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Overcoming negative reactions to prosocial intergroup behaviors in post-conflict societies: The power of intergroup apology☆

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ABSTRACT

In post-conflict societies, individuals often respond negatively to the prosocial behaviors of their former opponents. To identify forms of intergroup apology that facilitate positive reactions to offers of intergroup help, three experiments (N = 698) were conducted in the post-conflict context of Kosovo that involved offering help to participants following their exposure to different types of apologies for past misconduct. The results indicated that participants attributed greater prosocial motives to offers of help from an outgroup member (i.e., former opponent) and were more willing to accept such help when an outgroup member issued the apology (i.e., interpersonal apology) or when outgroup members supported the apology (i.e., normatively supported or normative apology) than when offered by an institution, when rejected by the majority of outgroup members, or when no information about the apology was provided. Beyond that, participants felt more at peace with the outgroup and were more willing to interact with outgroup members following apologies in the interpersonal and normative apology conditions than in the other experimental conditions. Overall, the participants' willingness to humanize outgroup members explained the observed effects. This article discusses the theoretical and practical implications of these findings for intergroup help and literature on intergroup relations.

1. Introduction

Offering cross-group help can reflect compassion and genuine concern for the welfare of outgroup members (Dovidio, Gaertner, Ditlmann, & West, 2012; Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006) and, at best, may serve to repair fractured intergroup relations (Gergen, Ellsworth, Maslach, & Seipel, 1975; van Leeuwen & Zagefka, 2017). However, in post-conflict societies, past unaddressed offenses exchanged between groups often result in resentment and outgroup dehumanization that only serve to heighten psychological barriers to positive intergroup interactions and reconciliation (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2011; Bar-Tal, Halperin, & De Rivera, 2007; Dovidio et al., 2012). For that reason, individuals in post-conflict societies may perceive offerings of cross-group help as being less genuinely motivated than help offered within their ingroup, which, over time, only further raises their suspicion and distrust of the outgroup (e.g., Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, & Andrighetto, 2020a; Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, Andrighetto, & Durante, 2020b; Halabi, Dovidio, & Nadler, 2016; Tropp, 2015; Wagner & Hewstone, 2012).

To illustrate that dynamic, research conducted in the context of the Serbian–Albanian conflict in Kosovo has shown that individuals appear to respond more negatively to the prosocial behavior of adversary outgroup members than to the similar prosocial behavior of their ingroup members (e.g., Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, & Andrighetto, 2020a; Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, Andrighetto, & Durante, 2020b). In particular, Kosovo Albanians attributed less empathy and altruistic motivation to help offered by a Kosovan Serb (i.e., the outgroup) than to help offered by a fellow Kosovan Albanian and were more reluctant to accept the Kosovan Serb's aid. Likewise, in research conducted in the context of Israel's prolonged Jewish–Arab conflict, Arabs were shown to perceive offers of assistance from Jewish people in ways that only escalated and reinforced their intergroup tensions (e.g., Halabi et al., 2016). As these

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examples reveal, past offenses in post-conflict societies can readily cause members of victim groups to react less positively to help offered by members of formerly adversarial outgroups.

The question then arises as to whether there are factors that could mitigate the adverse consequences of outgroup's prosocial efforts. Therefore, in the present research, we explored whether intergroup apologies reflecting the genuine regret of an outgroup might alter how individuals respond to offers of help in such societies. Specifically, we expected that interpersonal apologies (Halabi, Dovidio, & Nadler, 2018) and normatively supported apologies (Okimoto, Hornsey, & Wenzel, 2019), relative to institutional apologies (e.g., political leaders apologizing on behalf of their nation) and lack of apology, may enable members of victim groups to accept offers of help from outgroups and promote intergroup reconciliation.

1.1. Outgroup apology and intergroup relations

Research has shown that when apologies from outgroups—that is, *outgroup apologies*—are perceived as sincere, they can open the door to the forgiveness and reconciliation needed to improve intergroup relations (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006). Apologizing not only genuinely but also convincingly requires an offender to acknowledge past offenses, regret them, and express empathy to the victim. On the perpetrator's side, empathizing with the victim's suffering may positively impact fractured intergroup relations and encourage intergroup reconciliation (Holtgraves, 1989; cf. Nadler & Liviatan, 2006). On the victim's side, by comparison, perceiving an offending outgroup as being more empathic toward victims evokes more positive outgroup evaluations and improves expectations about future intergroup contact (e.g., Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003; Ohbuchi & Sato, 1994).

Despite literature addressing intergroup apologies as more or less genuine in terms of their content (e.g., Berndsen, Hornsey, & Wohl, 2015; Blatz, Schumann, & Ross, 2009; Harth et al., 2011; Meier, 1998; Wohl, Hornsey, & Bennett, 2012), scholars have seldom investigated whether the perceived genuineness of apologies depends upon who apologizes and on whose behalf (Holtgraves, 1989; Hornsey & Wohl, 2013; Hornsey, Wohl, & Philpot, 2015). Research has revealed, however, that not all forms of outgroup apology can improve intergroup relations (Blatz & Philpot, 2010; Branscombe & Cronin, 2010; Leonard, Mackie, & Smith, 2011; Nadler & Liviatan, 2006). Nevertheless, identifying what makes such apologies seem genuine and convincing remains a major intellectual and political challenge (Hornsey et al., 2015). For instance, one type of outgroup apology, the *institutional apology*, in which political leaders apologize on behalf of their governments and the people they claim to represent, is notorious for appearing to have limited impact (e.g., Halabi et al., 2018). Even if intended to facilitate intergroup reconciliation, institutional apologies are not usually perceived as being genuine and thus rarely manage to foster positive intergroup relations (Halabi et al., 2018; Shnabel, Halabi, & SimanTov-Nachlieli, 2015).

By contrast, and more relevant to our work, *interpersonal apologies*, which are provided by a single member of an outgroup, and *normative apologies*, which are perceived as representing an entire outgroup (i.e., supported by the majority of outgroup members), are usually regarded as more credible apologies and thus more effective in improving intergroup relations (Halabi et al., 2018; Okimoto et al., 2019). Among the reasons why, the first is that interpersonal apologies are more likely to be perceived as genuine than instrumental expressions of personal regret and/or the acknowledgment of the group's suffering (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006). As a case in point, Philpot and Hornsey (2008) showed that an apology for the atrocities committed during World War II prompted more positive reactions and forgiveness when it was delivered by an individual Japanese soldier than by the Japanese government. More recent research has additionally revealed that people are more inclined to seek help or react positively to help offered by an outgroup member when an apology is expressed at the interpersonal instead of the institutional level (Halabi et al., 2018).

