

Moral Immemorial: The Rarity of Self-Criticism for Previous Generations' Genocide or Mass Violence

Colin Wayne Leach* and Fouad Bou Zeineddine

University of Connecticut

Sabina Čehajić-Clancy

Sarajevo School of Science and Technology

Partly in response to political leaders' public expressions of self-criticism for past generations' genocide or other mass violence, psychologists have suggested that individuals who are psychologically connected to perpetrators may view themselves as sharing some responsibility. Such broadened self-perception should enable self-criticism for past failures just as it enables self-congratulation for past triumphs. We review studies of self-criticism regarding European colonization (of Africa, the Americas, Australia, and Indonesia) and 20th century genocide (in Bosnia, Germany, Norway, and Rwanda). Self-criticism—feelings of guilt, shame, and responsibility; wanting reparation—tended to be low. Self-criticism appeared to be lowest among nonstudent samples, those allowed to explicitly disagree with self-criticism, and those asked about more recent violence. Theoretical and practical implications of these patterns are discussed.

Genocide is always an accusation. In the 60 years since the United Nations convention against it, no group has ever spontaneously pronounced themselves perpetrators of genocide (see Minow, 1998). Rwandan Prime Minister Jean Kambanda was the first, and only, head of state to confess to genocide. However, he did so only after being brought to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. And, he later tried to withdraw his plea.

In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, Germany did not admit to genocide. While actively pursuing the “Federal Law for the Compensation of

*Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Colin Wayne Leach, Department of Psychology, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT 06521-1020 [e-mail: colin.leach@uconn.edu].

We thank Laurent Licata, Michał Bilewicz, and two anonymous reviewers, for their helpful comments on a previous draft of this paper.

the Victims of National Socialist *Persecution* (italics added),” The FRG’s first Chancellor avoided reference to genocide: “In our name, *unspeakable crimes* have been committed and demand compensation and restitution, both moral and material, for the persons and properties of the Jews who have been so seriously *harmed* . . .” (Konrad Adenauer, September 27, 1951, Brooks 1999, pp. 61–67, italics added). “Persecution,” “harm,” and “unspeakable crimes” are no substitute for the term genocide.

A fair number of highly publicized apologies and expressions of “remorse” and “regret” for mass violence have been recently offered by national representatives (Brooks, 1999; Minow, 1998). Most of these statements did not include direct acknowledgment that the in-group was a perpetrator of mass violence. For instance, several recent prime ministers have expressed remorse for the forced labor and prostitution practiced in Japan’s mid-20th century colonization of Korea. In 1997, Prime Minister Tony Blair suggested that British government policy had some role in the one million deaths in the Irish Famine of 1845–1852. In 2009, the U.S. senate apologized for the enslavement of Africans and the systems of formal segregation that prevailed until the 1960s. As with the more extreme case of genocide, the perpetrators of mass violence rarely characterize themselves as such.

Perhaps as a result of politician’s recent expressions of self-criticism, many psychologists argue that individuals may view themselves as morally implicated in past generations’ mass violence. Indeed, group identity binds us just as strongly to our inglorious as to our glorious past. Where individuals view themselves as direct descendants of perpetrators, as sharing an identity with perpetrators, or as inheriting spoils, individuals may feel implicated in past generations’ mass violence. This broadened self-perception is the putative basis for self-critical feelings based in membership in a perpetrator group, such as guilt and shame (for a review, see Iyer and Leach, 2008). And, these self-critical feelings are presumed to motivate support for compensation, apology, or other reparation (for reviews, see Branscombe & Doojse, 2004; Leach, Snider, & Iyer, 2002).

Somewhat surprisingly, recent research on self-criticism for past generations’ mass violence ignores the fact that no group has ever spontaneously pronounced themselves perpetrators of genocide, crimes against humanity, or the like. As most research has focused on establishing that the notion of group-based self-criticism is possible, it has been unconcerned with the actual level of self-criticism that people express (for discussions, see Iyer & Leach, 2008; Leach, 2010a). Thus, we have little sense of how prevalent self-criticism is or how it varies across particular instances. For these reasons, we review recent quantitative research in social and political psychology of self-criticism regarding genocide and other mass violence. We focus on quantitative research because we can better compare levels of self-criticism across studies when participants use close-ended response scales.

To complement the present volume, we discuss less researched examples of 20th century genocide (in Australia, Bosnia, and Norway) and compare levels of self-criticism to that found among Germans and Rwandans. However, our main focus is the self-criticism expressed by present day Europeans about the 16th to 20th century colonization of Africa, the Americas, Australia, and Indonesia. European colonization is one of the most elaborate, long-lived, and far-reaching examples of concerted mass violence in human history. And, colonization quite often proceeded through genocidal violence (Dirks, 1992; Todorov, 1984; UNESCO, 1980). Thus, self-criticism of colonization seems important to an understanding of the aftermath of genocide.

In the first section below, we discuss studies of self-criticism among Europeans today regarding the 16th to 20th century colonization of Indonesia and Africa. In the second section, we review studies regarding the genocide and other mass violence committed against Indigenous peoples in Australia and the Americas in the 16th to 20th centuries. In the third section, we review studies of self-criticism regarding genocide in the 20th century in Norway and Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as in Germany and Rwanda. We close with a discussion of empirical trends and conceptual explanations and implications.

Examples of European Colonization

In many ways, genocide was part and parcel of 16th to 20th century European colonization of land and natural resources in Asia and Africa (see Dirks, 1992; UNESCO, 1980). The colonizers had the “intent to destroy, in whole, or in part” ethnic, “racial,” and religious groups that complicated the colonial project. Fitting with the formal definition of genocide, this destructive intent was expressed in killing, physical and psychological harm, dangerous life conditions, sterilization and other means of preventing births, and forced removal of children. In the death throes of colonization, violence sometimes morphed into “politicide” as colonial powers sought to destroy the political groups fighting for independence.

