

Predictors of Collective Guilt after the Violent Conflict

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ABSTRACT

After a violent conflict many post-conflict communities remain ethnically divided and normalization of the inter-group relations is hindered not only by in-group norms and interpretation of past events, but also by collective guilt. Although collective guilt has proved to be an important indicator of post-conflict social repair, more research is needed to define its predictors. This study, conducted in an ethnically divided community, confirmed that collective guilt acceptance and collective guilt assignment in our sample are typical for the post-conflict pattern of intergroup relations – people readily assign guilt to the outgroup but are unwilling to accept the guilt of their in-group. This suggests that the process of community social reconstruction has not considerably progressed. Our findings also suggest that the two aspects of collective guilt – assignment and acceptance – are predicted by similar sets of variables. Both collective guilt assignment and collective guilt acceptance are influenced by identification with in-group which influence is fully or partially mediated with the justification of the in-group's wrongdoings. This indicates that in the post-conflict setting relationship towards the in-group may be more important for experiencing collective guilt than the relationship towards the out-group. Relationship towards out-group, although not crucial, also plays a role in experiencing collective guilt. Specifically, both affect towards and cognitions about out-group members predict collective guilt assignment (with cognition being stronger predictor than positive affect), whereas only (absence of) positive affect predicts acceptance of collective guilt and the cognitive aspect is not predictive.

Key words: *collective guilt assignment, collective guilt acceptance, justification of the in-group's wrongdoings, inter-group attitudes*

Introduction

Collective guilt is a relatively new concept in social psychology research and it is usually defined as emotional reaction when one's group has done wrong or been wronged¹. Even though most researchers define it as a group-based emotion², some emphasize that guilt also includes a set of beliefs about one's group's role in a negative event^{1,3-5}. We argue that collective guilt has not only affective and cognitive, but also a behavioral component (as it motivates actions that might lower the guilt feeling and promote better social relations between the two conflicted groups) which therefore makes it an attitudinal response to the wrongs committed to or by the in-group.

Collective guilt can arise in intergroup context even when the individual is not responsible for the harm done by the group or does not feel personally guilty⁶. It emerges from identification with a social group and its past actions. Just as we derive sense of pride from a success of

the group we belong to⁷, if the group is important for our social identity we can feel guilty for something our group has done⁸. Definition of collective guilt implies its two distinguishable forms – collective guilt assignment or out-group blame and collective guilt acceptance. Both could be important indicators of post-conflict social repair. Nevertheless, as Branscombe, Slugoski & Kappen⁹ have shown, there is another component – collective accountability – that shares with out-group blame and collective guilt acceptance the same underlying dimension that, as the authors put it, »go beyond the individual« (p. 22). Indeed, the notion of collective responsibility in the context of feeling collective guilt is well recognized: if a group member denies in-group responsibility for the wrongdoings or is not aware of it, it is not likely that the feeling of guilt will emerge^{1,10,11}.

Collective guilt assignment can be derived from a recent, but also from a historical conflict between the two groups. It represents the need of the victimized group that members of the perpetrator group acknowledge own responsibility for the harm done by their in-group members and to experience collective guilt as a consequence¹², which could then instigate a sincere apology to the victimized group or some other attempt of restitution for the harm done. However, assigning collective guilt usually has a downside: when assigning guilt to every member of an out-group, one does not differentiate between the individual perpetrators of a certain wrongdoing and other members of the same group who took no part in it. Assigning »guilt by association«⁶ in such a way, without acknowledging that some out-group members played no part in the wrongdoing that was committed, not even as passive bystanders, can lead to even deeper conflict between members of the two groups.

On the other hand, acknowledging the in-group wrongdoings committed during an intergroup conflict and accepting responsibility is a first step toward establishing more positive intergroup relations¹³ and an important assumption for social reconstruction¹⁴. Social reconstruction refers to the process within a community which restores its damaged social functioning to the level of functional interpersonal and intergroup relations¹⁵. It is characterized by recognition of community's joint interests, awareness of interdependency among different groups, trust and positive socioemotional relations. When members of one group stop blaming the out-group for every aspect of the conflict (i.e. stop assigning collective guilt exclusively to the out-group) and start acknowledging and accepting that the own group may have also harmed the other group, it is an important step towards reconstruction of intergroup social relations.

Collective guilt acceptance is a consequence of identification with one's group and recognition of its responsibility for the role in past conflict which can increase willingness for restitution to the victims and open opportunity for social reconstruction^{9,16,17}. Research shows that there is a link between guilt acceptance and various forms of reparation towards the out-group members⁶. For instance, Brown and Čehajić¹⁸ found that collective guilt acceptance is related to reparation through empathy for the out-group.