Second, as observed by Okimoto et al. (2019), individuals may perceive expressions of an outgroup's stance as being more relevant and representative of the outgroup when communicated by its members instead of by its leaders. This finding aligns with other results showing that people not only conform to ingroup norms but also react to the norms of outgroups—for example, by treating the outgroup as the outgroup treats you (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1996). Research has also shown that expressions of remorse are more likely to be considered when they are perceived as being prototypical of the offender group (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1998).

According to the literature reviewed, interpersonal and normative apologies are accepted more and generate better outcomes than apologies offered by institutions or not supported by the majority of outgroup members. However, no research to date has examined whether these types of apologies make people more open to accepting the outgroup's help, possibly by allowing them to attribute empathy and altruistic motives to the helpers, or whether such apologies increase their willingness for future intergroup contact. Thus, in our research, we sought answers to these questions in a series of experiments, the last of which focused on normatively supported versus rejected apologies and examined outgroup humanness as a psychological mechanism that could explain the pattern of the results.

1.2. The mediating role of perceived outgroup humanness

In contexts marked by intergroup intractability, the perception of outgroup members' humanity is one of the important facets of achieving reconciliation (Andrighetto, Mari, Volpato, & Behluli, 2012; Bar-Tal, 2000). Members of victim groups need to not only rehumanize their ingroup but also believe that decent people with genuine intentions are among their current and/or former adversaries (Heywood & Goodman, 2019). Enabling them to consider former opponents as fully human may be necessary for their positive understanding of that outgroup's prosocial and emotional actions and/or intentions. Put differently, the outgroup's perceived humanity enables them to experience empathy and engage in intergroup interactions (Bandura, 1999; Čehajić, Brown, & González, 2009) and thereby improve intergroup relations (e.g., Zebel, Zimmermann, Viki, & Doosje, 2008). This trend aligns with Gobodo-Madikizela's (2002) suggestion that two elements of achieving intergroup reconciliation are critical. The first is the humanization of the victim—that is, seeing the victim as a human being instead of as a dehumanized other. The second, by contrast, is the "rehumanization of the perpetrator" as an act of "opening the door to their readmission into the realm of moral humanity," as exemplified by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002; cf. Borinca, Tropp, & Ofosu, 2021).

Against that background, we hypothesized that genuine intergroup apologies might help to rehumanize both offender and victim groups. On the one hand, apologies can be used to rehumanize victims by giving voice and recognition to their grievances, even perhaps to the point of psychologically healing the aggrieved individuals and/or social group(s) affected (e.g., Hasmath, Ho, & Kay-Reid, 2020). On the other hand, apologies may also enable victims to (re)humanize offenders and thereby contribute to improving how members of victim groups react to offers of help from outgroup members and the extent to which they are willing to engage in intergroup reconciliation. Thus, in our final experiment, we tested the proposition that apologies supported by the majority of outgroup members enable outgroup humanization, more than apologies rejected by the majority of the outgroup. In turn, we also tested the hypothesis that such humanization mediates the effect of normative apologies on dependent variables: participants' reactions to help offered and their willingness for intergroup contact and reconciliation.

2. Overview and hypotheses

In the present research, we examined whether an interpersonal apology or a normative apology (i.e., an apology supported by the majority of the outgroup), compared with an institutional apology, an apology rejected by the majority of outgroup members, or the lack of apology (i.e., control condition), increases an individual's positive reaction to help offered by an outgroup helper (i.e., at the level of cross-group interaction) and willingness for intergroup reconciliation (i.e., at the level of intergroup relation). We tested that general hypothesis in three experiments conducted with Kosovan Albanian participants in the post-conflict context of Kosovo. During the 1998–1999 Kosovo War, Serbian forces killed at least 10,000 Kosovan Albanians and forcibly displaced more than 800,000 others (Voca & Kamberi, 2017). Since Kosovo declared independence in 2008, more than a hundred countries have recognized it as an independent state. Serbia has not, however, but instead repeatedly lobbied against Kosovo's sovereign status (Bytyqi, 2018; Surk, 2019). Therefore, intergroup relations between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs provide an exceptionally relevant context for testing our hypotheses.

In our experiments, we compared either an interpersonal or normative apology to an institutional apology, a control condition without any apology (i.e., in Experiments 1 & 2), and a normatively rejected apology. In Experiments 1 and 2, depending on the experimental condition, participants were presented with one message representing either an interpersonal apology (i.e., Experiment 1), a normative apology (i.e., Experiment 2), or an institutional apology (i.e., Experiments 1 and 2), whereas participants in the control condition (i.e., Experiments 1 and 2) did not receive any apology-related information. We then asked the participants to imagine a situation in which they were in a predicament and received spontaneous help from either an ingroup member or a member of the outgroup. In Experiment 3, to simplify the design, we focused only on the most relevant condition—that is, the one in which an outgroup member offers help. Thus, the experimental design included two conditions: a normative apology versus a normatively rejected apology.

In all experiments, the primary dependent variables were participants' reactions to the help offered: the amount of empathy and altruistic motives attributed to the helper and the participant's willingness to accept the help offered. In the experiments, we also extended our general hypothesis to dependent variables assessed at the intergroup level: participants' willingness for future intergroup contact and feelings of being at peace with the outgroup. Last, to better understand the nature of the investigated processes, in Experiment 3 we assessed the perceived humanness of the outgroup.

We expected Experiments 1 and 2 to reveal the significant effect of the helper's group membership, with participants reacting less positively to an outgroup helper than to an ingroup helper (H1). We also expected an interaction effect between apology and helper's group membership (H2). In particular, we expected that participants would react more positively to an outgroup member's offer of help when an interpersonal (Experiment 1) or normatively supported apology (Experiment 2) had previously been offered than when an institutional apology or no apology whatsoever had been offered. In Experiment 3, because we focused only on the condition with the outgroup helper, we expected that the apology would affect the reactions of participants (H3), with ones in the normative apology condition reacting more positively to the outgroup helper than ones in the condition involving the normative rejection of the apology. We also expected similar findings for the measures of reconciliation at the intergroup level. Last, in Experiment 3, we examined whether participants' willingness to humanize an outgroup would explain how apologies supported by the majority of outgroup members affected their reactions to the help offered and their willingness for intergroup contact and reconciliation (H4).

