CHANGE IN PERCEIVED OUTGROUP MORALITY INCREASES FORGIVENESS IN POST-GENOCIDE SETTINGS — STUDY OF THE MORAL EXEMPLARS

MARTA BENEDA
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

MARTA WITKOWSKA
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

NARINE KHACHATRYAN
NVARD GRIGORYAN
YEREVAN STATE UNIVERSITY

MICHAŁ BILEWICZ
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

In the aftermath of violent conflicts, victim groups tend to perceive perpetrator group members as homogeneously immoral, which may hinder intergroup forgiveness. In the present paper, we examine whether exposure to narratives about historical moral exemplars could alter perceived morality of the former perpetrator group and, as an effect, increase willingness to forgive. In the pilot study, an exposure to stories about moral behavior of perpetrator group members led to an increase of perceived morality of their descendants. Two studies performed in the post-genocide context of Armenian-Turkish relations showed that this change in perceived outgroup morality following an exposure to moral exemplars manipulation resulted in greater willingness to forgive the perpetrator group for past misdeeds. These effects were observed only when moral exemplars were presented as typical of the outgroup and they cannot be explained by inducing a general positive view of intergroup relations.

Key words: Moral exemplars; Forgiveness; Morality; Reconciliation; Intergroup conflict.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Michal Bilewicz, Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw, Stawki 5/7, 00-183 Warsaw, Poland. Email: bilewicz@psych.uw.edu.pl

"Human beings tend to forgive and forget. That's what is normal. For a hundred years, even though we suffered, we tried to live our lives. But we are living with blood on this land," said a young Armenian man one century after his compatriots were killed in the genocide committed by Turks (Jones, 2015). The 1915 genocide remains one of those atrocities that have never been officially acknowledged by descendants of perpetrators. Therefore, although many Armenians openly express a will to restore their relations with Turks, many substantial obstacles — of both diplomatic and psychological nature — stand in the way of such reconciliation.

Collectively meaningful events, such as acts of intergroup violence, often have a significant influence on contemporary intergroup relations (Klar & Bilewicz, 2017; Liu & Hilton, 2005). For instance,

people tend to perceive (even distant) descendants of historical perpetrators as being morally involved in past atrocities — "guilty by association" (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998). This may pose a serious threat to the moral image of contemporary nations, many of which have substantially changed since the conflict. The readiness to "forgive and forget" expressed by the young Armenian will not bring any positive effects as long as he views contemporary descendants of perpetrators as a homogeneously immoral group. Although state-level reconciliation cannot be effective without formal apologies by the government, it is plausible that individual-level forgiveness might be established even in the absence of state-level reconciliation.

In the present work, we suggest that, by modifying shared representations of the violent past, namely, by stressing moral actions undertaken by perpetrator group members, the contemporary image of the former perpetrator group may be changed, and the key obstacle to forgiveness removed. This approach, based on the moral exemplars model of reconciliation (Bilewicz & Jaworska, 2013; Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2017), may constitute an effective strategy to improve intergroup relations even in case of protracted conflicts over historical recognition, such as the one between Armenia and Turkey.

RESTORING POSITIVE EMOTIONS AFTER THE CONFLICT: THE PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS

The act of forgiving another person is accompanied by intense psychophysiological reactions such as changes in blood pressure, skin conductance, and heart rate (vanOyen Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). As with other emotional states, forgiveness mobilizes the whole body, is hardly controllable, and, albeit often correlated with cognition, independent of it (see Zajonc, 1984). This emotional nature of interpersonal forgiveness can also be seen in its intergroup counterpart. Baumeister, Exline, and Sommer (1998) define intergroup forgiveness as a two-dimensional phenomenon. On the one hand, it is a social process occurring between groups in a political reality and influencing this reality. On the other, it also refers to an emotional appraisal, equivalent to the arousal occurring interpersonally. The actual core of forgiveness has been defined as an emotional struggle, that is, a confrontation with hostile emotions, such as anger and resentment, resulting from the injustice experienced (Harber & Wenberg, 2005). The emotional nature of forgiveness becomes especially vivid when its emotional antecedents (e.g., empathy and trust) are taken into account (Čehajić, Brown, & Castano, 2008). Studies in a variety of post-conflict settings have showed that forgiveness is facilitated mainly by emotional factors (e.g., Wohl & Branscombe, 2005), while reparation intentions are influenced rather by cognitive factors (e.g., Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008). For instance, in the study by Manzi and Gonzáles (2007) conducted in Chile, forgiveness among left-wing groups toward historical right-wing perpetrators proved to be predicted mainly by collective emotions such as anger and guilt, whereas reparation intentions were predicted by a conjunction of cognitive (e.g., demand for outgroup remorse, perceived victimization) and emotional factors.

Conversely, Baumeister and colleagues (1998) argued that the emotional aspects of forgiveness may be affected by cognitive processes such as reframing the representation of perpetrators. Indeed, altering the perception of the adversary group has been identified as one of the crucial elements of reconciliation (Noor et al., 2008). Specifically, biased attributions of the causes of the adversary's behavior need to be changed in order to make the reconciliation (and forgiveness as its core element) possible. Victims (like everybody) tend to underestimate the impact of situational factors on the conflict and overestimate the role of personal dispositions of the outgroup (Bilewicz, Witkowska, Stefaniak, & Imhoff, 2017; Pettigrew, 1979). All the violent acts committed by the perpetrator group are therefore attributed to the immoral and evil nature of its members, and may lead to the perception that they are less humane and to general nega-

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tive attitudes toward their descendants (Imhoff et al., 2017). Only changing this negative perception, that is, including the former perpetrator group in the moral community (Tam et al., 2008) will open the door to forgiveness.