Two types of collective guilt serve different functions in intergroup relations. While collective guilt acceptance often serves to advance reparation, restore justice and facilitate the processes of social reconstruction^{12,19–24}, the function of collective guilt assignment is to remove responsibility from the in-group and is a mechanism of the victimized group to seek acknowledgement of its suffering and restitution for the harm done by the perpetrator group. Therefore, the two types of collective guilt might have different antecedents. Another possibility is that collective guilt assignment and acceptance can be related to the same set of variables but that their relative importance can be different for the two phenomena. However, precise sets of individual and situational factors that determine emergence of collective guilt assignment and acceptance remain to be determined.

When looking for predictors of collective guilt, it is important to keep in mind that the concept is closely related to the group membership. Both one's relation to the in-group as well as to the out-group need to be taken into consideration. Most authors emphasize identification with the in-group as crucial for experiencing collective guilt¹. Depending on whether the in-group is considered to be the victim or the perpetrator of wrongdoings, identification can be associated with either collective guilt assignment or acceptance. The strength of this association can depend on how the in-group perceives the role and responsibility of one's own group. Clearly, identification with the victimized group will most likely lead to assigning collective guilt to the out-group and less collective guilt acceptance. Although importance of identification with the perpetrating group is also well documented, it is still unclear whether high identifiers should experience more or less collective guilt acceptance. While some research suggests that high identifiers experience more collective guilt because their group is more important for their identity²¹, other show that high identifiers are more motivated to maintain positive social identity and therefore use more strategies to avoid experiencing collective guilt⁶. According to Roccas, Klar and Liviatan²⁵ the relationship between identification and collective guilt depends on the form of identification: in-group glorification or in-group attachment. People who glorify their group probably more likely justify their group's harmful actions, which undermines collective guilt acceptance. On the other hand, group members who are critically attached to their group (i.e. in-group attachment when controlling for glorification), when confronted with information about the harm perpetrated by their group would critically examine in-group's behavior and thus are likely to feel guilty for their group's harm doing.

Čorkalo Biruški and Magoč²⁶ argue that it is not only the form of identification, but also other elements of expressing group membership (such as justification of in-group's wrongdoings) that predict assigning collective guilt to the out-group, and that this process is different for groups of different public status – victimized and perpetrating groups. They found that for the group that is perceived by its members as »more victimized« during the intergroup conflict, ethnic identification level was the single strongest predictor of collective guilt assignment (as if they meant »We were victimized only because we belong to this ethnic group«). However, in the group that is mostly seen as having done more harm, ethnic identification level remained insignificant and the in-group justification played a dominant role in predicting the guilt assignment to the out-group (as if they meant »We were only defending ourselves«). Therefore, not only feelings of belonging to a group (i.e. identification with an ethnic group), but also cognitive mechanism that serves to preserve positive social identity (such as justification of the in-group deeds) probably play an important role in blaming the out-group. Similarly, other psychological mechanisms, like collective emotional orientations,

that are processed either automatically or cognitively, proved to be also important in intergroup relations²⁷.

When it comes to accepting collective guilt, the processes may be even more complex and identification with the perpetrator group also might not suffice. According to the Social Identity Theory²⁸ people are motivated to perceive their in-group positively because their social identity and social self-esteem depend on it. People will use many strategies to maintain and enhance favorable views of the in-group and we can expect that collective guilt acceptance would be experienced only when all group protective strategies fail. Wohl, Branscombe & Klar¹ argue that only when members perceive the in-group as responsible for the harm done to another group as well as in-group's actions to be illegitimate, will collective guilt acceptance emerge. They go on to state that the collective guilt acceptance might not occur if members perceive costs to the in-group of making reparations for the harm done as exceeding the value of doing so.

Emotions towards the out-group can also be decisive of whether a person would experience accepting or assigning collective guilt²⁹. Recent research on collective guilt acceptance has identified positive emotions towards the out-group, specifically trust and empathy, together with awareness of in-groups causal role in conflict, as its antecedents⁸. Researchers have not yet looked at the relation between collective guilt assignment and (other) intergroup emotions, but it is plausible to expect that negative emotions towards members of the out-group would be positively correlated with collective guilt assignment and negatively with collective guilt acceptance. Thus it is plausible to assume that intergroup emotions would successfully predict collective guilt as they are predictive for other intergroup attitudes and behaviors^{30,31}.

As stated earlier, collective guilt acceptance is an unpleasant feeling that accompanies the belief that harmful acts one's group committed were not legitimate. Therefore, when looking for predictors of collective guilt we find it necessary to include both emotional and cognitive elements. For example, justification of in-groups wrongdoings is a cognitive element connected to the in-group that can have decisive role in experiencing collective guilt acceptance. Cognitive element of the relation to the out-group can be operationalized through positive or negative stereotypes of the out-group members. Furthermore, comparing relative importance of emotional and cognitive elements of experiencing collective guilt could provide more insight into the construct of collective guilt itself. Bar-Tal²⁷ argued that automatic and unconscious emotions (such as fear) can override emotions based on cognitive activity (such as hope). Thus it is important to determine the underlying processes of collective guilt to fully understand its' potential in establishing more stable intergroup relations. We posit that collective guilt acceptance is an emotional (affective) reaction heavily saturated with cognitions which can emerge only in a psychologically safe environment, when fear of the out-group is no longer a part of everyday life and the former adversaries are oriented to common future. On the other hand, historical experiences with the intergroup conflict

and emotion of fear from the out-group might offer a solid ground for the emergence of collective guilt assignment as a way of finding cognitive justification for hostile emotions towards out-group members.

