

Summary

Does “Who Says What Regarding the Expropriation of Sur” Has an Influence on the Evaluation of the Message and Collective Guilt?

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Fifteen districts of Sur district were hastily expropriated by the Ministry of Environment and Urbanization with the decision of the Council of Ministers on 21 March 2016. In this process, information flow about what happened in the region has been provided by many different sources. Without doubt, how an information / message has an impact on the person may change, depending on the source of information / message, the person / group that is focused on the given information, or some of the characteristics of the receiver (e.g., Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). In this study, we aimed to investigate the role of the source of the message, the focus of the message, and the characteristics of the receiver by focusing on the expropriation of Sur as a context. Because Kurds constitute the majority of the population in Sur district and neighborhoods evacuated due to conflicts in the region and the security operations carried out by the state (Baysal, 2018, OHCHR, 2017), we evaluated the expropriation of Sur in the context of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. In our study, we characterized the local community who were negatively affected by the expropriation process as a victim, and we characterized people who are responsible for the expropriation process as the perpetrator because they are the actors of the expropriation process of Sur. In our study, we presented a text to the sample of ethnic-Turkish participants, and participants were told that the given text is based on an interview about the expropriation process of Sur district. By using this text, we manipulated the source (perpetrator / victim), and focus (perpetrator / victim) of the message and we investigated the effect of the changes in the source and focus of the message on the evaluation of the content of the message and on the level of collective guilt. Because the findings in the literature show that perceived legitimacy of an event and identification with the in-group have an effect on the evaluation of the content of the message (e.g., Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 2006; Feldman, 1984) and collective guilt

(e.g., Bahns & Branscombe, 2011; Miron, Branscombe, & Biernat, 2010), we also included those variables into our study.

Because there are a few studies conducted about the current events / conflicts in the Kurdish regions in Turkey, and because few studies simultaneously analyze the effect of the source and focus of the message, we think that this study contributes to the literature.

Method

Participants

Participants ($N = 340$) were 254 female and 66 male, 2 of the participants did not want to state their gender, and 18 of the participants did not answer the question. Participants' ages varied from 17 to 41 ($M = 22.31$, $SD = 5.10$) and 84.4 % of the participants were university students.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were recruited via an online questionnaire platform by using convenient and snowball sampling methods. We presented the text to the volunteering participants about the expropriation process in Sur, in which we manipulated the source and the focus of the message. Subsequently, we asked them to fill out the scales given in detail in the following section.

Manipulation of the focus and perspective of the message. We asked participants to read a text about the expropriation process in Sur. By using this text, we manipulated message conditions. For the manipulation of the source of the message, we indicated that the interview had been done with the person who responsible for the expropriation process in Sur (the perpetrator condition) or with the person who is one of the local community (the victim condition). In order to manipulate the focus of the message, in the perpetrator condition, we

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focused on the actions of the people responsible for the expropriation process. However, in the victim condition, we focused on the experiences of the local community. We used active sentence structure in perpetrator-focused narratives and passive sentence structure in victim-focused narratives. Within the scope of the study, we created four different conditions: the perpetrator's perpetrator-focused narrative, the victim's victim-focused narrative, the perpetrator's victim-focused narrative, and the victim's perpetrator-focused narrative. We randomly assigned the participants to one of these conditions.

Evaluation of the message. Participants evaluated the accuracy and bias of the interview with two questions rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores indicate that the interview was perceived as more accurate / unbiased.

Questions of the perception of the legitimacy of the event. Participants rated the legitimacy of the expropriation of Sur with a scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale is .83. High scores indicate that the event is perceived as legitimate.

Collective guilt scale. In order to evaluate collective guilt, a 6-item collective guilt scale, which was formed by Doosje et al. (1998) and adapted to Turkish by Özkan (2014), was used. The items were evaluated on a scale ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale is .88. High scores indicate a higher value of collective guilt.

In-group identification scale. Identification with Turkish identity was evaluated by using the Bohner, Siebler, Gonzalez, Haye, and Schmidt's (2008) 3-item scale, which was ranged from 1 (*none*) to 5 (*very*). The Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale is .86. High scores indicate a higher level of Turkish ethnic identification.

Informed consent form. Participants' age, gender, and education status were asked in this form.