Although the physical destruction of groups emphasized in the UN convention on genocide was present in many instances of colonization, sometimes this system of domination was more focused on physical and psychological subjugation. As such, it can be said that colonization also worked though “cultural genocide,” as colonial authorities sought to destroy indigenous practices of religion, language, culture, and politics (see Dirks, 1992; Todorov, 1984; UNESCO, 1980). It is unclear if cultural genocide fits the “psychological harm” referred to in the UN convention on genocide. However, Ralph Lemkin (1944) seemed to include the prototypical practices of colonization in his original conceptualization of genocide:

Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, except when accomplished by mass killings of all members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction

of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objectives of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of the personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and even the lives of the individuals belonging to such groups (p. 79).

In his last sentence, Lemkin makes it clear that the physical annihilation of some or all of a group is not the only kind of annihilation sought in the perpetration of genocide. Later on the same page, Lemkin goes on to say,

Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonization by the oppressor's own nationals (p. 79).

Thus, we think that there is good reason to view colonization as a form of mass violence that was often genocidal in purpose and practice, even if it did not always focus on the physical annihilation of the colonized. However, little work in mainstream psychology has examined contemporary opinions or feelings about colonialism, either among perpetrators or victims. A 2010 special issue of the *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* edited by Volpato and Licata is a rare effort to highlight the psychological side of what present day Europeans make of the mass violence perpetrated by past generations in pursuit of colonization. We have relied heavily on this recent work in the section below.

The Dutch in Indonesia

The Netherlands was a major colonial empire, involved in the African slave trade until 1863. Indonesia, the most important colony, was ruled for over three centuries. Its independence was granted in 1949, after the failure of a four-year military intervention to prevent it (Dirks, 1992). In a pioneering paper, Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, and Manstead (1998, study 2) presented 135 Dutch university students with a summary of the 17th and 18th century Dutch colonization of Indonesia presumably written by respected historians. This history was portrayed positively, negatively, or ambivalently. Importantly, in the negative portrayal, the Dutch were said to have “(a) exploited Indonesian land, (b) abused Indonesian labor, and (c) killed a lot of Indonesians.” This text was accompanied by images of emaciated Indonesian servants and laborers in rice paddies. Thus, the mass violence in Dutch colonization was made clear.

Doosje et al. (1998, study 2) asked participants to indicate their “feelings of guilt about the behavior of the Dutch during the colonial period” with a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) response scale. Participants expressed slightly more guilt when colonization was portrayed negatively ($M = 4.12$) rather

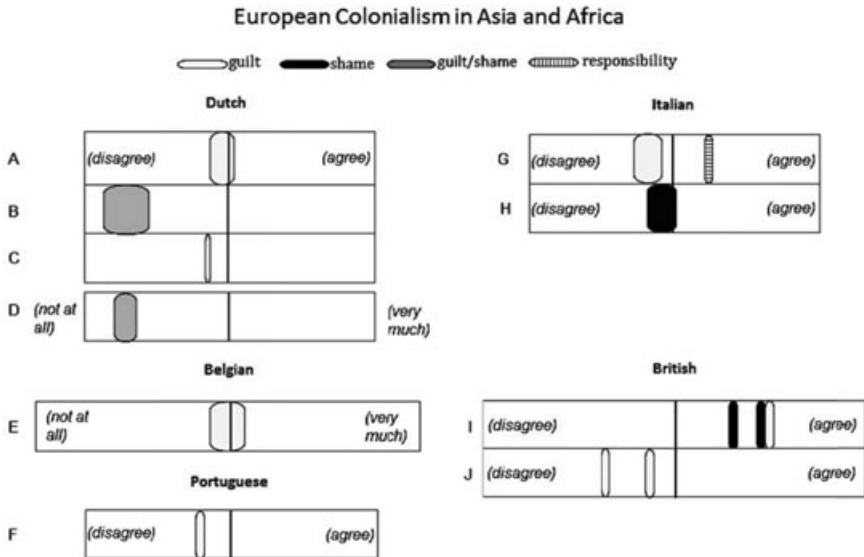


Fig. 1. Mean levels of self-criticism regarding past generations' mass violence. Each horizontal bar represents the range of the scale for a study. The dark vertical line in the middle of each bar represents the mid-point of the response scale. The width of the vertical marker within each bar represents the range of means obtained across conditions within a study.

than positively ($M = 3.60$) or ambivalently ($M = 3.76$). This range of responses is shown in case A of Figure 1. Thus, in all three experimental conditions, participants tended to *disagree* that they felt guilty. Participants also tended to disagree with the notion that they, or their country, should compensate Indonesians for colonization. Two subsequent studies with similar samples also showed the modal response to be disagreement with guilt about the colonization of Indonesia (Doojsje et al., 2006).

In two studies with 141–150 Dutch university students each, Zebel et al. (2007) framed the colonization of Indonesia in a negative or positive light. Zebel et al. also provided participants with a suggestion that their ancestors were involved (or not) in colonization. Across all conditions in study 1, self-critical emotions tended to be very low (see case D of Figure 1). In fact, participants expressed much more pride and contentment than guilt and shame. In study 2, Zebel et al. (2007) manipulated family involvement more directly by presumably having a database match participant's family genealogy to historical records of those involved in colonialism. Across all conditions, participants tended to express fairly strong disagreement with feelings of guilt and shame (see case B in Figure 1). Although participants expressed the most self-criticism when their family was involved in colonization cast in a negative light, they still tended to disagree with guilt and

shame in this experimental condition. In fact, participants expressed more positive feelings than guilt and shame, even when their family was involved in colonization cast in a negative light.

Figuereido, Doosje, Pires Valentim, and Zebel (2010, study 2) examined 157 Dutch students responses to the Netherlands' 1945–1949 military attempt to re-establish colonization after Indonesia declared its independence. Participants mildly disagreed that they felt guilty about Dutch violence and moderately disagreed that reparations should be made to Indonesia (see Figure 1, case C). Taken together, the studies of Dutch students' responses to their country's colonization of Indonesia offer little evidence of self-criticism or a willingness to make reparation. Portraying colonization negatively, or implicating people directly, did not increase self-criticism.