MORALITY AS A CENTRAL DIMENSION OF OUTGROUP PERCEPTION

Some emotional aspects of forgiveness may be facilitated by cognitive processes such as reframing the representation of the perpetrator group. After violent conflicts, perpetrators are likely to suffer a damage to their image as moral social actors (Nadler & Shnabel, 2008). They may be perceived as morally inferior and suffer from social rejection. Victim group members tend to create narratives about the conflict in which they emphasize the injustice and cruelty of their adversary, while underlining their own innocence and righteousness (Baumeister & Catanese, 2001). Moreover, they perceive the perpetrator group as highly homogeneous, ascribing the same negative traits to all its members (Bar-Tal, 2000). These beliefs about the outgroup being immoral and evil not only affect those directly involved in the conflict, but may be passed down through generations becoming a part of shared societal beliefs (Bar-Tal, 1998). As an effect, they may fuel prejudice, even after the conflict has long been resolved. We suggest that, as long as the descendants of victims perceive the historical perpetrator group as thoroughly immoral, the forgiveness cycle is unlikely to start.

Morality refers to traits relevant to the perceived correctness of social actors (e.g., honesty, sincerity, trustworthiness; Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007) and has been identified as one of the core dimensions underlying social judgments and intergroup behavior (Brambilla, Sacchi, Rusconi, Cherubini, & Yzerbyt, 2012; Leach et al., 2007; Leach, Minescu, Poppe, & Hagendoorn, 2008). Brambilla, Rusconi, Sacchi, and Cherubini (2011) found that people are more likely to look for characteristics related to morality than to other dimensions of social judgment (i.e., competence and sociability) when asked to form an impression about individuals. It has also been demonstrated that information about morality may be relevant when evaluating the outgroup. In a series of studies, Brambilla and colleagues (2012) observed that participants' judgments about a fictional immigrant group were most affected by its supposed morality (rather than competence and sociability). This effect was mediated by the perception of outgroup threat. Specifically, when the outgroup was presented as immoral, it evoked a feeling of psychological and material threat, which, in turn, resulted in its unfavorable evaluation. Finally, apart from being disliked and perceived as more threatening, immoral social targets may be associated with little behavioral flexibility (Rusconi, Sacchi, Capellini, Brambilla, & Cherubini, 2017) and can be ascribed lower levels of humanity as well as receive less empathy from others (Riva, Brambilla, & Vaes, 2016). All these negative outcomes have been demonstrated to hinder positive intergroup relations and, more importantly, intergroup forgiveness. Therefore, it seems justifiable to assume that an improvement in moral image of a social group could result in an increase in forgiveness intentions.

THE ROLE OF MORAL EXEMPLARS IN PROMOTING FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Researchers have proposed and examined numerous approaches aimed to promote reconciliation and forgiveness in post-conflict settings (e.g., Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013; Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). One of these approaches (Bilewicz & Jaworska, 2013; Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2017; Witkowska, Beneda, Bilewicz, & Čehajić-Clancy, 2018) focuses specif-

ically on increasing awareness of historical moral variability of the perpetrator group by exposing people to stories of moral exemplars.

Moral exemplars are nonstereotypical members of the perpetrator group — those who acted morally, and in opposition to the passive or violent majority (Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2017). Such individuals often sacrificed their safety (and the safety of their families) in order to rescue neighbors, friends, or even complete strangers. It has been suggested that presenting victims with narratives about moral exemplars may change their entitative representations of the perpetrator group (Bilewicz & Jaworska, 2013), as such stories demonstrate that not all perpetrator group members shared the same beliefs and engaged in the same behaviors. As an effect, victim group members may realize that it is not justified to perceive the perpetrator group as homogeneously evil and immoral. Changing these negative representations of the perpetrator group may constitute an important step on the way to reconciliation.

So far, the moral exemplars approach has been tested in conjunction with intergroup contact interventions. In the study of Bilewicz and Jaworska (2013), Polish and Israeli high school students were introduced to stories of Poles who rescued Jews during World War II, and were encouraged to discuss them in mixed groups. After this intervention, both Poles and Israelis reported more positive emotions toward the outgroup and greater perceived similarity to one another. A similar study was performed in the context of post-genocide relations in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2017). Young Bosniaks, Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians participated together in a workshop in which they were exposed to stories of both ingroup and outgroup rescuers from the 1992-1995 war. The researchers found that participation in the workshop resulted in greater forgiveness intentions, which, in turn, led to an increase of reconciliatory beliefs. Therefore, there is some evidence suggesting that, in the context of intergroup contact, moral exemplars narratives may promote more positive outgroup attitudes and forgiveness between historical adversaries. However, in many post-conflict settings, intergroup contact is very rare or does not occur at all, and for that reason the use of such interventions may be limited. A recent study (Witkowska et al., 2018) has investigated one of the previously found effects of moral exemplars narratives — change in outgroup attitudes — in the absence of intergroup contact. It was found that being presented with information about moral individuals from the perpetrator group decreased social distance among former victims (e.g., Poles) and perpetrators (e.g., Germans) alike. This effect was mediated by either an increase in outgroup trust or a decrease in negative affect. Given that information about moral exemplars has been observed to improve intergroup attitudes even without intergroup contact, it could also positively influence forgiveness intentions in a similar context. Based on the research on morality (Brambilla et al., 2011, 2012) and intergroup forgiveness (Baumeister et al., 1998), we suggest that such a change would be mediated by a shift in perceived outgroup morality.

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The aim of this research was to test whether information about historical moral exemplars could foster forgiveness in a problematic post-genocide setting by modifying the general perception of the former perpetrator group as moral. Specifically, we sought to examine whether information about historical moral behavior of perpetrator group members could increase perceived morality of the perpetrator group as a whole, including its contemporary descendants (H1, Pilot study, Studies 1 and 2) and whether this change in perception would lead victim group members to a greater willingness to forgive (H2, Studies 1 and 2). We tested our hypotheses in two cases of mass violence which, many years later, continue to gravely affect current intergroup relations between the parties involved.