3. Experiment 1

Experiment 1 was designed to provide an initial test for H1 and H2. After we created three experimental conditions involving apologies—the interpersonal apology condition, the institutional apology condition, and the control condition—we asked a sample of Kosovan–Albanian adults to imagine that they were in a predicament and received an unsolicited offer of help from a stranger. Depending on the experimental condition, the potential helper was either an ingroup or an outgroup member. We assessed participants' perceptions of the offer of help by asking them to estimate the amount of empathy felt by the potential helper, the degree to which the person's motives in offering help were likely to be altruistic versus instrumental, and the extent to which they would be willing to accept the help offered. Last, we assessed participants' willingness for future intergroup contact, whether they felt at peace with the outgroup, and their understanding of the apology (see Supplementary Material).

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants and procedure

Following Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn's (2013) guidelines, before commencing our experiment we determined the need to recruit at least 50 participants per experimental condition (cf. Nook, Ong, Morelli, Mitchell, & Zaki, 2016), and our preliminary results did not affect that criterion. Thus, we recruited 300 adults who identified as being of Kosovan–Albanian descent (161 women: $M_{age} = 22.57$, $SD_{age} = 3.54$) on the campuses of the University of Prizren and the Prizren Business College in the city of Prizren in Kosovo. Participants were first asked to complete a questionnaire presented to them as a survey on how people perceive social groups. Next, they were randomly assigned to one of six experimental conditions in a 3 (Apology: interpersonal vs. institutional vs. no apology-related information) × 2 (Helper's group membership: ingroup vs. outgroup) between-subjects design. After data inspection, we excluded from analysis the 14 participants who failed the two attention checks. Thus, the final sample included 286 participants (147 women) between 18 and 42 years old ($M_{age} = 22.60$, $SD_{age} = 3.57$). A sensitivity analysis conducted with G*Power (version 3.1.9.2; Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009) revealed that, assuming a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.05 and a power of 0.80, our sample was sufficiently powered to detect an effect size f of 0.16 (Faul et al., 2009). At the end of all experiments, participants were thanked and fully debriefed.[1]

3.1.2. Experimental manipulations

3.1.2.1. Apology. Once participants provided basic demographic information, they were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions: interpersonal apology, institutional apology, or no apology (Halabi et al., 2018; Okimoto et al., 2019). In the no apology condition (i.e., control condition), participants were not given any information related to an apology. In the interpersonal and institutional apology conditions, by contrast, participants read a short apology in which a representative of the Serbian government apologized for the Kosovo War either on his own behalf (i.e., interpersonal apology condition) or on the behalf of the Serbian government (i.e., institutional apology condition). The apologies presented in the interpersonal and institutional apology conditions were in the form of two brief press reports, both of which began as follows:

[1] All experiments were conducted in accordance with ethical principles governing research involving human participants. All measures, manipulations, and exclusions in the experiments have been disclosed and are reported either in the article or in the supplementary material. The method of determining the final sample size has been described, and data collection did not continue after data analysis. The second author's institution approved all materials.

Serbian representative expresses remorse.

According to BBC News, a member of the audience at a conference on the situation in the Balkans at the University of Basel asked a representative of the Serbian government about the 1998–1999 Kosovo War.

In the interpersonal apology condition, the press report continued as follows:

He answered, "I personally feel sorry and apologize for what happened in the Kosovo War. Although it's my personal opinion and not necessarily the official position of the Serbian government or Serbian people, I wish the war had never happened and believe that it's time for both countries to move forward for a better future in Europe."

In the institutional apology condition, however, the press report continued differently:

He answered, "As an elected representative, I can say that the whole of Serbia feels sorry for what happened in the Kosovo War, and I apologize on the behalf of the Serbian government. We wish the war had never happened and believe that it's time for both countries to move forward for a better future in Europe."

3.1.2.2. Helper's group membership. Following procedures similar to Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, and Andrighetto's (2020a); Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, Andrighetto, and Durante's (2020b), the second part of the questionnaire asked participants to imagine themselves in a predicament in which a stranger of the same gender offered them help. For half of the participants, the helper was an ingroup member (i.e., Albanian); for the other half, the help was an outgroup member (i.e., Serbian). Set in Pristina, Kosovo's capital, the scenario read as follows, with the outgroup helper condition in brackets:

> *Imagine that you're in Pristina, and that you've just missed the last bus home. You're worried because missing the bus is a big problem for you, and the information desk at the bus station is closed. Then, an Albanian [Serbian] person of the same gender as you approaches you because you look very sad, helpless, and distressed. After you explain the situation, the person offers to give you a ride home.*

3.1.3. Dependent variables

Unless otherwise indicated, all responses were given on 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*absolutely*).

3.1.3.1. Attributed empathy. Participants completed a ten-item scale assessing the degree of empathy that they attributed to the helper (Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, & Andrighetto, 2020a; Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, Andrighetto, & Durante, 2020b), with items including "This person empathizes with my situation" and "This person is able to understand my point of view" ($\alpha = 0.79$; $M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.13$).

3.1.3.2. Attributed motives. We used a six-item scale (Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, & Andrighetto, 2020a; Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, Andrighetto, & Durante, 2020b) to assess whether the helper's behavior was inspired by altruistic motives (i.e., "This person offered to help you because: he or she feels a human responsibility to help others, he or she is able to put himself or herself in someone else's shoes, or he or she is moved to help people who are in stressful situations such as yours") or instrumental motives (i.e., "This person offered to help you because: he or she wants something from you, he or she wanted money in return for driving you home, or you could be very useful to him or her"). Across the three experiments, a principal component analysis consistently revealed the existence of a single factor including the six items. Accordingly, we computed a single score of altruistic motives after reversing the scores for instrumental items ($\alpha = 0.87$; $M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.49$).

3.1.3.3. Willingness to accept the help offered. We assessed whether participants would accept the help offered with an item from Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, and Andrighetto (2020a); Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, Andrighetto, and Durante (2020b)— "If such a situation really occurred, to what extent would you have accepted the help of this person?" ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 1.95$).

3.1.3.4. Willingness for future intergroup contact. We also used a single item to assess willingness for future intergroup contact: "In general, are you willing to have contact with Serbian people in the future?" ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.00$).