Europe in Africa

Belgium

In the 1885 conference of Berlin, King Leopold II of Belgium gained the Congo region of Africa as his personal property. He quickly indentured the native population and forced them to work for his profit. In 1908, after a global campaign against the killing, torture, and maiming, Leopold II gave the Congo to the Belgian government. The Congo gained independence in 1960.

Licata and Klein (2010) found that colonization of the Congo elicited very different views across three generations of (French-speaking) Belgians. Grandparents reported less guilt ($M = 3.70$) than parents ($M = 4.04$) or students ($M = 4.34$, see Figure 1, case E). However, the meaning of these moderate levels of guilt varied across generations. The grandparents' guilt was about leaving the Congo and "abandoning" the Congolese, who were seen as benefitting from colonial rule. In contrast, the students' guilt was about the exploitation of the Congo. This is consistent with Licata and Klein's (2010) argument that schools have recently moved to framing Belgian colonization in negative terms.

Portugal

Figuereido et al. (2010, study 1) asked 170 Portuguese university students about Portugal's colonization of Africa and its violent opposition to independence movements in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau in the 1960s and 1970s. Participants tended to slightly disagree that they felt guilty about colonization (see Figure 1, case F). Those who had negative stereotypes of Africans, or those who thought it important to remember the positive aspects of colonization, disagreed somewhat more with guilt. On average, participants expressed slight agreement that Portugal should compensate for colonization.

Cabecinhas and Feijó (2010) asked 118 Portuguese and 180 Mozambicans about the history of their country. For Mozambicans, Portuguese colonization and the fight for liberation were of moderate importance historically: 28% mentioned colonization and 36% mentioned the “war of liberation” as one of the five most important events in national history. When citing colonization as an important event, the Mozambicans made specific reference to some of its worst atrocities. For example, 11% remembered the slave trade and 8% remembered the Massacre of Mueda—where Mozambican protesters were murdered by order of a Portuguese administrator. Thus, colonization tended to be seen in quite negative terms by Mozambicans, whereas the fight for liberation was evaluated more positively.

The Portuguese offered a very different view of this shared history. Only 16% of the Portuguese mentioned colonialism, and only 10% mentioned the wars against colonial independence, as important events in the history of Portugal. None of the Portuguese mentioned the specific brutalities cited by the Mozambicans. A likely reason for the rarity of self-criticism among the Portuguese is their romantic view of the colonial period as marked by the “voyages of discovery.” Indeed, 80% mentioned these “voyages” as one of the five most important events in national history. For the Portuguese, this aspect of colonization was marked by strong feelings of pride and admiration.

Italy

In Italy, content analyses of history textbooks by Leone and Mastrovito (2010) found little reference to the colonial past, particularly the atrocities committed in Ethiopia and Libya during the Fascist regime (e.g., the use of poison gas, civilian massacres, concentration camps). Given these representations of Italy’s colonial period, it is not surprising that Mari, Andrighetto, Gabbiadini, Durante, and Volpato (2010) found little agreement with self-criticism in a study of 68 students and 84 people recruited through the internet (see Figure 1, case G, H). Despite general disagreement with guilt and shame, participants tended to acknowledge Italy’s responsibility for the violence and other damage of colonization. The discrepancy between national responsibility and self-critical feelings suggests that participants did not see themselves as implicated in the acts of their forebears. Indeed, Mari et al. suggested that Italians attribute the colonization of Africa to the fascists rather than to Italy in general.

Britain

Britain had one of the most extensive colonial empires in the world. Its brutal resistance to independence movements, in India, southern Africa, Australia, and elsewhere is well documented. However, there are few published studies of contemporary British sentiment regarding the colonization of Africa. In a recent

study, Allpress et al. (2010, study 2) queried 181 British university students about the deaths, “beatings, starvation, and torture” that the Kikuyu ethnic group was subjected to in British detention camps designed to end their involvement in the Mau Mau revolution in Kenya, 1952–1960. This information was presented as a factual report from a respected newspaper. Surprisingly, participants expressed near moderate agreement with guilt and shame (see Figure 1, case I). Agreement with compensation was slightly lower, but still on the agree side of the response scale. However, Morton and Postmes’ (2010, study 1) study of 58 British university students produced mean *disagreement* with guilt about the British role in the African slave trade. A second study showed even stronger disagreement with such guilt (see Figure 1, case J). Both studies by Morton and Postmes (2010) presented participants with historical evidence of the damage done by slavery, but apparently made little reference to the quality or scale of the violence involved. Nevertheless, it is surprising that two different papers in Britain about mass violence in the colonization of Africa produced such different levels of self-critical feeling. Given findings regarding other examples of European colonization, it is the moderate *agreement* with guilt and shame in Allpress et al. (2010) that is unusual. This may have to do with the particular event that they examined.

Colonization of Indigenous Peoples in Australia and the Americas

In the colonization of Asia and Africa, the European powers sought to use some portion of the population for labor. In the 16th to 20th century colonization of Australia and the Americas, the Indigenous peoples were treated differently as the intent to destroy entire groups was explicit and aggressively pursued (see Broome, 2002; UNESCO, 1980). Todorov (1984) estimated that tens of millions of Indigenous Americans were killed by Spanish colonization.

The Americas

There are few studies of contemporary sentiment regarding the genocide of the indigenous population of the Americas. In one study, Kurtiş, Adams, and Yellow Bird (2010, study 3) exposed 173 university students to manipulations of the salience of Native Americans and their genocide in a speech. Across all conditions (see Figure 2, case A), participants tended to disagree with reparations to Native Americans (e.g., “The US should establish a National Day of Apology to memorialize and atone for suffering inflicted upon Native Americans”). Making reference to the genocide of Native Americans did not increase agreement with reparation. Castano and Giner-Sorolla (2006, Study 3) presented 92 European Americans recruited on the internet with more and less violent accounts of European colonization of Native American land. In the more violent account, population decline was attributed to either intentional killing or disease.