The pilot study was conducted in the context of the Volhynian massacre which took place in Nazi-occupied Poland between 1943 and 1944. The massacre was a part of an ethnic cleansing operation carried out by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) against all non-Ukrainians (mostly Poles, but also Jews and Armenians) in the region. It has been estimated that, as an effect of these violent actions, 40-60 thousand of Polish civilians were killed (e.g., Institute of National Remembrance, 2013; Snyder, 2003) and around 200 thousand had to flee their homes (e.g., Snyder, 1999). The topic of the Volhynian massacre was mostly ignored or neglected in communist times, but has reemerged in the last decade causing tension in Polish-Ukrainian relations. Many contemporary Ukrainians perceive UPA leaders in a positive manner, as fighters for Ukrainian independence, which is reflected in various commemorative practices. For instance, since 1990s more than one hundred streets in Ukraine have been renamed after Stepan Bandera — one of the initiators of the Ukrainian nationalist movement (Liebich & Myshlovska, 2014). At the same time, increasing the antagonistic approach of the Polish Law and Justice Party toward Ukraine resulted in the adoption of the resolution recognizing the Volhynian massacre as genocide by the lower house of the Polish parliament in 2016 (Klikushin, 2016). In the pilot study, we wanted to test whether presenting information about Ukrainian civilians who helped Poles during the massacre would result in an increased perceived morality of this group among Polish participants.

Study 1 and Study 2 focused on the Armenian Genocide, in which around one million Armenians died as an effect of deportations and mass executions carried out by the Young Turk leaders between 1915 and 1917. For the last one hundred years, Turkish governments have firmly denied that any genocide of Armenians ever happened. According to the official version, Armenians had been planning a revolt to help Russians attack Turkey — "they stabbed Turks in the back," and, as a consequence, they had to be deported (Foss, 2000). Provided that the Ministry of Education authorizes all history textbooks in Turkey, these official narratives have influenced the beliefs of millions of Turkish citizens (Bilali, 2013). The fact that Turks refuse to admit their responsibility for the genocide and engage in politics of denial results in anger, hatred, and resentment among Armenians, and affects the current relations between the two (Bilali, 2013). It is also partly responsible for the reservations expressed by European nations about Turkey's accession into the EU (Freely, 2005). We decided to conduct the study in this difficult context in order to assess whether the moral exemplars approach may affect perceived outgroup morality when the initial level of prejudice and hostility is very high, and there is no intergroup contact (the border between the countries remains closed). We also wanted to explore whether an increase in perceived morality of Turks, induced by the new historical information, would result in more willingness among Armenians to forgive past crimes.

PILOT STUDY

The aim of the pilot study was to establish whether narratives about historical moral exemplars can improve the general perception of the outgroup as moral among members of a historically victimized group. We predicted that presenting victim group members with information about individuals from the perpetrator group who helped victims in times of persecution would decrease the tendency to perceive the former perpetrator group as immoral.

Method

Participants and procedure. Ninety-five students and alumni of Polish higher education institutions participated in the study. One participant who reported a nationality other than Polish as well as five

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participants who failed to follow the instructions were excluded from the analyses. The final sample consisted of 89 participants (39.3% male, 60.7% female; age range 19-30, $M = 23.19$, $SD = 1.95$). The study followed a between-participants design with one experimental factor (moral exemplars) with two levels (moral exemplars vs. control condition). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions and asked to read a text presented as an excerpt from a publication of a Polish historian on the topic of the Volhynian massacre. After reading the text, participants filled in a questionnaire including questions about perceived morality of Ukrainians.

Manipulation. Each participant was presented with two paragraphs. The first paragraph did not differ between the two conditions and described the crimes committed by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army on Poles in the region of Volhynia during WWII. In the control condition, the second paragraph included information about the social structure of Volhynia, whereas in the moral exemplars condition, it related instances of help offered by Ukrainian individuals to Poles.

Perceived outgroup morality. After reading the text, participants were asked to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: "Ukrainians are moral" and "Ukrainians are trustworthy." Answers were given on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*I strongly disagree*) to 7 (*I strongly agree*). The two items were positively correlated, $r(87) = .79$, $p < .001$, therefore their mean was used as a composite score of perceived morality in further analyses.

Results

In order to test the effect of moral exemplars information on perceived morality of the perpetrator group, we compared the mean scores of perceived morality across conditions using an independent-sample *t*-test. The analysis showed that participants in the moral exemplars condition perceived Ukrainians as more moral ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.27$) than participants in the control group ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.23$), $t(87) = –3.08$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

The results obtained in the pilot study show that narratives about historical moral exemplars may change the victims' perception of the perpetrator group. In the study, the participants who read about Ukrainians helping Poles during the Volhynian massacre perceived contemporary Ukrainians as more moral compared to participants in the control condition. Having established this initial link between exposure to moral exemplars narratives and perceived outgroup morality, we proceeded to an empirical evaluation of the next step in our theoretical model — testing the effect of moral exemplars information on forgiveness intentions and its underlying mechanism.

STUDY 1

The main aim of Study 1 was to evaluate whether information about moral exemplars could be effective in promoting forgiveness in a difficult post-genocide context. Therefore, we decided to conduct the study in Armenia — a country that still has no formal diplomatic relations with Turkey, over 100 years after the genocide committed by Turks on Armenians. Because we had already evidenced that narratives about historical moral exemplars can modify the general perception of the outgroup as moral, we hypothe-

sized that, by altering the perception of outgroup morality, moral exemplars information could increase forgiveness intentions among victim group members.