To summarize, most studies of collective guilt only look into guilt acceptance as the main predictor of social reconstruction, neglecting guilt assignment. We believe that both aspects should be taken into account in order to gain a more complete picture and understanding of relationship towards former adversary group.

After a violent intergroup conflict, such as the one that took place on the Croatian territory (1991–1995), an issue of accepting responsibility for the wrongdoings of one's own group plays a crucial role in social reconstruction process since people continue to live in the same communities as before the war. This process in the post-conflict context is important because without sincere rapprochement between the two ethnic groups the human rights violations committed by both sides in the conflict leave the burdening legacy of the conflict to generations not directly connected with it. We conducted the research in the city of Vukovar where self-categorization based on ethnicity cannot be avoided. In this paper the findings from the group that has been more victimized and represents both numerical and the normative majority (Croats) are presented. The reason for choosing this group is that it has a unique intergroup position: it is more victimized³², won the conflict and represents the ethnic majority at the national and community levels. Our research question is if the Croats in Vukovar accept collective guilt for the harmful actions against another group which is generally considered to have done more harm and lost the war (Serbs) or do they only assign guilt for their suffering to this out-group. Furthermore, even if they accept the fact that the in-group has committed wrongdoings against the out-group, we wanted to investigate whether they perceive those actions as illegitimate or justified. If they justify wrongs committed by the in-group as being done in self-defense, being less extreme in comparison to the wrongs committed by the out-group, or committed only by a few deviant in-group members, they might not be ready to accept collective guilt. Since the two types of collective guilt might have different antecedents, the objective of this study was also to investigate predictors of collective guilt assignment and acceptance on a highly traumatized group in the aftermath of conflict.

We hypothesized that identification with the in-group plays more important role in the emergence of collective guilt assignment and acceptance than the relationship with the out-group. We also hypothesized that both cognitive and emotional processes would predict collective guilt assignment and acceptance.

Materials and Methods

The hypotheses were tested in a real post-conflict setting using heterogeneous and diverse sample. The city of Vukovar is an example of disrupted multi-ethnic commu-

nity that used to be well integrated before the war. Tremendous destruction, massive losses, atrocities and traumatization lead to the ethnic division evident in all aspects of social life, especially schooling³³. The atmosphere of mutual distrust and social division still prevails and discourages social contacts between the two ethnic groups³⁴. The question of accepting responsibility for the conflict and reparation between the two sides emerges as the crucial step towards establishing stable social network.

Participants

The community probabilistic sample consisted of 198 Croats from Vukovar, aged 18–70, with the average age of 50.6 years (calculated as suggested by Breugelmans and van de Vijver³⁵, because we used age categories in the questionnaire). There were more females (64%) due to the fact that more women than men lived in the city at the time of the study. About 23% of the participants completed only primary school, 64% had high school and about 13% had a higher education degree. The sample composition mostly reflects the community population parameters for educational level³⁶. Only 26% of participants in our sample were employed, 16% were unemployed, 54% were retired and 4% were students. Unemployment rate is usually higher in Vukovar than in other parts of Croatia due to the massive destruction during the war and a very slow economic recovery. The comparison with the statistical data of the Employment Institute for the town of Vukovar (34% employed, 19% unemployed, 19% retired) shows a shift towards older participants in our sample (average age is about 51 years) which explains higher percentage of retired participants.

Procedure

The study was conducted in the city of Vukovar (Croatia), on members of the majority ethnic group, Croats, 13 years after the end of the war in July 2008. Participants were approached in their homes using the random walk technique. All interviews were carried out face-to-face and lasted about 45 minutes. A number of measures were taken, but for the purpose of the present study, the following measures are relevant:

Socio-demographic characteristics

The questionnaire included socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, ethnic affiliation, employment status and level of education.

Two measures of in-group belonging included ethnic identification scale and nationalism scale, as a measure of in-group glorification. Ethnic identity level³⁷ includes 4 items, with response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The score is formed as a mean of all items, ranging from 1 to 5 with higher score indicating stronger ethnic identification. (Sample item: »I see myself as a Croat.«). Cronbach α in this study is 0.80. Nationalism scale³⁸ served as a measure of in-group glorification. It includes 6 items with a 5-point Likert type response format. A higher score indicates stronger

nationalism (Sample item: »Members of the same nation should always stick together.«). The Cronbach α is 0.78.