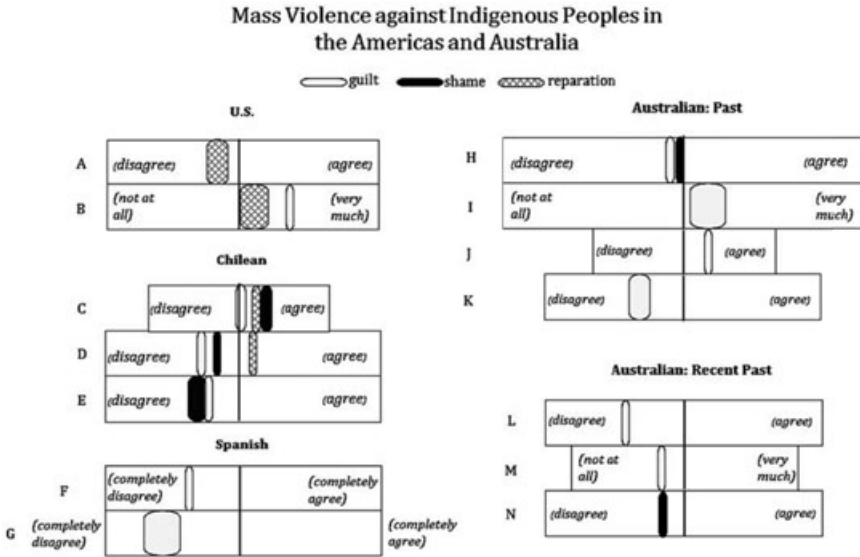


Fig. 2. Mean levels of self-criticism regarding past generations’ mass violence. Each horizontal bar represents the range of the scale for a study. The dark vertical line in the middle of each bar represents the mid-point of the response scale. The width of the vertical marker within each bar represents the range of means obtained across conditions within a study.

Intentional killing led to high guilt, whereas death by disease or a less violent portrayal of colonization led to more moderate guilt. Support for material compensation to Native Americans was moderate (see Figure 2, case B). It is unclear why so much more guilt was expressed in Castano and Giner-Sorolla (2006) than in Kurtiş et al. (2010). However, it is worth noting that the only studies where we observed moderate self-criticism about the colonization of the Americas were those by Castano and Giner-Sorolla (2006), who did not allow participants to disagree that they felt guilt or shame. We return to this recurrent issue below.

Brown, Gonzalez, Zagefka, Manzi, and Čehajić (2008) asked samples of 124 (study 1) and 247 (study 2) nonindigenous secondary school students in Chile their views regarding past and present mistreatment of the Mapuche indigenous group. Guilt garnered neutral responses and there was slight agreement with shame in both samples (see Figure 2, case C). In a third study, 193 university students tended to disagree that they felt guilt or shame, but agreed with reparation (see Figure 2, case D). Manzi and Gonzalez (2007) produced similar results in another study in Chile (see Figure 2, case E).

In two studies, Fernández and Kurtiş (2012, unpublished data) presented university students in Spain with an ostensible newspaper article reporting that respected academics had concluded that Spain was responsible for “an important

demographic catastrophe in which millions of natives died.” Despite this near-genocidal framing, participants tended to disagree that they felt guilt (see Figure 2, case F and G). When the “demographic catastrophe” was not mentioned explicitly, participants disagreed even more strongly that they felt guilt about Spanish colonization of the Americas (see Figure 2, case G).

Australia

British colonization of Australia proceeded partly through declaring the land uninhabited because Indigenous people were classified as fauna. Aborigines and Torres Straits Islanders gained Australian citizenship only through referendum in 1967. In the more recent past, Indigenous peoples have suffered forced migration, forced sterilization, the removal of children from families, and multiple forms of “cultural genocide” (Broome, 2002). Some of these policies, only ended in the 1970s, were revived in 2007 in the Northern territory of Australia. To enact these policies the Australian government had to suspend its anti-discrimination law and the 1975 Racial Discrimination Act in the Northern territory. Thus, the past is very much present in the treatment of Indigenous people in Australia.

In 2008 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd offered the first federal apology for the national policy of removing Aboriginal children from their homes and placing them with white families or in institutions. Two days before, Allpress et al. (2010, study 1) asked 136 white Australian shoppers about the apology for the 1910–1970 policy. Agreement with the coming apology was moderate. However, participants slightly disagreed that they felt guilt or shame about their in-group’s mistreatment of Aboriginal people (see Figure 2, case H). In Britain, Castano and Giner-Sorolla (2006, study 2) asked 57 university students about “what happened to the Aborigines as a consequence of British arrival on the Australian continent.” In one condition “participants were told that the British were responsible for a dramatic decline in the number of Aborigines because of the diseases introduced by British settlers and their cattle and planned military campaigns they conducted against the Aborigines,” whereas in the other condition colonization was presented more neutrally. Mentioning the features of genocide led to greater guilt about the past treatment of Aborigines ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.02$) than the neutral description ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 1.41$). However, in both conditions, participants expressed only moderate guilt (see Figure 2, case I).

McGarty et al. (2005, study 2) presented 116 university students and older adults with a brief summary of the 19th century colonization of Australia: “it was considered acceptable for actions against Indigenous Australians that *would now be classified as genocide* to take place. Hostile treatment included the poisoning of waterholes and the active hunting of Indigenous Australians in many regions. Many of the actions that resulted in the deaths of Indigenous Australians throughout the 19th century followed directly from policies of the time” (emphasis added).

Participants somewhat agreed that they felt guilt and that they, and their country, should apologize (see Figure 2, case J). Participants tended to be neutral on the question of whether descendants should feel guilty about the acts of their ancestors. Importantly, those who most agreed that descendants are proxies for their ancestors reported the most guilt ($r = .63$) and agreement with apology ($r = .57$).