At the same time, we wanted to assess the boundary conditions of the effectiveness of moral exemplars narratives. Therefore, we decided to present participants with information about either rare moral behaviors within the outgroup (marginal moral exemplars condition) or relatively typical moral exemplars within the outgroup (typical moral exemplars condition). This allowed us to test whether narratives about extremely rare individual behavior would suffice to change the perception of outgroup morality. Based on the research on intergroup contact (Wilder, 1984), experiences with outgroup members may be expected to produce a significant change in outgroup attitudes only if these outgroup members are typical of their group. Therefore, we presumed that information about non-typicality of moral exemplars could limit the effectiveness of moral exemplars narratives and that the message carried by such historical information would not result in a positive change of contemporary outgroup image (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). Importantly, we sought to manipulate perceived typicality of moral exemplars without creating the illusion that they constituted the majority of the population, because this could be associated with common alibi narratives of the perpetrator group and evoke even more distrust among victim group members (see Witkowska & Bilewicz, 2014). We made certain that our experimental manipulation would not convey such a harmful message by employing a measure of perceived help frequency.

Method

Participants and procedure. We examined 201 Armenian students (22.4% male, 76.6% female, and 1% unspecified; age range 18-27, $M = 19.44$, $SD = 1.43$). The study followed a between-participants design with one experimental factor (moral exemplars) with three levels (marginal moral exemplars vs. typical moral exemplars vs. control condition). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three groups and asked to read a passage about the Armenian Genocide. After reading the text, participants were asked to answer a series of questions, including items measuring forgiveness intentions and perceived morality of the perpetrator group.

Manipulation. Participants in the control condition were presented with a short paragraph about the events of 1915 when the leaders of the Young Turk Party started deportations and mass executions of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. In the two remaining conditions, this text was followed by the second paragraph about Turks who saved Armenians during the genocide. In the marginal moral exemplars condition, these instances of help were presented as extremely rare, whereas in the typical moral exemplars condition they were presented as relatively common. The information used in this paragraph was based on survivors' testimonies reported in Hovannisian's (1992) chapter about altruism during the Armenian Genocide. The full text of the experimental manipulation can be found in Appendix A.

Forgiveness intentions ($\alpha = .75$) were measured with three items adapted from Wohl and Branscombe (2005): "I am ready to forgive Turks for what they did in 1915," "I could never forgive the crimes committed by Turks," (reversed), and "My nation should never forgive Turks their misdeeds" (reversed). Participants indicated to what extent they agreed or disagreed with these statements on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*I strongly disagree*) to 7 (*I strongly agree*).

Perceived outgroup morality was measured with two items. Participants had to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements: "Turks are moral" and "Turks are trustworthy." Answers were given on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*I strongly disagree*) to 7 (*I strongly agree*). The correlation between the two items was high, $r(192) = .60$, $p < .001$.

Estimation of help frequency. In order to test whether we managed to manipulate the perceived typicality of moral exemplars without affecting the perceived frequency of heroic help (i.e., making participants believe that the number of moral exemplars in the perpetrator group was large), we included a control variable asking participants to estimate the percentage of Turks who helped Armenians during the genocide.

Results[1]

In order to test whether the information presented influenced the perceived frequency of Turkish heroic help, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted. Results revealed a significant main effect of the experimental manipulation on the estimated percentage of Turks who helped Armenians during the genocide (see Table 1). Post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni correction revealed that help frequency was estimated as higher in both experimental conditions (marginal and typical moral exemplars) than in the control condition. There was no difference between the two experimental conditions.

A one-way analysis of variance also showed a significant main effect of the experimental manipulation on forgiveness intentions (see Table 1). Post-hoc comparisons revealed that, in the group in which moral exemplars were presented as typical of the perpetrator group, participants demonstrated higher levels of forgiveness intentions than participants in the control condition. However, there was no significant increase in forgiveness in the marginal moral exemplars condition — it remained at the same level as in the control group. The typicality of help offered by the outgroup (i.e., Turks) proved to be relevant also in affecting perceived outgroup morality (see Table 1). Participants in the typical moral exemplars condition rated the morality of the perpetrator group as higher than participants in the control condition, but participants in the marginal moral exemplars condition did not. Given that information about rare moral outgroup behavior did not produce any effect on forgiveness intentions and perceived morality, the marginal moral exemplars group was combined with the control group in the mediation analysis.

TABLE 1
Effects of the experimental manipulation on forgiveness intentions and perceived outgroup morality
in Study 1

	Typical moral exemplars		Marginal moral exemplars		Control condition				
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	df	p ≤
Forgiveness intentions	3.04a	1.71	2.61b	1.64	2.35b	1.47	2.98	200	.05
Perceived outgroup morality	2.66a	1.29	1.99b	1.17	2.12b	1.12	5.45	197	.01
Estimation of help frequency	13.93a	14.17	10.50a	11.28	4.79b	5.75	9.82	175	.001

Note. Means with differing subscripts within rows are significantly different at $p < .05$, based on Bonferroni's post-hoc paired comparisons.