Stereotype of the out-group, as a measure of a cognitive component of the relation toward the out-group was measured by a semantic differential-type scale constructed for the purpose of this research. Respondents rated Croats and Serbs on 11 bipolar scales (for example selfish-unselfish, lazy-diligent, fair-unfair, honest-treacherous) with response range from 1 to 5. Higher score indicates more positive stereotype towards members of the group in question. Cronbach alpha in this study is 0.91.

Positive and negative intergroup affect³⁹ is a measure of emotional component of the relation toward the out-group. The participants rated their emotions towards the out-group on a set of 9 emotions chosen based on a pretest (5 negative: contempt, hatred, bitterness, anger, intolerance, and 4 positive: friendship, respect, closeness, conciliatory) on a scale from 1 (»not at all«) to 5 (»extremely«). Cronbach α in the present study is 0.87 for negative affect and 0.90 for positive affect.

In-group justification³⁹ was a proxy for the cognitive relations towards the in-group. A 5-item scale taps justification of wrongdoings committed by the in-group in a way that alleviates its responsibility (i.e. blaming the out-group for the own sufferings, attributing responsibility for harm done to the out-group on a few deviant in-group members, denying guilt of the in-group because the harm was done in self-defense etc; see¹⁵). Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (»not at all«) to 5 (»extremely«), with higher scale score indicating more in-group justification. Cronbach α in this study is 0.84.

The criterion variable in this study is the experience of collective guilt measured by Collective guilt scale³⁹ consisting of two subscales: Out-group guilt assignment and In-group guilt acceptance. This scale was developed after collective guilt scales from Doosje and colleagues⁶, as well as Branscombe, Slugoski & Kappen¹⁵, and Cehajic & Brown¹³. In-group guilt acceptance subscale includes 3 items that measure group-based guilt acceptance for harm done by in-group to another group (»Although I personally haven't done anything wrong, I feel guilty for what my in-group members have done«). Out-group guilt assignment subscale comprises of 3 items measuring the extent to which one ascribes guilt to members of the out-group for the harm done to the in-group (»I blame the other group for sufferings of my group«). The participants rated their responses on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (»not at all«) to 5 (»extremely«). Cronbach α is 0.90 for collective guilt assignment and 0.88 for collective guilt acceptance.

Results

Descriptive statistics of the results are presented in Table 1. It is not surprising that the participants who live in an ethnically divided community after the intergroup conflict expressed high level of ethnic identification (\bar{X} = 4.57, SD = 0.67) and fairly high level of nationalism (\bar{X} =

TABLE 1
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS ON OUT-GROUP GUILT ASSIGNMENT AND IN-GROUP GUILT ACCEPTANCE, ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION, NATIONALISM, JUSTIFICATION OF THE IN-GROUP'S WRONGDOINGS, OUTGROUP AFFECT AND STEREOTYPES OF THE OUT-GROUP MEMBERS

	Total range	N	\bar{X}	SD
Ethnic identity	1–5	198	4.57	0.67
Nationalism	1–5	198	3.66	0.99
Justification of in-group	1–5	194	4.03	0.92
Positive out-group affect	1–5	198	2.71	1.13
Negative out-group affect	1–5	198	2.84	1.14
Stereotype of the out-group	1–5	197	2.72	0.71
Out-group guilt assignment	1–5	194	4.54	0.92
In-group guilt acceptance	1–5	197	2.59	1.42

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR VARIABLES PREDICTING COLLECTIVE GUILT ASSIGNMENT

Collective guilt assignment	β in first step	β in last step	R ²	Δ R ²
Gender	-0.094	-0.071	0.019	0.019
Age	0.074	-0.023		
Education level	-0.053	0.070		
Ethnic identity	0.350**	0.271**	0.317**	0.298**
Nationalism	0.279**	0.129		
Justification of in-group's wrongdoings	0.311**	0.286**	0.372**	0.055**
Positive intergroup affect	-0.046	-0.008	0.373**	0.001
Negative intergroup affect	-0.006	-0.033		
Out-group stereotypes	-0.112	-0.112	0.381**	0.008

β – standardised Beta coefficients; R² – coefficient of determination; Δ R² – change in R²; *p<0.05, **p<0.01

3.66, SD=0.99). The participants showed high justification of the wrongdoings committed by their in-group (\bar{X} =4.03, SD=0.92). As for the relationship towards the out-group, participants showed moderate levels of both negative (\bar{X} =2.84, SD=1.14) and positive affect (\bar{X} =2.71, SD=1.13) for the out-group members, while stereotype of the out-group was slightly negative (\bar{X} =2.72, SD=0.71).