Several studies with nonstudent samples show less self-criticism among non-Indigenous Australians. For example, Pedersen, Beven, Walker, and Griffiths (2004) measured guilt about “past and present inequality” in two randomly selected samples in the city of Perth ($N = 122$ and 157). The average response in both samples was to somewhat disagree with feelings of guilt (see Figure 2, case K). In McGarty et al. (2005, Study 1) 163 Perth residents tended to somewhat disagree that they felt guilt about present and past treatment of Aboriginal people (see Figure 2, case L). Participants also tended to disagree with the notion of a federal apology to Aboriginal people. Leach, Iyer, and Pedersen (2006, Study 3) had local activists recruit 203 Perth residents concerned with social justice. Even this quite left-wing sample expressed modest feelings of guilt and responsibility (see Figure 2, case M). It is no surprise then that Leach et al. (2006, Study 1) found that 164 ordinary Perth residents tended to slightly disagree with the question, “I feel a sense of shame when I think of how non-Aborigines have treated Aborigines” (see Figure 2, case N).

20th Century Genocides

In addition to the mass violence of 20th century European colonization, a number of states pursued outright genocide against their own, or neighboring, ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities. The Nazi genocide is the best-known example, although we are not aware of many studies of contemporary German self-criticism comparable to those reviewed here. However, Dresler and Liu (2006) questioned 500 German university students about the Holocaust (see Figure 3, case A). Participants tended to slightly agree that they felt shame for “so many crimes against the Jews” and “what our grandparents did during the Third Reich.” Thus, even in Germany, young people express little self-criticism about their country’s genocide only fifty years after its end (see also Paez, Marques, Valencia, & Vincze, 2006).

The rapidity and scope of the killing in the 1994 genocide of Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda has been discussed in several contributions to this issue. In a remarkable study, Kanyangara, Rimé, Philippot, and Yzerbyt (2007) had fifty (mostly male) prisoners accused of genocide in Rwanda indicate their feelings about the trial 45 days before and after. The prisoners expressed moderate guilt and shame (see Figure 3, case B, C) and slightly higher sadness before their trial. Thus, even among those accused of perpetrating genocide, self-criticism is modest.

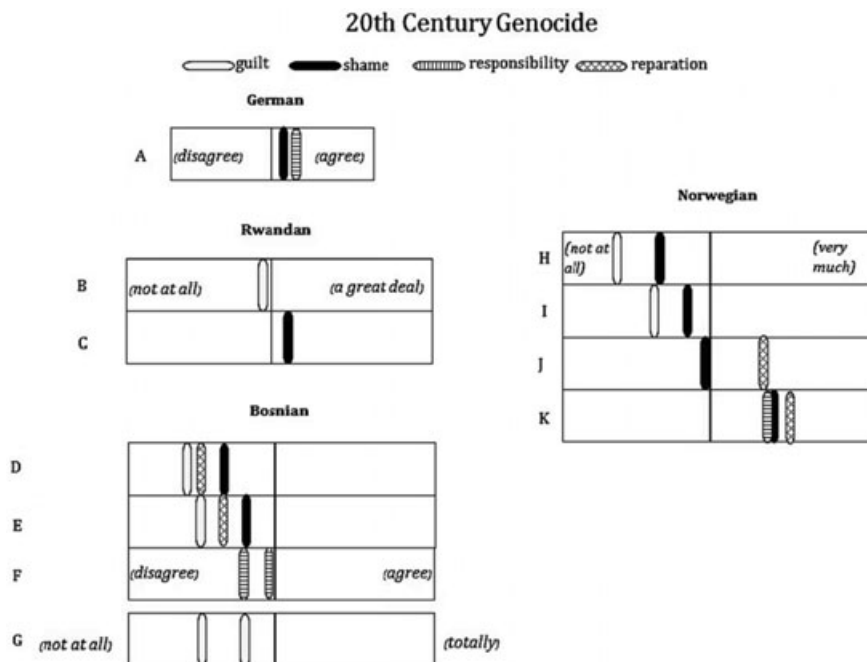


Fig. 3. Mean levels of self-criticism regarding past generations’ mass violence. Each horizontal bar represents the range of the scale for a study. The dark vertical line in the middle of each bar represents the mid-point of the response scale. The width of the vertical marker within each bar represents the range of means obtained across conditions within a study.

Bosnia-Herzegovina

From 1992 to 1995, ethnic Serbs, Croats, and Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) fought for control of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Serbs laid siege to the United Nations “safe havens” of Sarajevo and Srebrenica. In July 1995, Serbs massacred an estimated 8,000 Bosniak men and boys in Srebrenica. In February 2007, the International Court of Justice confirmed the Srebrenica massacre as genocide. Brown and Čehajić (2008, study 1) asked 173 Serb high school and university students about the 1992–1995 treatment of Bosniaks. They tended to strongly disagree that they felt guilt or shame about “past harmful actions,” “human rights violations,” and “how Serbs took away homes.” They also tended to strongly disagree that Serbs should make reparations (see Figure 3, case D). In a second study, 247 Serb high school students also tended to disagree with self-criticism and reparation (see Figure 3, case E).

In a different approach, Čehajić, Brown, and Gonzalez (2009, study 2) asked 158 Serb high school students about Serbian responsibility for the “misdeeds” and

“things that happened” from 1992 to 1995. In a control condition, participants tended to express mild disagreement with in-group responsibility (see Figure 3, case F). Those who read a brief interview of their peers discussing Serbs’ responsibility for “atrocities” expressed slightly less disagreement with Serbian responsibility. In two studies in the Netherlands, Zeibel et al. (2008) asked university students how much guilt they felt about the failure of Dutch peacekeepers to protect Bosniaks in Srebrenica. Guilt was low (the left most bar in Figure 3, case G). Even when this failure was presented in its most negative form, by portraying the Dutch as actively helping the Serbs’s genocide, guilt remained fairly low (the right most bar in see Figure 3, case G).

Norway

Like many countries in northern Europe, Norway pursued eugenicist informed policies of genocide against its Romani (*Tater*, “gypsy”) population well into the late 20th century. Indeed, official state mistreatment—forced sterilization, removal of children from families, forced labor, restricted movement—ended only in 1986. In 2001 and 2005 the Norwegian government admitted to these policies and to their purposeful destruction of all records, and offered monetary compensation to the victims (see Gausel, Leach, Vignoles, & Brown, 2012).