Perceived morality and forgiveness intentions proved to be significantly correlated, $r(194) = .41$, $p < .001$. In order to test whether the effect of typical moral exemplars information on forgiveness intentions was mediated by perceived morality of the perpetrator group, we performed an indirect effect analysis using the PROCESS macro (Model 4; Hayes, 2013). All analyses were computed using bias-corrected 95%

confidence intervals with 1,000 bootstrap samples: the dichotomous moral exemplars indicator was the independent variable (1 = typical moral exemplars condition; 0 = control and marginal moral exemplars conditions combined). We found an indirect effect of typical moral exemplars on forgiveness intentions through perceived morality: estimate = .32, SE = .12, 95% CI [.12, .61] (Figure 1). The total effect of typical moral exemplars on forgiveness, B = .55, SE = .25, p = .03, 95% CI [.06, 1.05], became nonsignificant when the mediator (perceived outgroup morality) was entered, B = .23, SE = .28, p = .33, 95% CI [–.24, .70].
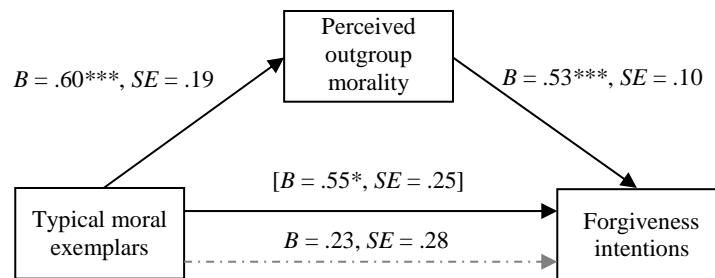

FIGURE 1
The indirect effect of the typical moral exemplars information on forgiveness intentions through perceived outgroup morality: unstandardized regression coefficients.
The dashed line denotes a direct effect of the information presented.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Discussion

Study 1 supported our main hypothesis showing that moral exemplars information may indeed increase forgiveness intentions among victim group members, by increasing perceived outgroup morality, as long as the moral exemplars are not perceived as marginal in their group. In the study, participants who were exposed to narratives about typical outgroup moral exemplars perceived Turks as more moral, which, in turn, was related to greater willingness to forgive Turks for the crimes committed in 1915.

In addition, we found that the effect of moral exemplars may depend on perceived typicality of outgroup help. Specifically, moral exemplars information was effective in increasing forgiveness intentions and perceived outgroup morality when intergroup help was presented as relatively typical of the perpetrator group, but not when it was presented as a marginal individual behavior. Therefore, it seems that moral exemplars narratives may be helpful in promoting forgiveness in a difficult post-genocidal context, but only if victims perceive the helpers as typical of the outgroup.

However, Study 1 suffers from some limitations. Firstly, the study did not include a direct measure of perceived typicality of moral exemplars and therefore we cannot be certain whether moral exemplars in the two experimental conditions were indeed perceived differently in terms of typicality. Future research should address this problem. Secondly, and most importantly, both in the control condition and in the marginal moral exemplars condition, the narratives portrayed ingroup members as helpless or receiving very little help from the outgroup. Therefore, participants could have been reminded of the fact that nobody reacted when their group was mistreated, which could have activated beliefs in the evil nature of the world, characteristic of historically victimized groups (e.g., Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). In addition, participants in the control condition were informed about numerous victims but received no information about survivors, which could increase their feeling of victimhood making them less prone to forgive (e.g., Shnabel, Halabi, & Noor, 2013). To conclude, the effects of enhanced outgroup morality and increased forgiveness, found in

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the study, could have emerged due to the negative information about the ingroup past in the control condition rather than information about moral exemplars. Study 2 was designed to address these problems.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, we decided to test our main hypothesis again proposing that moral exemplars narratives may increase forgiveness intentions toward the perpetrator group by increasing its perceived morality, but this time we introduced two control conditions that would allow us to verify two alternative explanations of the effects observed. First of all, we wanted to test whether the effects observed could be attributed simply to the fact that in the moral exemplars scenario ingroup members receive help from others, whereas in the control scenario they do not. Work on heroism (Zimbardo, 2007) shows that being informed about any positive intergroup behavior may increase prosociality and improve intergroup attitudes. At the same time, research on redemptive violence (Campbell & Vollhardt, 2014) suggests that believing in peaceful intergroup relations may facilitate nonviolent responses while facing intergroup conflict. Therefore, being informed about any intergroup helping behavior may potentially lead to more positive intergroup outcomes. In order to examine this possibility, we decided to employ two types of narratives in which the ingroup receives external help (from the perpetrator group or from an irrelevant outgroup) and contrast them with a narrative in which no external help is offered.

Secondly, we wanted to make sure that the effects observed would not be explained by the fact that moral exemplars information highlights ingroup's survival while in the control condition participants are only informed about death and casualties. Research on competitive victimhood (Shnabel et al., 2013) has demonstrated that the more groups perceive themselves as absolute victims, the less prone they are to forgive the adversary. Just as information about survival could decrease perceived victimhood, it could likewise reduce its negative intergroup outcomes. In order to test this alternative explanation, we contrasted our standard moral exemplars condition with two conditions in which participants were presented with information about ingroup's survival. In one of the conditions, the ingroup was rescued by an irrelevant outgroup and in the other, the ingroup used internal resources to survive.

Method

Participants and procedure. One hundred sixty-seven Armenian students participated in the study. However, 30 of them failed to complete the questionnaire and therefore were excluded from the analyses. The final sample consisted of 137 students (37.2% males, 62.8% females; age range 18-25, $M = 19.8$, $SD = 1.43$), all of whom were born in Armenia and had Armenian parents. The study followed a between-participants design with one experimental factor (moral exemplars) with three levels (self-rescue vs. irrelevant outgroup help vs. moral exemplars help). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three experimental groups and were presented with a text related to the Armenian genocide. After reading the text, participants were asked to fill in a questionnaire including items measuring forgiveness intentions and perceived morality of the perpetrator group.

Manipulation. All participants were presented with five short stories written from the perspective of survivors of the Armenian Genocide or their families. In the first condition (moral exemplars help), all the stories described situations in which Armenians survived the genocide with the help of Turks who risked their lives in order to save their friends, neighbors, and sometimes even total strangers. In the second

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condition (irrelevant outgroup help), participants read similar stories of rescue during the genocide, with help being offered by Germans. Finally, in the third group (self-rescue), participants were presented with testimonies in which Armenians survived because of their own courage and determination. The narratives were inspired by real stories collected by the State Commission on Coordination of the Events for the Commemoration of the 100th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide (2015). Examples of stories used in the study can be found in Appendix B.