The participants readily assigned guilt to the out-group and reported low level of accepting guilt for the harm done by the in-group. Significantly higher levels of collective guilt assignment than acceptance ($t(192)=15.66$, $p<0.01$) represents a typical post-conflict pattern of intergroup relations. As collective guilt acceptance is an attitudinal response proved to be crucial for forgiveness and reparation^{8,21}, these results suggest that participants in our study have not progressed far with the social reconstruction of their community. Low levels of collective guilt acceptance might be due to associating acceptance of collective guilt with giving up of the group's own victimhood.

Our main objective was to investigate predictors of collective guilt assignment and acceptance on a traumatized group after an intergroup conflict. Two hierarchical

regression analyses with out-group guilt assignment and in-group guilt acceptance as criterion variables were conducted. Variables were entered in five blocks. In the first step demographic data were entered, in the next ethnic identification and nationalism level (as two forms of in-group belonging) were added, after which justification of the wrongdoings committed by the in-group was entered. This variable represents cognitive aspect of relationship towards the in-group. Variables measuring the relation toward the in-group, positive and negative affect for the out-group were entered in the next step, followed by stereotype of the out-group members as a cognitive aspect of relationship towards the out-group. In this way we could assess how much emotions and cognitions toward the in-group in comparison to emotions and cognitions related to the out-group contribute to the explanation of the collective guilt acceptance and out-group blame. Results for collective guilt assignment are presented in Table 2.

All predicting variables account for 38% of the total variance of collective guilt assignment. However, the only two blocks that are significant are identification with the in-group and justification of in-group's wrongdoings.

TABLE 3
SUMMARY OF HIERARCHICAL REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR VARIABLES PREDICTING COLLECTIVE GUILT ACCEPTANCE

Collective guilt acceptance	β in first step	β in last step	R ²	Δ R ²
Gender	-0.066	-0.039	0.014	0.014
Age	0.023	0.106		
Education level	0.099	0.066		
Ethnic identity	0.006	0.101	0.049*	0.035*
Nationalism	-0.195*	-0.049		
Justification of in-group's wrongdoings	-0.381**	-0.389**	0.131**	0.083**
Positive intergroup affect	0.140	0.147	0.154**	0.023
Negative intergroup affect	0.173*	0.168		
Out-group stereotypes	-0.022	-0.022	0.154**	0.000

β – standardised Beta coefficients; R² – coefficient of determination; Δ R² – change in R²; *p<0.05, **p<0.01

Results show that demographic data does not play significant role in explaining collective guilt assignment. Moreover, positive and negative affect towards out-group members, as well as stereotype of the out-group proved to be irrelevant in predicting collective guilt assignment in the context of in-group oriented variables. On the other hand, variables related to the in-group were much more predictive for the collective guilt assignment. Interestingly, two forms of identification with the in-group – ethnic identification and nationalism – were both significant predictors of out-group blame until justification of the in-group was entered. Finally, only ethnic identity remained a predictor ($\beta=0.271$, $p=0.01$) together with justification of the in-group ($\beta=0.286$, $p=0.01$), while level of nationalism seized to predict collective guilt assignment. These results suggest that relationship with in-group is more important for assigning guilt to the out-group than relationship with out-group.

In order to determine predictors of accepting collective guilt for harmful acts done by the in-group, collective guilt acceptance was regressed on demographic data, identification with the in-group and justification of the wrongdoings committed by the in-group members as well as affects and cognitions towards the out-group. Results are presented in Table 3.

As shown in Table 3 all variables account only for 15% of total variance of collective guilt acceptance, which is far less than explained by the same set of variables in the case of out-group guilt assignment. However, it seems that similar processes underline these two constructs, but with different strength.

When it comes to collective guilt acceptance, only justification of the in-group's harmful acts predicts whether a person would accept collective guilt or not. People who justify their own in-group and deny responsibility for the wrongdoings that members of their group committed during the war will also fail to accept collective guilt.

It seems that for in-group guilt acceptance the relationship with in-group is more important than relationship with out-group as was the case with the guilt assignment. Interestingly, nationalism seems to predict collec-

tive guilt acceptance much better than identification with the in-group. Attachment to one's ethnic group is crucial for collective guilt assignment but it is the lack of glorification for the in-group that defines people who are more ready to accept the responsibility of the in-group. Nevertheless, it seems to be a predictor when justification of in-group's wrongdoings is entered. It seems that both collective guilt assignment and collective guilt acceptance are affected with identification with in-group which influence is mediated with the justification of in-group's wrongdoings. After testing for mediating effects, it was confirmed that justification of in-group's wrongdoings fully mediates the effect of nationalism on collective guilt acceptance (Sobel test revealed a significant total indirect effect ($z=-3.45$; $p<0.001$)) and partially on collective guilt assignment ($z=4.62$; $p<0.001$). Justification of in-group's wrongdoings is also partial mediator of the effect of ethnic identity on both collective guilt assignment ($z=4.50$; $p<0.001$) and acceptance ($z=-3.94$; $p<0.001$). In other words, those who identify more strongly as Croats tend to endorse to a higher degree a specific set of beliefs about the status of the in-group in past conflict (such as »we are exclusive victims in this war«) which leads to stronger blaming of outgroup members and stronger reluctance to recognize atrocities committed by in-group members.