In a sample of 196 ethnic Norwegians in public places, Gausel and Brown (2012) found that those who were born after the state abuse ended (i.e., participants under 35) expressed little guilt and near moderate shame (see Figure 3, case H). Those over 35 expressed near moderate guilt and shame (see Figure 3, case I). In Gausel et al. (2012, study 1), 206 ethnic Norwegians were presented with an ostensible newspaper article describing the government’s genocidal policies. In response, participants reported feeling moderate shame and somewhat stronger support for state restitution (see Figure 3, case J). Gausel et al. (2012, study 2) performed another study with 166 ethnic Norwegians. Here they presented the details of the genocide with a photo of a weeping *Tater* man recounting his forced sterilization. Participants reported somewhat strong shame, and blame of Norwegians, and slightly stronger support for state restitution (see Figure 3, case K). Thus, self-criticism for state genocide appeared to increase as the evidence for it became more detailed and more emotionally moving.

Discussion

Our review covered a wide range historically and geographically. In addition, studies varied a great deal on who was queried and how questions were asked. Despite this diversity, we can offer some general observations and

interpretations. We must first note that explicit and strong self-criticism for past generations' genocide, or other mass violence, is a rarity in the studies we reviewed. In most cases, participants tended to *disagree* with self-critical sentiment when they were given the opportunity to do so. Some of the examples are surprising. Given the evidence, and its recency, one might expect more self-criticism about the Srebrenica massacre in Bosnia, Norway's genocidal policies against the Tater, and the removal of Aboriginal children in Australia. Generally speaking, it seems most accurate to describe this literature as examining the *absence*, rather than the presence, of self-criticism for the in-group's mass violence (Leach, 2010a,b; see also Iyer & Leach, 2008; Leach et al., 2002). Although levels tended to be low, people expressed more self-criticism for their in-group's genocide or other mass violence when it (1) occurred in the more distant past, (2) was described more explicitly and movingly, and (3) was measured with a response scale whose lowest end-point was "0" and/or "not all" rather than some form of "disagree."

The More Distant Past

Surprisingly, people tended to express more self-criticism about older instances of genocide or mass violence (with the notable exception of Dutch colonization of Indonesia). Why should people feel worse about what their ancestors did centuries ago when the initial harm and on-going consequences of more recent violence should be more apparent? One possibility is that recent genocides are *too close* to the present day. The stronger temporal link to recent ancestors, perhaps even the generation of one's parents, may be enough to directly implicate those in the present day (see Gausel & Brown, 2012; Zebel et al., 2007). As such, people may have greater psychological, social, financial, and moral reasons to resist feeling connected to recent perpetrators. For example, those in the present day may fear that feeling connected to recent perpetrators will result in their own moral or financial responsibility to make reparation to victims (McGarty et al., 2005). More distant mass violence suggests less moral or financial cost in the present day.

Another possibility is that self-criticism about long past genocide may be more about individuals' association with their violent ancestors than their association with the violence itself. It is entirely possible that people in the present day feel bad and wish to make reparation because they believe that having genocidaires as ancestors taints their group's social image in the eyes of the world (see Allpress et al., 2010; Brown & Čehajić, 2008; Brown et al., 2008). Although people may use the term "shame" to express this concern for their group's social image, this is not genuine self-criticism. Thus, such reputation-oriented shame should do little to motivate effort for moral *self-improvement* (e.g., Allpress et al., 2010; Gausel et al., 2012; for a discussion, see Gausel & Leach, 2011).

Representing the Reprehensible

There is great variation in the form and style in which the mass violence was presented to participants in the studies reviewed. Most studies did not refer to the full set of acts that meet the technical definition of genocide. Some studies referred to mass killing and other violence directed at a national, ethnic, or religious group, whereas other studies referred to blocked fertility and physical displacement. Perhaps as a result, few studies referred to the term genocide in their communication with participants. Interestingly, those studies that presented participants with detailed and vivid information about actual genocides did appear to elicit more self-critical sentiment. This may be most readily observed in the set of studies conducted by Gausel and colleagues in Norway. Across four studies that used very similar materials, self-criticism appeared to increase as the description of the genocide was more detailed and vivid. The highest levels of self-criticism were obtained with a detailed description of the persecution of Tater that was accompanied by a photo of a man weeping as he recounted the story of his forced sterilization.

Although it makes sense that more moving materials are more moving, it is surprising how few studies accounted for this possibility (for discussions, see Iyer & Leach, 2008; Leach, 2010a). It is possible that the modest levels of self-criticism observed in many studies are due to pallid representations of the reprehensible. It is also possible that participants' modest self-criticism resulted from their pre-existing knowledge, beliefs, and feelings about the examples of genocide and mass violence examined. However vivid or moving a representation of the past may be, it is likely interpreted through an individual's pre-existing orientation to the issue. More studies must examine how pre-existing orientations guide individuals' responses to (little known or well known) examples of genocide and mass violence (for a discussion, see Leach, 2010a).

The Scale of Response

There was great variation in the response scales used to assess participants' degree of self-critical sentiment. Inspection of Figures 1 and 2 suggests that greater self-criticism was expressed when response scales began with an endpoint labeled as "none" or "not at all." Such response scales communicate to participants that some of the sentiment is expected by the researcher (for a review, see Schwarz, 1994). In contrast, response scales that range from "disagree" to "agree" communicate the researcher's expectation that participants may or may not have a particular opinion or feeling. Thus, disagree-agree scales more easily allow people to oppose the very idea that they should feel bad about what their group has done (for a discussion, see Leach, 2010a). When people were given the option to oppose the notion of moral self-criticism for their in-group's

immorality they tended to do so. It seems likely then that studies that employ more restrictive response scales tend to exaggerate the degree of self-criticism reported. Future research would do well to take the communicative power of response scales into account, especially when examining a topic as morally loaded as mass violence.