Forgiveness intentions ($\alpha = .82$) were measured with the three items used in Study 1. Participants had to indicate, on a scale ranging from 1 (*I strongly agree*) to 7 (*I strongly disagree*) to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: "I am ready to forgive Turks for what they did in 1915," "I could never forgive the crimes committed by Turks," (reversed), and "My nation should never forgive Turks for their misdeeds" (reversed).

Perceived outgroup morality was assessed as in the two previous studies. Participants indicated, on a scale ranging from 1 (*I strongly agree*) to 7 (*I strongly disagree*), to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the statements: "Turks are moral" and "Turks are trustworthy." The correlation between the two items was high, $r(134) = .62$, $p < .001$.

Results

A one-way analysis of variance revealed a marginally significant main effect of experimental manipulation on forgiveness intentions (see Table 2). Planned contrasts indicated that the level of forgiveness intentions in the two conditions in which participants read about help offered to the victims did not differ significantly from the self-rescue condition where no information about outgroup help was provided, $t(132) = -1.94$, $p = .06$. On the other hand, participants who read about Turkish help showed greater forgiveness intentions than participants in the two remaining conditions combined, $t(132) = -2.27$, $p = .02$ (for means and standard deviations, see Table 2).

TABLE 2
The effects of the experimental manipulation on forgiveness intentions and perceived outgroup morality in Study 2

	Moral exemplars help		Irrelevant outgroup help		Self-rescue				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	*df*	*p ≤*
Forgiveness intentions	3.12a	1.92	2.57b	1.81	2.22b	1.55	3.04	132	.05
Perceived outgroup morality	2.63a	1.40	2.07b	1.14	1.98b	1.39	2.29	133	.04

Note. Subscripts within rows denote contrasts that are significantly different at the $p < .05$.

There was also a significant main effect of the experimental manipulation on perceived outgroup morality (see Table 2). Planned contrasts revealed no difference in perceived morality between participants in the self-rescue condition and those in the moral exemplars and irrelevant outgroup help conditions combined, $t(133) = -1.57$, $p = .12$.

However, Turks were perceived as more moral in the moral exemplars help condition than in the two other conditions combined, $t(133) = -2.51$, $p = .01$ (for means and standard deviations, see Table 2).

Perceived outgroup morality and forgiveness intentions proved to be significantly correlated, $r(132)$ = .37, $p < .001$. In order to test whether stories about Turkish moral exemplars increased forgiveness intentions through an increase in perceived morality of the perpetrator group, we performed an indirect effect analysis using the PROCESS macro (Model 4; Hayes, 2013). The analysis was computed using bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals with 1,000 bootstrap samples. The dichotomous moral exemplars indicator was the independent variable (1 = moral exemplars help; 0 = irrelevant outgroup help and self-rescue conditions combined). We found an indirect effect of moral exemplars on forgiveness intentions through perceived morality: estimate = .29, SE = .14, 95% CI [.10, .67] (Figure 2). The total effect of moral exemplars help on forgiveness intentions, B = .77, SE = .32, $p < .05$, 95% CI [.13, 1.40], decreased and became nonsignificant, when the mediator (perceived outgroup morality) was entered, B = .47, SE = .31, p = .13, 95% CI [.14, 1.09].
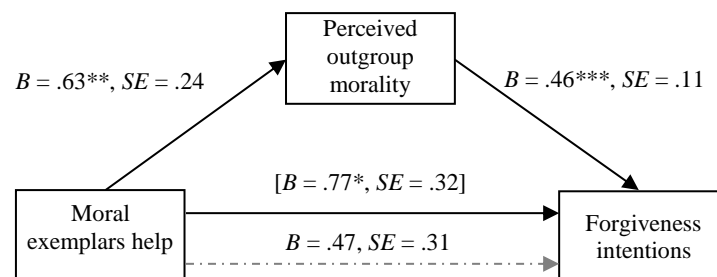

FIGURE 2
The indirect effect of the moral exemplars help on forgiveness intentions through
perceived outgroup morality: unstandardized regression coefficients.
The dashed line denotes a direct effect of the information presented.
$*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

Discussion

Study 2 replicated the effects observed in Study 1. Participants who read about perpetrator group members helping the ingroup were more likely to perceive the perpetrator group as moral, which, in turn, resulted in greater forgiveness intentions. In addition, the study showed that these effects cannot be attributed to the negative information presented in the control conditions of the previous studies, which emphasized ingroup victimization and helplessness. All participants in Study 2 were presented with similar information about the survival of ingroup members: due to moral exemplars from the perpetrator group (in the first condition), due to third-party helpers (in the second condition), or due to self-rescue (in the third condition). Only those participants who read about moral behavior of perpetrator group members perceived the perpetrator group as more moral and expressed greater forgiveness intentions. Therefore, the results of Study 2 constitute further evidence for the effectiveness of the moral exemplars approach in changing outgroup perception and promoting intergroup forgiveness.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to examine whether narratives about moral exemplars may modify perceived morality of the former perpetrator group among descendants of historical victims and whether this change in perceived morality could foster intergroup forgiveness. Previously, it had been demonstrated that an exposure to stories about moral behavior of outgroup members can indeed promote forgiveness and reconcil-

iatory beliefs between groups with a history of intergroup violence (Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2017). However, these positive effects were observed in a situation of intergroup contact, and in many post-conflict areas contact is impossible or unlikely. In our studies, being presented with moral exemplars narratives led to an increase in forgiveness intentions among the historical victim group, in an absence of intergroup contact, where the level of prejudice is extremely high. Therefore, our research provides further evidence for the effectiveness of the moral exemplars approach in promoting forgiveness in problematic post-conflict settings.