Overall, it seems that both (lack of) acceptance and assignment of collective guilt are part of a larger identity narrative of exclusive victimhood, which prevents (former) belligerent groups to acknowledge the suffering of the other group and empathize with other side's victims. These very processes proved to be important for improving intergroup relations^{11,40}.

These results indicate that relationship with in-group is crucial for the experience of collective guilt. The explanatory power of cognitive and emotional aspects of the relationship towards the out-group members in assigning and accepting collective guilt seems to be minor if they are introduced into the analyses after the most prominent explanatory variable, i.e. in-group identity. However, considering their well-established theoretical

and practical importance in determining inter-group relations we wondered if cognitive and affective elements of the relations toward the out-group might help explain the feeling of collective guilt as it is theoretically sound to expect. Therefore we conducted additional regression analyses in which the block with out-group variables were entered in a different sequence – starting with demographic data, followed by affective and cognitive elements of relation with the outgroup, and entering the in-group variables (ethnic identity and nationalism) in the last two blocks.

This analysis confirmed the overwhelming role of in-group identification and in-group justification for collective guilt assignment. However, it also yielded some interesting, although much smaller effects of relationship with the out-group. It seems that positive affect towards the out-group members is more important for experiencing collective guilt than negative affect towards the out-group ($\beta_{\text{positive}} = -0.23^{**}$; $\beta_{\text{negative}} = 0.15$). Results suggest that it is the lack of positive affect, and not a presence of negative affect towards the out-group members, that lead to more collective guilt assignment. This finding corroborates contemporary views on modern prejudice^{41,42} according to which it is precisely the lack of positive affect toward a certain group that determines the negative out-group attitudes. Moreover, stereotypes of out-group members is a significant predictor of assigning guilt to the out-group, with more negative stereotypes of the out-group related to more collective guilt assignment, although beta coefficient is fairly small ($\beta = -0.19$, $p=0.03$). Even when two forms of identification with the in-group (level of ethnic identity and nationalism) are entered into the equation, out-group stereotypes remain marginally significant predictor of out-group blame, although beta becomes smaller ($\beta = -0.15$, $p=0.05$). Finally, when justification of the in-group is entered in the final step, out-group stereotypes cease to predict collective guilt assignment.

To summarize, positive affect and out-group stereotypes predict collective guilt only until identity variables are entered into regression equation. This result confirms our prediction that both emotional and cognitive elements of the relations toward the out-group play significant role in experiencing collective guilt, but are less important than in-group identification and justification of in-group's wrongdoings. Furthermore, it seems that affective aspects of the relationship to the out-group are more important predictors of assigning collective guilt than cognitive aspects of the out-group relationship.

Regression analyses of collective guilt acceptance on demographic data, followed by relationship toward the out-group and with in-group variables entered in the last two blocks was also conducted. Results indicate that emotional and cognitive aspects of relationship towards the out-group members predict collective guilt acceptance. Furthermore, positive affect towards the out-group predicts acceptance of collective guilt even when cognitive element (stereotypes towards out-group members) is entered into the regression. Nevertheless, it ceases to be

a predictor when in-group variables are entered. Thus, it seems that emotional aspects of the relationship to the out-group are more important predictors of both accepting and assigning of collective guilt than cognitive aspects of out-group relationship.

Discussion

This paper explores predictors of collective guilt assignment and acceptance. We included demographic data, in-group relation indicators measured as two forms of belonging to the in-group – ethnic identification level and nationalism – and, as a cognitive aspect of relationship with in-group we also included justification of the wrongdoings committed by the in-group members. Finally, emotional and cognitive aspects of relationship with the out-group, measured as positive and negative affect towards out-group members and stereotypes of the out-group members were included.

Results show that Croats in Vukovar readily assign guilt to the out-group and at the same time do not accept responsibility and guilt of the in-group for the wrongdoings during the conflict. Collective guilt acceptance has proved to be a relatively rare emotional experience in other research as well¹. It seems that people are motivated to use various strategies that legitimize the harm done by the in-group towards the out-group in order to avoid this unpleasant emotion^{1,8,11}. Furthermore, costs of creating a more just relationship with the harmed group can also affect the extent to which collective guilt acceptance is experienced. Among often used strategies of avoiding collective guilt is active denial of the facts¹⁰, in-group-flattering interpretation of the past harm⁴³ or interpretations that legitimize the harm done by the in-group¹. In our study the participants expressed a strong tendency to justify their group's wrongdoings. The highest agreement was found for two statements: »The wrongdoings committed by members of my ethnic group are incomparably smaller than the wrongdoing committed by the other side« and »The other side deserved everything that happened to them«. On the other hand, participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement: »I don't believe that my nation has done anything wrong during the war«. This shows that, although aware that both groups committed harmful acts during the period of war, Croats believe that they are the victimized group and as such cannot be held responsible for any wrongdoings as they were only defending themselves. This is consistent with previous studies using different methodology⁴⁴ and with our findings obtained with sample of young people in Vukovar²⁶. Results obtained on the same participants (although not directly used in this study) confirm that Croats perceive themselves as a more victimized group whereas Serbs believe that Croats and Serbs were equally victimized during the war³⁹. These findings suggest that the ethno-political conflict between Serbs and Croats in Croatia produced two different group narratives showing a sign of competitive victimhood²⁷. Such unresolved interpretations of the conflicts generate