Implications

Our main aim was to review *the degree* of self-critical sentiment about past generations' genocide and other mass violence. However, many studies examined possible explanations for the rarity of self-criticism that we observed. These explanations ran the gamut. Examples include the costs and rewards of colonization, the strength of national or other group identity, and the age of participants and their chronological link to events. However, of all of the explanations of the rarity of self-criticism, moral disengagement appears to be the most popular at present. Bandura (1999) identified a variety of strategies by which people disengage their behavior from the self-criticism that should typically follow from reprehensible acts such as genocide or other mass violence. These strategies work to either (1) frame actions as less unjust, (2) construe actions as causing little harm, or (3) frame victims as deserving of their treatment. Moral justification is a strategy of the first kind, as it provides a moral or practical reason for mistreatment. Dehumanization is a strategy of the third kind, as it renders victims deserving of mistreatment by portraying them as less human.

Many of the studies regarding colonization reviewed above provided evidence that participants engaged in moral justification and/or dehumanization. This is perhaps not surprising, given that the ideology and practice of colonization is based in part on both moral justification and dehumanization (Dirks, 1992; Todorov, 1984; UNESCO, 1980). As colonizers saw themselves as superior human beings, they had the "burden" of "taking care of" "inferior" subject populations. Thus, the death and destruction wrought by colonization could be justified by the "progress"—in infrastructure, education, medicine—it brought to an otherwise "backward" people. It is to this supposedly mixed legacy of colonization that many participants seemed to refer when asked to reflect on their country's colonization of others. By viewing colonization as a morally justified sacrifice of sub-humans to achieve progress, those in the present day can disengage past perpetration from present moral standards against genocide and mass violence.

There is little doubt that people sometimes use strategies of moral disengagement when facing past generations' genocide or other mass violence. However, the process of moral disengagement assumes that individuals view their ancestors' violence as morally reprehensible and thus disengage their moral standards to avoid the moral self-criticism that would otherwise follow (Leach, 2010b). This assumption seems questionable given that few people today actually view their

ancestors as committing genocide or other morally reprehensible violence. Given the degree to which individuals are invested in viewing their in-groups as moral (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007), individuals rarely consider the possibility that an in-group has acted immorally. Thus, rather than justifying past immorality to protect present self-image, people may not perceive an immorality in the first place. By projecting into the past the present image of the in-group as moral, individuals may prophylactically prevent moral self-criticism. If one's group is moral, then it is moral in the past, present, and future; it is moral immemorial. Leach (2010b) recently described this phenomenon as a "pre hoc" moral *mis-engagement* whereby evaluation of the in-group as moral in general guides the construal of particular group actions such that they are rarely viewed as immoral. He contrasted this pre hoc affirmation of the (individual and group) self to the post hoc defense proposed in the notion of moral disengagement.

There are few failures that threaten people's self-concept, as individuals or as group members, more than moral failures. And, there are few moral failures worse than genocide or other forms of mass violence. Thus, it is not surprising that so few people recognize past generations' mass violence or see themselves as implicated in it. It feels better to recognize, and share in, past generations' triumphs than tragedies. It feels better to be moral immemorial. Nevertheless, there are those who choose a more balanced view of the past and thereby choose to view their group's legacy critically. Where self-integrity is secure (e.g., Čehajić, Effron, Halperin, Liberman, & Ross, 2011), or where self-improvement is more important than self-defense (Gausel & Leach, 2011), individuals may *morally engage* in past generations' wrongdoing. Perhaps moral engagement of past perpetration serves as preparation for future prevention? This is an important question for future research.

References

- Allpress, J. A., Barlow, F. K., Brown, R., & Louis, W. R. (2010). Atoning for colonial injustices: Group-based shame and guilt motivate support for reparation. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 4, 75–88. Retrieved from www.ijcv.org.
- Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3, 193–209. doi: 10.1207/s15327957pspr0303.
- Branscombe, N. R., & Doosje, B. E. J. (Eds.). (2004). *Collective guilt: International perspectives*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Brooks, R. (1999). *When sorry isn't enough: The controversy over apologies and reparations for human injustice*. New York, NY: New York University.
- Broome, R. (2002). *Aboriginal Australians: Black responses to White dominance, 1788–2001* (3rd ed.). Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin.
- Brown, R., & Čehajić, S. (2008). Dealing with the past and facing the future: Mediators of the effects of collective guilt and shame in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 38, 669–684. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.466.
- Brown, R., Gonzalez, R., Zagefka, H., Manzi, J., & Čehajić, S. (2008). Nuestra culpa: Collective guilt and shame as predictors of reparation for historical wrongdoing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94, 75–90. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.94.1.75.