Furthermore, we found a mechanism underlying these effects. It had been previously suggested that forgiveness may be facilitated by a positive change in the representation of the perpetrator group (Baumaister et al., 1998). In all of our studies, an exposure to stories about historical moral exemplars resulted in an increase of perceived outgroup morality. In Study 1 and Study 2, this change in outgroup perception was further found to be related to an increase in intergroup forgiveness. Therefore, our research suggests that morality may constitute one of the most important dimensions of outgroup perception affecting forgiveness processes. This is in line with previous studies showing the effects of morality perception on social judgments and intergroup behavior (Brambilla et al., 2012; Leach et al., 2007). Moreover, our research suggests an effective way of enhancing perceived outgroup morality after intergroup conflicts in the form of moral exemplars narratives.

Our research also explored the boundary conditions under which moral exemplars narratives can foster intergroup forgiveness. We found that, as in the case of intergroup contact (Wilder, 1984), historical moral exemplars need to be regarded as typical of the outgroup for such an intervention to be effective. However, in many instances, information suggesting typicality of help may produce an inaccurate image of "altruistic majority," which could be misused by perpetrator group members as they strive to appear highly moral. As a result, disseminating such information could lead to backlash in intergroup relations and create outrage among victimized groups (Witkowska & Bilewicz, 2014). In the present study, though, the information about typicality of moral exemplars did not lead to an extreme overestimation of their number: participants in the typical moral exemplars condition estimated the proportion of helpers to be 13% of the perpetrator population (which was not significantly different from the estimates in the marginal moral exemplars condition). Therefore, our manipulation of moral exemplars' typicality did not create an illusion of (too) many heroic helpers.

In our research we also examined two alternative explanations of the moral exemplars effects. First of all, moral exemplars narratives may reduce perceived ingroup victimization, because they stress ingroup survival in times of genocide. Given that feelings of victimhood constitute an obstacle to reconciliation and forgiveness (Shnabel et al., 2013), the effects of moral exemplars may be seen as resulting from changes in victims' self-perception rather than from changes in former perpetrators' image. In order to verify this possibility, in Study 2 we employed two control groups where the chances of ingroup survival in the stories presented were the same as in the standard moral exemplars scenario. Secondly, the effects of moral exemplars could also be attributed simply to the fact that in the moral exemplars condition participants receive information about positive intergroup behavior (i.e., one group helping another), whereas in the control condition they do not. As research on heroism (Zimbardo, 2007) suggests, an exposure to any stories about intergroup help may increase prosociality and evoke more positive outgroup attitudes. In order to test this alternative explanation, in one of the control conditions of Study 2 participants were presented with stories where their group received external help, but from an outgroup irrelevant to the context. In neither control group did we observe any significant effects. Therefore, we concluded that the mechanism through which historical moral exemplars affect forgiveness is very specific — information about moral exemplars modify the moral image of the perpetrator group, which leads to an increase in forgiveness intentions toward that group particularly.

The current research examines emotional and cognitive post-conflict processes looking at the case of Armenia and the 1915 genocide. By investigating Armenian samples, our research becomes part of a small group of psychological studies that break the pattern of studying Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) populations. Moreover, the Armenian context is unique not only due to its cultural or socio-demographic characteristics. The topic of post-genocidal forgiveness and reconciliation between Armenians and Turks has been very rarely studied in social psychology and the majority of the existing studies reflect on Turkish samples or the Armenian diaspora (e.g., Bilali, 2013; Vollhardt, Mazur, & Lemahieu, 2014). This is highly regrettable considering that the study of contemporary Armenians gives an opportunity to gain knowledge about a context where collective memories are highly politicized and continue to hinder intergroup forgiveness (as in the case of Armenia's relations not only with Turkey, but also with Azerbaijan). Furthermore, it could provide an insight into the long-term processes of mourning in a group that preserves memory of victimization generations after the genocide has happened (Vollhardt & Bilewicz, 2013). Finally, the Armenian case is unprecedented due to the long-lasting and continuous denial of past crimes by the perpetrators — both at the political (none of the Turkish governments has ever acknowledged the crimes against Armenians) and community level (as exemplified by writers' and journalists' self-censorship, which may result from institutional norms and fears of sanctions; for a review, see Bar-Tal, 2017). Considering this complete denial of responsibility, studying the moral exemplars approach in the context of the Armenian Genocide offers an extremely conservative test of our hypotheses. The fact that we observed the positive effects of moral exemplars on forgiveness among Armenians indicates how promising this approach is, especially since, according to many theoretical frameworks, intergroup forgiveness cannot occur without an acknowledgement of perpetrators' responsibility (see Nadler & Shnabel, 2008).

To conclude, in this paper we demonstrated that moral exemplars narratives have the power to influence outgroup perception and that this change in perception may foster intergroup forgiveness. However, further research implementing behavioral measures is needed to examine how the observed effects translate into real-life situations such as engaging in intergroup contact, intergroup helping, or cooperation aimed to achieve common goals.

NOTE

1. Following Leys, Ley, Klein, Bernard, and Licata (2013), we used the median-based outliers detection method.

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APPENDIX A

Study 1: Text of the Experimental Manipulation

Control Group

In Spring 1915, the leaders of the Young Turk Party took advantage of the fact that the world was entirely concentrated on the warfare in order to eliminate Armenians from the Ottoman Empire. Armenian elite was gathered and slaughtered; as for the rest, some were immediately executed in their villages. However, the majority suffered mass deportation. The worst fate was met by those Armenians who were sent to Deir-el-Zor and therefore had to cross the desert. They were escorted by Turkish soldiers and prisoners released and recruited for that very purpose. En route, many people, exhausted, died from epidemics and lack of water and food. Nonetheless, most of them were killed by the military escort and by locals, incited by the authorities. Armenian houses were pillaged and razed to the ground; children were murdered in front of their mothers; rapes and other brutal acts of violence, such as tortures, were committed. As a consequence, more than half of the Armenians who lived within the Ottoman Empire was annihilated.