unfavorable climate for the emergence of collective guilt acceptance¹. Therefore, it is of great importance to determine the predictors of guilt acceptance in order to advance the understanding of the underlying processes that might be used to facilitate the social reconstruction of such ethnically divided communities.

Our findings suggest that the relations towards the in-group are more important for experiencing both collective guilt assignment and acceptance than the relationship to the out-group, at least with the selected set of predictors. More specifically, attachment to one's ethnic group plays the most important role in predicting out-group blame, followed by justification of the in-group's wrongdoings. On the other hand, nationalistic glorification of the in-group seized to predict out-group guilt assignment when justification of the in-group was entered in the equation. This suggests that nationalism and justification of the in-group's wrongdoings explain similar share of variance and it is possible that in-group justification completely mediates relation between nationalism and collective guilt assignment, while attachment to ethnic group has a different influence on guilt assignment.

Compared with results obtained by Roccas et al.²⁵ we also found significant negative effect of nationalism (in-group glorification), but failed to find specific positive effect of attachment on collective guilt acceptance. Those with more nationalistic sentiments who glorify their in-group more tend to justify in-group's wrongdoings and at the same time blame outgroup members more.

Although relationship with the in-group proved to be more important for collective guilt than relationship towards out-group, additional analyses for out-group variables yielded interesting findings. Namely, when the order of blocks of variables in the regression analyses was reversed and in-group variables were entered last, the relationship toward out-group was a significant predictor of collective guilt only until identity variables were entered into the equation. This finding suggests that selected out-group variables have significant although not crucial role in accepting responsibility of the in-group as well as in assigning guilt to others. Specifically, both affect and cognition toward out-group members predict collective guilt assignment with positive affect being stronger predictor than cognition. As for acceptance of collective guilt, only positive affect toward out-group members predicts acceptance of collective guilt whereas cognitive element is not a predictor. Thus, positive affect towards out-group members has a significant role in accepting responsibility of the in-group as well as in assigning guilt to others, while stereotype of out-group is important only for assigning collective guilt to the out-group. When it comes to relationship to the out-group, collective guilt assignment is based on both affect toward as well as beliefs about the out-group, while collective guilt acceptance is based solely on (the absence of) positive affect to the out-group. This finding fits with the literature on prejudice where the different importance of affective and cognitive elements is a well-established finding^{30,45,46}. Therefore, our findings show that in-group variables are better predictors of both

collective guilt assignment and acceptance than the out-group variables. It seems that in a post-conflict context collective guilt is primarily defined by group identity variables whereas all other factors that probably play significant role in less threatening period become less important. However, relationship towards the outgroup members is a complex phenomenon that can be operationalized by different set of variables and therefore this finding should be tested with other relevant outgroup variables like social distance, inter-group contact, prejudice etc. Furthermore other relevant emotions toward outgroup members should be included as the mean levels of both positive and negative emotions used in this study were at the midpoint of the scale which could indicate some kind of emotional indifference. It is possible that some other emotions, such as fear, are still strongly experienced in Vukovar. For example, Bar-Tal²⁷ showed that fear, being an automatic and unconsciously processed emotion, can override hope, emotion based on cognitive activity, such as thinking, creativity and flexibility. These emotional responses were also recognized as crucial in transgenerational effects of trauma⁴⁷. In that context our results, showing that collective guilt acceptance is more cognitive-based emotion, suggest that it can emerge only in societies that are no longer in conflict, that are not dominated by collective fear of the out-group which is typical for societies involved in intractable conflict but also for post-conflict communities. This may be the reason why collective guilt acceptance is low in our sample. According to Bar-Tal²⁷, collective emotional orientation of fear is functional in coping with stressful and demanding situation (»Evolutionary safeguard that ensures survival in view of potential threats and dangers that human beings encounter«, p.7) but can become an obstacle to a peace process. One should be careful in interpreting the present findings in the light of Bar-Tal's argument for the two reasons. First, the emotions used in this study as indicators of negative affect towards the out-group did not include fear which would give a stronger argument to this hypothesis. Second, emotions that are indicators of positive and negative affect in our study could be both cognitive and automatic in their nature as we haven't pretested them.