- Cabecinhas, R., & Feijó, J. (2010). Collective memories of Portuguese colonial action in Africa: Representations of the colonial past among Mozambicans and Portuguese Youths. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 4, 28–44. Retrieved from www.ijcv.org/.
- Castano, E., & Giner-Sorolla, R. (2006). Not quite human: Infrahumanization in response to collective responsibility for intergroup killing. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 804–818. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.804.
- Čehajić, S., Brown, R., & Gonzalez, R. (2009). What do I care? Perceived ingroup responsibility and dehumanization as predictors of empathy felt for the victim group. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 12, 715–729. doi: 10.1177/1368430209347727.
- Čehajić, S., Efron, D., Halperin, E., Liberman, V., & Ross, L. (2011). Affirmation, acknowledgment of ingroup responsibility, group-based guilt, and support for reparative measures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101, 256–270. doi: 10.1037/a0023936.
- Dirks, N. B. (Ed.). (1992). *Colonialism and culture*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan.
- Doosje, B. E. J., Branscombe, N. R., Spears, R., & Manstead, A. S. R. (1998). Guilty by association: When one's group has a negative history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 872–886. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.75.4.872.
- Doosje, B. E. J., Branscombe, N. R., Spears, R., & Manstead, A. S. R. (2006). Antecedents and consequences of group-based guilt: The effects of ingroup identification. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations*, 9, 325–338. doi: 10.1177/1368430206064637.
- Dresler-Hawke, E., & Liu, J. H. (2006). Collective shame and the positioning of German national identity. *Psicologia Política*, 32, 131–153. Retrieved from www.uv.es/garzon/psicologia%20politica/N32-7.pdf.
- Figueiredo, A., Doosje, B. E. J., Valentim, J. P., & Zebel, S. (2010). Dealing with past colonial conflicts: How perceived characteristics of the victimized outgroup can influence the experience of group-based guilt. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 4, 89–105. Retrieved from <http://www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/64/189>
- Gausel, N., & Brown, R. J. (2012). Shame and guilt—Do they really differ in their focus of evaluation? Wanting to change the self and behavior in response to ingroup immorality. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 152, 547–567. doi: 10.1080/00224545.2012.657265.
- Gausel, N., & Leach, C. W. (2011). Concern for self-image and social-image in the management of moral failure: Rethinking shame. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 41, 468–478. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.803.
- Gausel, N., Leach, C. W., Vignoles, V. L., & Brown, R. J. (2012). Defend or repair? Explaining responses to in-group moral failure by disentangling feelings of shame, rejection, and inferiority. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102, 941–960. doi: 10.1037/a0027233.
- Iyer, A., & Leach, C. W. (2008). Emotion in inter-group relations. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 19, 86–125. doi: 10.1080/10463280802079738.
- Kanyangara, P., Rimé, B., Philippot, P., & Yzerbyt, V. (2007). Collective rituals, emotional climate and intergroup perception: Participation in “Gacaca” tribunals and assimilation of the Rwandan genocide. *Journal of Social Issues*, 63, 387–403. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.2007.00515.x.
- Kurtis, T., Adams, G., & Yellow Bird, M. (2010). Generosity or genocide? Identity implications of silence in American Thanksgiving commemorations. *Memory*, 18, 208–224. doi: 10.1080/09658210903176478.
- Leach, C. W. (2010a). The person in political emotion. *Journal of Personality*, 78, 1827–1859. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-6494.2010.00671.x.
- Leach, C. W. (2010b). *Moral mis-engagement: How moral self-evaluation leads to injustice*. Paper presented at the Small Group Meeting: Forgotten Alternatives: Denaturalizing Conditions of Injustice and Exclusion, City University of New York Graduate Center, New York, NY.
- Leach, C. W., Ellemers, N., & Barreto, M. (2007). Group virtue: The importance of morality (vs. competence and sociability) in the positive evaluation of in-groups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93, 234–249. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.93.2.234
- Leach, C. W., Iyer, A., & Pedersen, A. (2006). Anger and guilt about in-group advantage explain the willingness for political action. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32, 1232–1245. doi: 10.1177/0146167206289729

- Leach, C. W., Snider, N., & Iyer, A. (2002). "Poisoning the consciences of the fortunate": The experience of relative advantage and support for social equality. In I. Walker & H. J. Smith (Eds.), *Relative deprivation: Specification, development, and integration* (pp. 136–163). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Lemkin, R. (1944). *Axis rule in occupied Europe: Laws of occupation—analysis of government—proposals for redress*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Leone, G., & Mastrovito, T. (2010). Learning about our shameful past: A socio-psychological analysis of present-day historical narratives of Italian colonial wars. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence, 4*, 11–27. Retrieved from ijcv.org/.
- Licata, L., & Klein, O. (2010). Holocaust or benevolent paternalism? Intergenerational comparisons on collective memories and emotions about Belgium's colonial past. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence, 4*, 45–57. Retrieved from <http://www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/60/186>.
- McGarty, C., Pedersen, A., Leach, C. W., Mansell, T., Waller, J., & Bliuc, A. (2005). Group-based guilt as a predictor of commitment to apology. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 44*, 659–680. doi: 10.1348/014466604x18974.
- Minow, M. (1998). *Between vengeance and forgiveness: Facing history after genocide and mass violence*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Morton, T. A., & Postmes, T. (2010). Moral duty or moral defence? The effects of perceiving shared humanity with the victims of ingroup perpetrated harm. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 40*, 1–12. doi: 10.1002/ejsp.751.
- Páez, D., Marques, J., Valencia, J., & Vincze, O. (2006). Dealing with collective shame and guilt. *Psicología Política, 32*, 59–78. Retrieved from http://www.europhd.eu/html/_onda02/07/PDF/12th_lab_scientificmaterial/valencia/collectiveshame.pdf.
- Pedersen, A., Beven, J., Walker, I., & Griffiths, B. (2004). Attitudes toward indigenous Australians: The role of empathy and guilt. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 14*, 233–249. doi: 10.1002/casp.77.
- Todorov, T. (1984). *The conquest of America: The question of the other*. (R. Howard, Trans.). New York, NY: Harper Row.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (Ed.). (1980). *Sociological Theories of Race and Colonialism*. Paris, France: UNESCO.
- Zebel, S., Pennekamp, S. F., van Zomeren, M., Doosje, B. E. J., van Kleef, G. A., Vliek, M. L. W., & van der Schalk, J. (2007). Vessels with gold or guilt: Emotional reactions to family involvement associated with glorious or gloomy aspects of the colonial past. *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations, 10*, 71–86. doi: 10.1177/1368430207071342.
- Zebel, S., Zimmermann, A., Viki, G. T., & Doosje, B. E. J. (2008). Dehumanization and guilt as distinct but related predictors of support for reparation policies. *Political Psychology, 29*, 193–219. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9221.2008.00623.

COLIN WAYNE LEACH received BA in 1989, MA in 1991 from Boston University, and PhD in 1995 from University of Michigan. He is Professor of Psychology at the University of Connecticut. Colin's research examines status and morality in self-evaluation, emotion, and social relations.

FOUAD BOU ZEINEDDINE received BA in 2009, MA in 2010 from Clark University, also MA in 2012 from University of Connecticut. He is a graduate student in social psychology at the University of Connecticut. His research is mainly concerned with morality, power dynamics, and political engagement in international relations.

SABINA ČEHAJIĆ-CLANCY received BA in 2003 from University of Sarajevo; MSc in 2005, PhD in 2008 from University of Sussex. She is an assistant professor of political psychology at the Sarajevo School of Science and Technology. Her current research focus is on moral engagements with collective atrocities.