Marginal Moral Exemplars Condition

In Spring 1915, the leaders of the Young Turk Party took advantage of the fact that the world was entirely concentrated on the warfare in order to eliminate Armenians from the Ottoman Empire. Armenian elite was gathered and slaughtered; as for the rest, some were immediately executed in their villages. However, the majority suffered mass deportation. The worst fate was met by those Armenians who were sent to Deir-el-Zor and therefore had to cross the desert. They were escorted by Turkish soldiers and prisoners released and recruited for that very purpose. En route, many people, exhausted, died from epidemics and lack of water and food. Nonetheless, most of them were killed by the military escort and by locals, incited by the authorities. Armenian houses were pillaged and razed to the ground; children were murdered in front of their mothers; rapes and other brutal acts of violence, such as tortures, were committed. As a consequence, more than half of the Armenians who lived within the Ottoman Empire was annihilated.

Although many Turks approved of the government's cruel policy, there were also some people who took action to save Armenians: individuals, families, and sometimes even entire villages decided to intervene — they hid Armenians in their houses, helped them to find a safe way to escape, provided them with clothes and food. In the city of Zonguldak, 600 Armenians were saved thanks to a single Turkish official. A Turkish businessman, Haji Khalil, after the death of his Armenian friend, took care of his whole family and gave them shelter on the upper floor of his house. For one year, he hid seven people — four young children among them — and gave them food and water every day; all of his servants knew, but kept the secret. Thanks to him the Kourken Sarkissian's family survived the worst period of the persecution. Another Turk, Ali Bay, helped Armenians in danger to escape eleven times; the twelfth time, he was caught by the soldiers and shot in the middle of the city. He had a family of his own, that was left without aid. As a little girl, Aghavi Mazmania was fostered by a Turk from Malatia: he took her to the village where he lived and hosted her in his house. She afterwards said that he and his wife were very good people; they took care of her as if she were their own daughter so that she never lacked anything. Similar stories

happened to other Armenians: had it not been for the help of those individual Turks, by no means would they have been able to avoid victimization.

Typical Moral Exemplars Condition

In Spring 1915, the leaders of the Young Turk Party took advantage of the fact that the world was entirely concentrated on the warfare in order to eliminate Armenians from the Ottoman Empire. Armenian elite was gathered and slaughtered; as for the rest, some were immediately executed in their villages. However, the majority suffered mass deportation. The worst fate was met by those Armenians who were sent to Deir-el-Zor and therefore had to cross the desert. They were escorted by Turkish soldiers and prisoners released and recruited for that very purpose. En route, many people, exhausted, died from epidemics and lack of water and food. Nonetheless, most of them were killed by the military escort and by locals, incited by the authorities. Armenian houses were pillaged and razed to the ground; children were murdered in front of their mothers; rapes and other brutal acts of violence, such as tortures, were committed. As a consequence, more than half of the Armenians who lived within the Ottoman Empire was annihilated.

Although many Turks approved of the government's cruel policy, a significant part of the Turkish population took action to save Armenians: individuals, families, and very often entire villages intervened — they hid Armenians in their houses, helped them to find a safe way to escape, provided them with clothes and food. In the city of Zonguldak, 600 Armenians were saved thanks to a single Turkish official. A Turkish businessman, Haji Khalil, after the death of his Armenian friend, took care of his whole family and gave them shelter on the upper floor of his house. For one year, he hid seven people — four young children among them — and gave them food and water every day; all of his servants knew, but kept the secret. Thanks to him the Kourken Sarkissian's family survived the worst period of the persecution. Another Turk, Ali Bay, helped Armenians in danger to escape eleven times; the twelfth time, he was caught by the soldiers and shot in the middle of the city. He had a family of his own, that was left without aid. As a little girl, Aghavi Mazmania was fostered by a Turk from Malatia: he took her to the village where he lived and hosted her in his house. She afterwards said that he and his wife were very good people; they took care of her as if she were their own daughter and so that she never lacked anything. Similar stories happened to many Armenians: had it not been for the help of all those Turks, by no means would they have been able to avoid victimization.

APPENDIX B

Study 2: Text of the Experimental Manipulation

Irrelevant Outgroup Help Condition

Stories of Armenians who survived due to the help of Germans, such as:

Lilit: When the 1914 military recruitment began, my son Sargis was also taken but was able to escape after a few days. Two months later, Karl Bremer, German missionary and an acquaintance of mine, called my husband and told him to leave the village with our two sons and 30 other boys from our village. The next morning Turkish gendarmes broke into the village and killed everyone. Karl Bremer saved our lives and the lives of all these boys.

Self-Rescue Condition

Stories of Armenians who survived due to the courage and determination of other Armenians, such as:

Lilit: When the 1914 military recruitment began, my son Sargis was also taken but was able to escape after a few days. Two months later, my husband Hovhannes learned about Turkish troops being close to our village. He decided to leave the village with our two sons and 30 other boys from our village. The next morning Turkish gendarmes broke into the village and killed everyone. My husband saved our lives and the lives of all these boys.

Moral Exemplars Help Condition

Stories of Armenians who survived the genocide with the help of Turks, such as:

Lilit: When the 1914 military recruitment began, my son Sargis was also taken but was able to escape after a few days. Two months later, Mustafa Effendi, Turkish official and an acquaintance of mine, called my husband and told him to leave the village with our two sons and 30 other boys from our village. The next morning Turkish gendarmes broke into the village and killed everyone. Mustafa Effendi saved our lives and the lives of all these boys.