3.1.3.5. Feeling at peace with the outgroup. We again used a single item to measure participants' feeling at peace with the outgroup: "Do you feel at peace with Serbians?" ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.73$).

3.1.3.6. Perceived genuineness of the apology. To assess the observed trend that people perceive apologies as being more or less genuine depending on who offers them (e.g., Halabi et al., 2018; Okimoto et al., 2019; Philpot & Hornsey, 2008; Wenzel, Okimoto, Hornsey, Lawrence-Wood, & Coughlin, 2017), we used a single item asking participants to indicate the extent to which they thought that the apology expressed genuine regret ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.88$). The item was not introduced in the control condition (see Supplementary Material).

3.1.3.7. Attention checks. We introduced two attention checks to ensure that participants correctly identified the ethnicity and gender of the helper described in the scenario. As mentioned, participants who did not respond correctly to the checks were excluded from analysis.

3.1.3.8. Additional measures. For exploratory purposes, we also included three scales at pretest: a seven-item prejudice scale, a ten-item perceived negative stereotype scale, and a ten-item perceived threat scale. Reliability analyses showed that the perceived stereotype scale was reliable ($\alpha = 0.80$), but not the prejudice scale ($\alpha = 0.46$) or perceived threat scale ($\alpha = 0.36$). Exploratory CFA conducted on the two latter scales did not help to compute meaningful subscales, either. Although we also conducted the primary analyses as described with perceived stereotypes introduced as a covariate, the results did not change. Therefore, we do not discuss these pretest measures here. Last, and again for exploratory purposes, we included additional measures at post-test. However, because these measures were not included in the final experiment (i.e., Experiment 3), the description of analyses for these variables is beyond the scope of this article (see Supplementary Material).

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Dependent variables

We performed a 2 (Helper's group membership: ingroup vs. outgroup) × 3 (Apology: normative vs. institutional vs. no apology-related information) full factorial ANOVA for all variables. Means and standard deviations appear in Table 1.

3.2.1.1. Perceived genuineness of the apology. Participants in the control condition did not respond to the item about apology genuineness. Results revealed the apology's significant main effect, $F(1, 186) = 48.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.20$. In particular, participants perceived the apology to be more genuine in the interpersonal condition ($M = 4.52$, $SD = 1.79$) than in the institutional apology condition ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 1.55$). No other effects were significant.

3.2.1.2. Attributed empathy. The main effect of the helper's group membership was significant. Participants attributed more empathy to the ingroup helper ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 0.72$) than to the outgroup helper ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 0.92$), $F(1, 280) = 341.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.54$. In addition, both the main effect of apology, $F(2, 280) = 16.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.10$, and the predicted helper's group membership × apology

Table 1
Reaction to the offered help (attributed empathy and altruistic motives, and willingness to accept the help offered) as a function of apology and helper membership conditions (standard deviations in parentheses; Experiment 1).

	Interpersonal apology	Control	Institutional apology
Empathy			
Ingroup	4.66 (0.87)[a]	4.91 (0.63)[a]	4.88 (0.60)[a]
Outgroup	4.08 (0.90)[c]	2.97 (0.48)[b]	2.71 (0.68)[b]
Altruistic motives			
Ingroup	4.97 (0.75)[a]	5.42 (0.49)[b]	5.65 (0.50)[b]
Outgroup	3.62 (0.85)[c]	3.15 (1.53)[d]	3.14 (1.61)[d]
Help acceptance			
Ingroup	5.23 (1.20)[a]	6.02 (1.08)[b]	6.28 (0.85)[b]
Outgroup	3.92 (0.96)[c]	2.27 (1.00)[d]	2.06 (0.87)[d]
Future intergroup contact			
Ingroup	2.63 (1.08)[a]	1.73 (0.73)[b]	1.60 (1.03)[b]
Outgroup	2.65 (0.86)[a]	1.98 (0.86)[bc]	2.06 (0.96)[c]
Feeling at peace			
Ingroup	4.10 (0.97)[a]	2.77 (1.75)[b]	2.02 (1.13)[c]
Outgroup	5.15 (1.16)[d]	3.02 (1.65)[b]	2.30 (1.36)[c]

Note. Means with different letters differ at least at $p < .05$.

interaction, $F(2, 280) = 34.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.19$, were significant. Planned comparisons indicated no significant differences between apology conditions for the ingroup helper condition, $F(2, 280) = 1.78$, $p = .171$, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$. More relevant to our hypotheses, significant differences emerged between apology conditions regarding the outgroup helper condition, $F(2, 280) = 49.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.25$: attributed empathy was significantly higher in the interpersonal apology condition than in the control condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.81, 1.39], and institutional apology condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.07, 1.65]. However, the control and institutional conditions did not differ significantly, $p = .075$, 95% CI [−0.02, 0.55].

Decomposing the interaction the other way around, the pattern of interaction revealed that participants attributed less empathy to the outgroup helper than to the ingroup helper in all three conditions: the institutional apology condition, $F(1, 280) = 216.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.43$; the control condition, $F(1, 280) = 176.06$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.38$; and the interpersonal apology condition, $F(1, 280) = 15.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.05$. However, as expected, the magnitude of the effect was noticeably higher in the first two cases.

3.2.1.3. Altruistic motives. When the same full factorial ANOVA was performed on the attribution of altruistic motives, the main effect of the helper's group membership was significant. Participants attributed more altruistic motives to the ingroup helper ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 0.65$) than to the outgroup helper ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.38$), $F(1, 280) = 267.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.48$. The main effect of apology was not significant, $F(1, 280) = 0.33$, $p = .566$, $\eta^2_p = 0.002$, but the predicted helper's group membership × apology interaction was significant, $F(2, 280) = 8.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.05$. Planned comparisons indicated significant differences between the apology conditions for the ingroup helper condition, $F(2, 280) = 5.11$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2_p = 0.03$. In particular, participants attributed less altruistic motives to the ingroup helper in the interpersonal apology condition than in the control condition, $p = .038$, 95% CI [−87, −0.02], and institutional condition, $p = .002$, 95% CI [−1.11, −0.25], with no significant difference between the latter two conditions, $p = .287$, 95% CI [−0.66, 0.19]. More relevant to our hypotheses, significant differences emerged between apology conditions regarding the outgroup helper condition, $F(2, 280) = 3.25$, $p = .040$, $\eta^2_p = 0.02$. Participants attributed more altruistic motives to the outgroup helper in the interpersonal apology condition than in the control condition, $p = .028$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.90], and institutional condition, $p = .029$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.91], again with no significant difference between the latter two conditions, $p = .99$, 95% CI [−0.42, 0.42].