To sum up, collective guilt acceptance is strongly related to justification of the in-group's wrongdoings, while collective guilt assignment can also be predicted by the level of identification with the in-group. Based on these results we argue that collective guilt is not just another group-based emotion, it relies on more than affect – it is also a cognitive-based mechanism defined heavily by justification of the in-group's harmful acts, at least when it comes to accepting collective guilt. This finding is important because various collective emotions play different roles in intergroup relations depending on the underlying mechanisms.

Strengths and limitations of the study

The strength of the study is the use of the probabilistic community sample of traumatized participants who live in the post-conflict community where ethnic divi-

sions are highly salient. The participants in our study come from a group that is publicly considered to be more victimized than the former adversary group, which won the war and which is the overwhelming ethnic majority at the national and a relative majority at the community level. The face-to-face interviewing by trained interviewers and instruments with good metrics enabled compiling high-quality data. Given the specific status of the participant group in the research setting, socially desirable responses were probably not elicited. The study looked at the same time at both in-group guilt acceptance and the out-group guilt assignment using the same sets of predictor variables.

The study has several limitations. First, it is possible that other emotional and cognitive responses towards the outgroup that were not included in the present study also may have a significant contribution in how people attribute collective guilt assignment and acceptance. Future research should address other sets of possible predictors of collective guilt acceptance, as there is a considerable proportion of variance that was not explained by the variables in our study. It is possible that some other group variables play more important role in accepting responsibility for harmful acts that members of the in-group have done. Furthermore, higher relevance of the in-group variables should be tested when relationship towards the outgroup is operationalized with different set of variables such as distance towards the outgroup, prejudice etc. Finally, it would be beneficial to include members of both conflicted groups in a study whenever possible in order to gain better understanding of the intra- and intergroup relations relevant for the social reconstruction process.

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Conclusion

This study shows that collective guilt is a complex and intriguing construct. Low levels of collective guilt acceptance and much higher levels of collective guilt assignment in our sample are typical for the post-conflict pattern of intergroup relations. This suggests that the process of community social reconstruction between the two former adversary groups has not considerably progressed at the time of the study.

Our findings suggest that the two aspects of collective guilt – assignment and acceptance – are predicted by similar sets of variables. However, collective guilt acceptance is predicted exclusively by the (lack of) justification of the in-group's wrongdoings, while collective guilt assignment is predicted both by the level of identification with the in-group and justification of the in-group's wrongdoings. This indicates that in-group variables may be more important for both guilt assignment and acceptance than the variables related to the out-group, such as intergroup affects and cognitions. Relationship towards out-group, although not crucial, also plays a role in experiencing collective guilt. Specifically, both affect towards and cognitions about out-group members predict collective guilt assignment (with cognition being stronger predictor than positive affect), whereas only (absence of) positive affect predicts acceptance of collective guilt while the cognitive aspect is not predictive.

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PREDIKTORI KOLEKTIVNE KRIVNJE NAKON NASILNOG SUKOB

SAŽETAK

Nakon nasilnog sukoba mnoge zajednice ostaju etnički podijeljene, a normalizacija međugrupnih odnosa otežana je ne samo grupnim normama i interpretacijom prošlih događaja, nego i pripisivanjem ili doživljajem kolektivne krivnje. Premda se kolektivna krivnja pokazala važnim indikatorom socijalnog oporavka nakon sukoba, potrebna su dodatna istraživanja kako bi se odredili njeni prediktori. Ovo istraživanje, provedeno u etnički podijeljenoj zajednici, potvrdilo je da je razina pripisivanja i prihvaćanja kolektivne krivnje u našem uzorku tipična za postkonfliktni obrazac međugrupnih odnosa – ljudi spremno pripisuju krivnju za sukob drugoj grupi, dok istovremeno ne prihvaćajući krivnju vlastite grupe. Taj nalaz sugerira da proces socijalne rekonstrukcije zajednice još nije značajno unapredovao. Rezultati također upućuju na zaključak da dva aspekta kolektivne krivnje – prihvaćanje i pripisivanje – predviđaju slični skupovi varijabli. I pripisivanje i prihvaćanje kolektivne krivnje određeno je razinom identifikacije s grupom čiji je utjecaj potpuno ili djelomično posredovan opravdavanjem postupaka vlastite grupe. Ovaj nalaz sugerira da je vezanost za vlastitu grupu važnija i za pripisivanje i za prihvaćanje kolektivne krivnje od odnosa prema drugoj grupi (npr. međugrupnih afekata i kognicija). Međutim, odnos prema vanjskoj grupi, iako nije presudan, također ima značajnu ulogu za doživljaj kolektivne krivnje. Specifično, osjećaji prema vanjskoj grupi i kognicije o članovima vanjske grupe predviđaju pripisivanje kolektivne krivnje (pri čemu su kognicije jači prediktor od pozitivnog afekta), dok pozitivni afekt prema vanjskoj grupi predviđa prihvaćanje kolektivne krivnje.