunctioning. Nevertheless, fostering international governance is necessary if we want to keep glorification and nationalistic *dérapiages* in check. It is because we call ourselves patriots, but we call them nationalists, that we continuously fall into violent dynamics, and once these are at play, it is difficult to prevent ourselves from engaging in the many psychological mechanisms that either allow us to deny our own misdeeds or justify them. We need to allow others to tell us about ourselves, and we need a context that encourages us to listen to what they say.

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### **Short Biography**

Emanuele Castano is a social and political psychologist, whose main areas of research include nationalism and international relations, intergroup conflict and reconciliation, and collective responsibility. He has authored papers in these as well as in several other areas of psychology and political science in journals such as *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *European Review of Social Psychology*, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, and *Political Psychology*. He has also contributed to several edited books, among which the *Handbook of Experimental Existential Psychology* and a multidisciplinary text on the European Union, *Transnational Identities: Becoming European in the EU*. His research has been supported by the European Union, the Economic and Social Research Council (UK), and the National Science Foundation (USA). He has taught at the University of St. Andrews and the University of Kent at Canterbury, and he is now Associate Professor at the New School for Social Research in New York.

### **Endnote**

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