From the other direction, participants attributed less altruistic motives to the outgroup helper than to the ingroup helper in all conditions: the institutional apology condition, $F(1, 280) = 132.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.32$; the control condition, $F(1, 280) = 111.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.28$; and the interpersonal apology condition, $F(1, 280) = 39.08$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.12$. However, the magnitude of the effect was noticeably higher in the first two cases.

3.2.1.4. Willingness to accept the help offered. The full factorial ANOVA on willingness to accept the help revealed that participants were more willing to accept the help from the ingroup helper ($M = 5.84$, $SD = 1.14$) than from the outgroup helper ($M = 2.76$, $SD = 1.25$), $F(1, 280) = 676.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.70$. In addition, both the apology's main effect, $F(2, 280) = 5.45$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2_p = 0.03$, and the predicted helper's group membership × apology interaction, $F(2, 280) = 57.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.29$, were significant. Planned comparisons indicated significant differences between the apology conditions for the ingroup helper condition, $F(2, 280) = 14.07$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.09$. Participants were less willing to accept ingroup help in the interpersonal apology condition than in the control condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.19, −0.03], and institutional condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.45, −0.64], with no significant difference between the latter two conditions, $p = .216$, 95% CI [−0.65, 0.20]. More relevant to our hypotheses, the apology's effect was significant and strong in the outgroup helper condition, $F(2, 280) = 48.74$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.25$. In that case, participants were more willing to accept the outgroup's help in the interpersonal apology condition than in the control condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.24, 2.05], and institutional condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [1.44, 2.25], again without any significant difference between the latter two conditions, $p = .316$, 95% CI [−0.19, 0.61].

From the other direction, participants were less willing to accept the outgroup's help than the ingroup's help in all conditions: the institutional apology condition, $F(1, 280) = 412.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.59$; the control condition, $F(1, 280) = 334.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.54$; and the interpersonal apology condition, $F(1, 280) = 40.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.12$. However, the effect's magnitude was noticeably higher in the first two conditions.

3.2.1.5. Willingness for future intergroup contact. The full factorial ANOVA on willingness for future intergroup contact showed that participants were less willing to pursue future intergroup contact in the ingroup helper condition ($M = 1.99$, $SD = 1.06$) than in the outgroup helper condition ($M = 2.23$, $SD = 0.94$), $F(1, 280) = 5.00$, $p = .026$, $\eta^2_p = 0.018$. Added to that, the apology's main effect was significant, $F(2, 280) = 23.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.14$. Participants reported greater willingness for future contact in the interpersonal apology condition ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 0.97$) than in the control condition ($M = 1.85$, $SD = 0.80$), $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.04, −0.51], and institutional apology condition ($M = 1.83$, $SD = 1.02$), $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.07, −0.54], without any significant difference between the latter two conditions, $p = .85$, 95% CI [−0.29, 0.24]. Last, the predicted helper's group membership × apology interaction was not significant, $F(2, 280) = 1.37$, $p = .25$, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$.

3.2.1.6. Feeling at peace with the outgroup. The full factorial ANOVA on feeling at peace with the outgroup showed that participants were more at peace in the outgroup helper condition ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 1.85$) than in the ingroup helper condition ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.57$), $F(1, 280) = 10.38$,

$p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.03$. Moreover, the apology's main effect was significant, $F(2, 280) = 81.13$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.36$. In particular, participants felt more at peace with the outgroup in the interpersonal apology condition ($M = 4.63$, $SD = 1.19$) than in the control condition ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.70$), $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.11, −1.33], and institutional apology condition ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 1.25$), $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.85, −2.07]. However, these two last conditions also differed significantly, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.34, 1.12]. Last, the predicted helper's group membership × apology interaction fell short of significance, $F(2, 280) = 2.57$, $p = .078$, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$.

3.3. Discussion

Designed to test H1 and H2, Experiment 1 showed that participants attributed less empathy and less altruistic motives to the outgroup members than ingroup members and were less willing to accept the outgroup members' offers of help (H1). This pattern was consistently moderated by apology (H2), because the effect of the helper's group membership was lower in the interpersonal apology condition than in the control and institutional apology conditions. Moreover, no significant differences emerged between the control and the institutional apology conditions. Thus, our findings support the general assumption that, in post-conflict situations, the interpersonal apology for past transgressions increases positive perceptions and reactions of outgroup prosocial behaviors in cross-group interactions. However, our findings were less conclusive regarding the measures at the intergroup level (see Supplementary Material). In order to further explore this issue, we conducted a second experiment to investigate the same hypothesis but involving a normative apology instead of an interpersonal one.

4. Experiment 2

We extended the test of our general hypothesis from an interpersonal apology condition to a normative apology condition—that is, one in which the majority of the outgroup has apologized. As in Experiment 1, we expected the helper's group membership to exert a main effect, with participants reacting less positively to an outgroup helper than to an ingroup one (H1). We also expected an interaction effect between apology and the helper's group membership (H2), such that participants in the normative apology condition would react more positively to an outgroup helper than participants in the control and institutional apology conditions. Again, we also expected similar findings for the measures of reconciliation at the intergroup level.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants and procedure

We recruited participants on the campus of Kadri Zeka University in Gilan in Kosovo as well as in public spaces in the city. Our initial sample included 302 participants, all of whom identified as being of Kosovan–Albanian descent. However, after excluding participants who failed the two attention checks concerning the helper's gender and ethnicity, the final sample comprised 292 participants (141 women) between 18 and 49 years old ($M_{age} = 29.88$, $SD_{age} = 7.52$). A sensitivity analysis similar to the one used in Experiment 1 revealed that our final sample was sufficiently powered to detect an effect size $f = 0.16$. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six experimental conditions within a 3 (Apology: normative vs. institutional vs. no apology-related information) × 2 (Helper's group membership: ingroup vs. outgroup) between-subjects design. The scenario and manipulation of the helper's membership were similar to those in Experiment 1.

4.1.2. Experimental manipulation

4.1.2.1. Apology. The control and institutional apology conditions were the same as in Experiment 1. Participants in the normative apology condition read a short, fictitious press release reporting that the Serbian people had expressed regret about the Kosovo War. The press release read as follows:

Serbian people express regret.