Results

Findings on Evaluation of the Message

2 X 4 Factorial ANOVA results showed that in predicting evaluation of the message, the main effects of the manipulated message conditions ($F(3,319) = 2.73, p = .04, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$) and Turkish ethnic identification ($F(1,319) = 16.67, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .05$) were significant. Besides, interaction effect of message conditions and Turkish ethnic identification was found as significant ($F(3,319) = 6.54, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .06$). Results indicated that people with low Turkish identification ($M = 4.42$) evaluated the message more accurate / less biased compared to participants with high Turkish identification ($M = 3.86$), ($p < .001$). Considering the effect of mes-

sage conditions, participants perceived victim's victim focused narrative ($M = 4.39$) more correct / less biased compared to perpetrator's perpetrator focused narrative ($M = 3.83$). Considering the interaction effect, Post-hoc comparisons with Bonferroni correction showed that people with low Turkish identification evaluated the victim's victim focused narrative and the victim's perpetrator focused narrative more accurate / less biased compared to people with high Turkish identification.

Another 2 X 4 Factorial ANOVA was conducted to analyze the interaction effect of the event's perceived legitimacy and the manipulated message conditions. Result indicated significant main effect of manipulated message conditions ($F(3,332) = 2.71, p = .04, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$) however the main effect of perceived legitimacy of the event was not significant ($F(1,332) = 1.12, p = .29, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .00$). Results showed that the interaction effect of the perceived legitimacy of the event and the manipulated message conditions was at the edge of significance ($F(3,332) = 2.63, p = .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$). Post-hoc comparisons with Bonferroni correction demonstrated that compared to people perceiving expropriation of Sur as legitimate, people perceiving expropriation of Sur as illegitimate evaluated the victim's victim-focused narrative as more correct / less biased.

Findings on Collective Guilt

One-way ANCOVA analysis showed that when the effects of control variables were considered, the manipulated message conditions had no significant effect on collective guilt scores ($F(3,216) = 1.86, p = .14, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$). When we look at the effects of control variables on collective guilt, it was found that Turkish ethnic identification ($F(1,216) = 5.52, p = .02, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$) and perceived legitimacy of the event ($F(1,216) = 32.15, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .13$) were associated with lower level of collective guilt.

Discussion

Evaluation of the Message

Our findings indicate that for people with high Turkish ethnic identification and people perceiving the expropriation of Sur as legitimate, the victim who is described as one of those from the local community is not a reliable source. More specifically, when a source of the message is from the local community, people who had high identification with Turkish identity (compared to people who had low identification with Turkish identity), and people who perceive the expropriation of Sur as legitimate (compared to people who perceive the expropriation of Sur as illegitimate) evaluated the message as more biased.

The findings we gathered can be used to develop attitude change strategies and intervention programs aiming to resolve conflicts. For example, the findings demonstrate that when the source of the message is victim / disadvantaged group member, individuals with high ethnic group identification and individuals perceiving the victimization of disadvantaged group(s) as legitimate perceive the message as more biased. Therefore, precautions should be taken to reduce this perception of bias. Although verifying the victim's opinion by another source or statistics can be suggested as methods to increase the credibility of the victim, in future studies, possible strategies / methods should be explored and tested in terms of their effectiveness.

Collective Guilt

In our study, we found that conditions in which we manipulated the source and focus of the message together do not have any significant effect on collective guilt. Our results are consistent with the study of Littleford and Jones (2017) who suggested that in a context where the identity of the message source is salient, and the issue is related to ethnic / racial identity, rather than their feelings, participants focus on evaluating the validity of a message. Our study conducted in a different context provided support for the argument of Littleford and Jones (2017). The findings indicate that it is not an accurate strategy to manipulate both the source and focus of the message if the aim is to make advantageous group members show behaviors to compensate for the harm of disadvantaged group members via a feeling of collective guilt. Since few studies analyzing the effect of conditions in which both the source and focus of the message manipulated simultaneously, there is a need for further research to understand the psychological bases of the findings.

There are limitations of our study: To illustrate, the majority of the sample consists of students, and we did not measure to what extent participants informed about Sur before their participation in the study. Although it has limitations, considering the simultaneous investigation of the source and focus of the message and characteristics of the receiver and considering the relatively less studied context of the study, the study might contribute to the literature of both collective guilt and message evaluation. Besides, the finding of the study might be considered while preparing the intergroup conflict resolution programs.

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