According to BBC News, a team of researchers from the University of Pristina has just conducted a survey in Kosovo in which they asked the Serbian population if they regretted the 1998–1999 Kosovo War. More than 89% of the Serbians interviewed agreed with the statement, "I personally feel sorry and apologize for what happened in the Kosovo War. Although my personal opinion does not necessarily represent the official position of the Serbian government, I wish the war had never happened, and I believe that it's time for the two countries to move forward for a better future in Europe."

4.1.2.2. Dependent variables. As in Experiment 1, we measured attributed empathy ($\alpha = 0.85$; $M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.13$), altruistic motives ($\alpha = 0.83$; $M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.41$), willingness to accept the help offered ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.88$), willingness for future intergroup contact ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.75$), and feeling at peace with the outgroup ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.53$). To assess the perceived genuineness of the apology compared with Experiment 1, we introduced a different item—"Do you think Serbians in general regret what happened during the conflict in Kosovo?" ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.86$)—that participants in the control condition responded to as well. Again, unless otherwise indicated, all responses were given on 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*absolutely*).

4.1.2.3. Additional measures. As in Experiment 1, for exploratory purposes we also included three measures at pretest: a seven-item prejudice scale, a six-item perceived threat scale, and a seven-item scale assessing participants' opinions about the Serbia–Kosovo conflict. The major results discussed in what follows remained significant when controlling for each of these pretest variables. Last, as in Experiment 1, we also included additional items at the post-test for exploratory purposes (see Supplementary Material).

4.2. Results

4.2.1. Dependent variables

As in Experiment 1, we performed a 2 (Helper's group membership: ingroup vs. outgroup) × 3 (Apology: normative vs. institutional vs. no apology-related information) full factorial ANOVA for all variables.

Table 2
Reaction to the offered help (attributed empathy and altruistic motives, and willingness to accept the help offered) as a function of apology and helper membership conditions (standard deviations in parentheses; Experiment 2).

	Normative apology	Control	Institutional apology
Empathy			
Ingroup	4.86 (0.92)[a]	5.01 (0.88)[ab]	5.33 (0.99)[b]
Outgroup	4.03 (1.08)[c]	3.69 (0.59)[cd]	3.40 (0.75)[d]
Altruistic motives			
Ingroup	5.05 (0.98)[a]	5.09 (0.69)[a]	5.36 (0.74)[a]
Outgroup	3.87 (1.53)[b]	2.89 (0.72)[c]	2.81 (0.80)[c]
Help acceptance			
Ingroup	5.35 (1.33)[a]	5.28 (1.14)[a]	5.42 (1.21)[a]
Outgroup	4.79 (1.93)[b]	2.64 (1.49)[c]	2.57 (1.25)[c]
Future intergroup contact			
Ingroup	4.52 (1.77)[a]	3.56 (1.70)[b]	3.54 (1.50)[b]
Outgroup	3.85 (2.03)[ab]	3.18 (1.58)[b]	3.06 (1.56)[c]
Feeling at peace			
Ingroup	4.02 (2.13)[a]	1.90 (0.83)[b]	2.44 (1.02)[c]
Outgroup	3.11 (1.78)[d]	1.98 (0.86)[e]	2.16 (0.98)[e]

Note. Means with different letters differ at least at $p < .05$.

Means and standard deviations appear in Table 2.

4.2.1.1. Perceived genuineness of the apology. On average, participants perceived that Serbian people did not regret what had happened (M = 3.58, SD = 1.86), and the ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for apology only, $F(2, 286) = 10.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.07$. Participants perceived that the Serbian people regretted what happened to a greater extent in the normative apology condition (M = 4.29, SD = 1.95) than in the control condition (M = 3.29, SD = 1.75), $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.51, −0.49], and institutional apology condition (M = 3.21, SD = 1.70), $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.59, −0.56], without any significant difference between the latter two conditions (p = .76).

4.2.1.2. Attributed empathy. The main effect of the helper's group membership was significant, $F(1, 286) = 173.38$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.37$. Participants attributed more empathy to the ingroup helper (M = 5.07, SD = 0.94) than to the outgroup helper (M = 3.70, SD = 0.86). In addition, the helper × apology interaction was significant, $F(2, 286) = 9.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.06$. Planned comparisons indicated significant differences between apology conditions for the ingroup helper condition, $F(2, 286) = 3.51$, $p = .031$, $\eta^2_p = 0.02$. Attributed empathy to the ingroup helper was significantly lower in the normative apology condition than in the institutional apology condition, p = .011, 95% CI [0.11, 0.82], and the control condition did not differ from those two conditions, p = .42, 95% CI [−0.50, 0.21], and p = .07, 95% CI [−0.02, 0.67], respectively. More relevant to our hypotheses, the apology's effect was significant in the outgroup helper condition, $F(2, 286) = 6.25$, p = .002, η^2_p = 0.04. Attributed empathy to the outgroup helper was significantly greater in the normative apology condition than in the institutional apology condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−0.98, −0.28], and the control condition again did not differ from the other two conditions, p = .055, 95% CI [−0.01, 0.70], and p = .10, 95% CI [−0.63, 0.06], respectively.

Decomposing the interaction the other way around, participants attributed less empathy to the outgroup helper than to the ingroup helper in all conditions: the institutional apology condition, $F(1, 286) = 118.37$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.29$; the control condition, $F(1, 286) = 55.99$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.16$; and the normative apology condition, $F(1, 286) = 20.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.06$. However, as expected, that effect's magnitude was noticeably higher in the first two conditions.

4.2.1.3. Altruistic motives. The main effect of the helper's group membership was significant, $F(1, 286) = 313.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.52$: Participants attributed more altruistic motives to the ingroup helper (M = 5.16, SD = 0.81) than to the outgroup helper (M = 3.17, SD = 1.16). The main effect of apology, $F(2, 286) = 6.49$, p = .002, $\eta^2_p = 0.04$, and the predicted helper's group membership × apology interaction, $F(2, 280) = 13.14$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.08$, were also significant. Although the apology's effect was not significant in the ingroup helper condition, $F(2, 286) = 1.48$, p = .229, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$, it was significant in the outgroup helper condition, $F(2, 286) = 18.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.11$. Participants attributed more altruistic motives to the outgroup helper in the normative apology condition than in the control condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.35, −0.59], and institutional apology condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.43, −0.67], and the difference between the latter two conditions was not significant, p = .67, 95% CI [−0.29, 0.45].

From the other perspective, participants attributed less altruistic motives to the outgroup helper than to the ingroup helper in all conditions: the normative apology condition, $F(1, 280) = 35.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.11$; the control condition, $F(1, 280) = 132.77$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.31$; and the institutional apology condition, $F(1, 280) = 176.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.38$. However, the effect's magnitude was noticeably higher in the latter two conditions.

4.2.1.4. Willingness to accept the help offered. The main effect of the helper's group membership was significant, $F(1, 286) = 147.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.34$. In particular, participants were less willing to accept help from the outgroup helper (M = 3.30, SD = 1.86) than from the ingroup helper (M = 5.35, SD = 1.22). In addition, both the apology main effect, $F(2, 286) = 18.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.11$, and the predicted helper × apology interaction, $F(2, 286) = 18.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.11$, were significant. Although the apology's effect was not significant in the ingroup helper condition, $F(2, 286) = 0.11$, p = .89, $\eta^2_p = 0.00$, it was significant in the outgroup helper condition, $F(2, 286) = 38.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.21$. Participants were more willing to accept the outgroup's help in the normative apology condition than in the control condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.71, −1.58], and the institutional apology condition, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.78, −1.65], although the difference between the latter two conditions was not significant, p = .80, 95% CI [−0.62, 0.48].

Finally, participants were less willing to accept the outgroup's help than the ingroup's help in the institutional apology condition, $F(1, 280) = 99.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.25$, and the control condition, $F(1, 280) = 86.80$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.23$, although that effect was not significant in the normative apology condition, $F(1, 280) = 3.64$, p = .057, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$.

4.2.1.5. Willingness for future intergroup contact. The main effect of the helper's group membership was significant, $F(2, 286) = 11.62$, $p < .001$, η^2_p = 0.07. To be specific, participants were more willing for future contact in the normative apology condition (M = 4.18, SD = 1.92) than in the control condition (M = 3.37, SD = 1.64), $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.29, −0.33], and institutional apology condition (M = 3.29, SD = 1.54), $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.36, −0.40]. Last, the predicted helper's group membership × apology interaction was not significant, $F(2, 286) = 0.43$, p = .65, $\eta^2_p = 0.003$.

4.2.1.6. Feeling at peace with the outgroup. The ANOVA showed a significant helper's main effect, $F(1, 286) = 5.53$, p = .019, $\eta^2_p = 0.01$. Unexpectedly, participants were more at peace in the ingroup helper condition (M = 2.76, SD = 1.68) than in the outgroup helper condition (M = 2.16, SD = 0.98). The apology's main effect was also significant, $F(2, 286) = 38.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.21$. Participants felt more at peace with the outgroup in the normative apology condition (M = 3.56, SD = 2.00) than in the control condition (M = 1.94, SD = 0.85), $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.00, −1.24], and institutional apology condition (M = 2.29, SD = 1.01), $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.65, −0.88]. However, the difference between the latter two conditions was not significant, p = .063, 95% CI [−0.73, 0.02]. Last, the helper × apology interaction was significant, $F(2, 286) = 3.33$, p = .037, $\eta^2_p = 0.02$. The apology effect was significant in the ingroup helper condition, $F(2, 286) = 31.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.18$. Feelings of being at peace with the outgroup were higher in the normative apology condition than in both the control and the institutional apology conditions, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.66, −1.57], and $p < .001$, 95% CI [−2.13, −1.03], respectively. Furthermore, the difference between the latter two conditions was significant, p = .05, 95% CI [0.00, 1.07]. More relevant to our hypotheses, the apology's effect was also significant in the outgroup helper condition, $F(2, 286) = 9.68$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.06$. Participants also felt more at peace with the outgroup in the normative apology condition than in the control and institutional apology conditions, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.66, −0.58], and $p < .001$, 95% CI [−1.48, −0.42], respectively, and the difference between these latter two conditions was not significant, p = .51, 95% CI [−0.70, 0.35].

From an alternative perspective, surprisingly participants felt more at peace with the outgroup when help was provided by an ingroup member instead of an outgroup member in the normative apology condition, $F(1, 286) = 10.68$, p = .001, $\eta^2_p = 0.036$, but not in the institutional apology or control conditions, $F(1, 286) = 1.06$, p = .30, and $F(1, 280) = 0.08$, p = .777, respectively.

4.3. Discussion

Confirming the results of Experiment 1, Experiment 2 provided consistent support for H1 and H2 while using another form of apology: a normative apology instead of an interpersonal one. Among the results, participants reacted more positively to the outgroup's offer of help in the normative apology condition than in the other two conditions. A similar pattern of findings was observed regarding feeling at peace with the outgroup but not regarding willingness to have future contact with the outgroup members. Of particular relevance for the present purpose, in Experiments 1 and 2, the institutional apology condition did not differ from the control condition, which is consistent with previous research showing that institutional apology is perceived as less sincere and appears to be limited in improving intergroup relations (Okimoto et al., 2019; Wenzel, Lawrence-Wood, Okimoto, & Hornsey, 2018). Last, to test our hypothesis that outgroup humanization accounts for the positive effects of genuine apologies on the dependent variables (H4), we conducted a third and final experiment.

5. Experiment 3

In this experiment, we focused exclusively on the outgroup helper in a simplified experiment with only two apology conditions: a normative apology condition (same as in Experiment 2) and a condition involving the normative rejection of the apology, or *rejected apology condition*, in which only a minority of Serbian people expressed regret for the Kosovo War. This simplification enabled us to keep the outgroup apology constant and more directly explore the effects of its normativity. Because the rejected apology condition emphasized that many outgroup members did not feel regret or the need to apologize for the past, we expected the results for the condition to be similar to those observed for the control and institutional conditions in Experiments 1 and 2. Last, along with the variables examined in the previous experiments, Experiment 3 included a measure of outgroup humanization in order to test whether it mediated the predicted effects of apology on the dependent variables (H4).

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants and procedure

Unless otherwise indicated, the procedure and materials were the same as those used in Experiment 2. We recruited 125 participants (76 women; $M_{age} = 26.96$, $SD_{age} = 7.83$) on the campus of the Economic University of Pristina, and in surrounding public spaces. Again, all participants identified as being of Kosovan–Albanian descent, and each was randomly assigned to either of two experimental conditions: the normative apology condition or the rejected apology condition. We excluded five participants from the analysis because they failed the attention checks for the helper's gender, which left a final sample of 120 participants (72 women) between 18 and 53 years old ($M_{age} = 26.78$, $SD_{age} = 7.79$). A sensitivity analysis conducted with G*Power (version 3.1.9.2; Faul et al., 2009), assuming an α of 0.05 and a power of 0.80, revealed that the sample was sufficiently powered to detect an effect size of $f = 0.25$ (Faul et al., 2009).

5.1.2. Experimental manipulation

5.1.2.1. Apology. We used the same normative apology as in Experiment 2. For the rejected apology condition (Harth, Hornsey, & Barlow, 2011), the fictitious short press release stated that only a minority of Serbians regretted the Kosovo War:

According to BBC News, a team of researchers from the University of Pristina has just conducted a survey in Kosovo in which they asked the Serbian population if they regretted the 1998–1999 Kosovo War. Only 11% of the Serbians interviewed agreed with the following statement: "I personally feel sorry and apologize for what happened in the Kosovo War. Although my personal opinion doesn't necessarily represent the official position of the Serbian government, I wish that the war had never happened, and I believe that it's time for the two countries to move forward for a better future in Europe."

5.1.2.2. Ingroup and outgroup humanization. We assessed the amount of humanity that participants attributed to the outgroup and ingroup immediately after participants read the press release and before they read the scenario. We measured humanization according to Kteily et al.'s (2016) adaptation of Bastian, Denson, and Haslam's (2013) scale, on which participants indicated the extent to which a series of human traits applied to the outgroup and ingroup in general: refined, cultured; rational, logical; backward, primitive (reverse scored (r)); savage, aggressive (r); lacking in morals (r); barbaric, cold-hearted (r); scientifically/technologically advanced; capable of self-control; and mature, responsible. Participants replied to items using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *absolutely*), and the order of the target group (i.e., ingroup vs. outgroup) was randomized. Although we separately analyzed scores for the outgroup ($\alpha = 0.83$; $M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.27$) and ingroup ($\alpha = 0.75$; $M = 5.13$, $SD = 0.88$), analyses of the difference in scores yielded findings similar to those obtained for the outgroup score.

5.1.2.3. Other dependent variables. We also assessed attributed empathy ($\alpha = 0.84$; $M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.29$), altruistic motives ($\alpha = 0.88$; $M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.55$), willingness to accept the help offered ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 2.24$), willingness for future intergroup contact ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 2.18$), feeling at peace with the outgroup ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.66$), and perceived genuineness of the apology ($M = 2.77$, $SD = 1.18$), as in Experiment 2. No additional variables were introduced at pretest or post-test.

5.2. Results

5.2.1. Dependent variables

Table 3 provides means and standard deviations for all of the primary dependent variables. We performed a two-way ANOVA (Apology: normative vs. rejected) for all variables.

5.2.1.1. Perceived genuineness of the apology. An ANOVA conducted on the apology's perceived genuineness revealed the apology's significant main effect, $F(1, 118) = 20.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.14$ (see Supplementary Material). Participants thought that the outgroup population felt more regret in the normative apology condition ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 2.02$) than in the rejected apology condition ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 1.31$).

5.2.1.2. Outgroup and ingroup humanization. The ANOVA showed a significant effect of apology on outgroup humanization, $F(1, 118) = 32.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.21$. Participants attributed more humanity to the outgroup in the normative apology condition ($M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.20$) than

Table 3
Outgroup and ingroup humanization, reaction to the offered help (attributed empathy and altruistic motives to the outgroup helper, and willingness to accept the help offered) and reconciliation measures (willingness for future intergroup contact and feeling at peace) as a function of apology conditions (standard deviations in parentheses; Experiment 3).

Outgroup helper		
	Normative apology	Non-normative apology
Outgroup humanization	3.99 (1.20)[a]	2.81 (1.06)[b]
Ingroup humanization	5.16 (0.87)[a]	5.10 (0.89)[a]
Empathy	4.74 (1.06)[a]	3.67 (1.29)[b]
Altruistic motives	5.03 (1.03)[a]	3.84 (1.76)[b]
Willingness to accept help	4.22 (2.33)[a]	2.65 (1.85)[b]
Future intergroup contact	4.10 (1.97)[a]	2.67 (2.16)[b]
Feeling at peace	3.25 (1.84)[a]	2.03 (1.17)[b]

Note. Means with a different letter differ at least at $p < .05$.

in the rejected apology condition ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 1.06$). Moreover, the main effect of apology on ingroup humanization was not significant, $F(1, 118) = 0.11$, $p = .741$, $\eta^2_p < 0.001$.

5.2.1.3. Attributed empathy. We observed a significant effect of apology, $F(1, 118) = 24.02$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.16$, because participants attributed more empathy to the outgroup helper in the normative apology condition ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.06$) than in the rejected apology condition ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.29$).

5.2.1.4. Altruistic motives. The analysis showed a significant effect of apology, $F(1, 118) = 20.33$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.14$: participants attributed more altruistic motives to the outgroup helper in the normative apology condition ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.03$) than in the rejected apology condition ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 1.76$).

5.2.1.5. Willingness to accept the help offered. The apology significantly affected the willingness to accept the help offered, $F(1, 118) = 16.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.12$, which was greater among participants in the normative apology condition ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 2.33$) than in the rejected apology condition ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.85$).

5.2.1.6. Willingness for future intergroup contact. The analysis showed the apology's significant effect on willingness for future intergroup conduct as well, $F(1, 118) = 14.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.10$. To be specific, participants were more willing for such contact in the normative apology condition ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 1.97$) than in the rejected apology condition ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 2.16$).

5.2.1.7. Feeling at peace with the outgroup. The effect of the apology on feeling at peace with the outgroup was significant, $F(1, 118) = 18.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.13$. Participants felt more at peace with the outgroup in the normative apology condition ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.84$) than in the rejected apology condition ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.17$).

5.2.2. Mediation analyses

We tested our mediation hypothesis (H4) based on Hayes's PROCESS Macro (2018; Template 4) in the SEM software Amos. We entered apology (−1 = normative apology vs. +1 = normative rejection of apology) as the independent variable, the outgroup's humanization as the mediator, and attributed empathy, altruistic motives, acceptance of help, willingness for intergroup contact, and feeling at peace with the outgroup as the dependent variables (Fig. 1).

The direct and indirect effects appear in Table 4. Regarding its indirect effects, the apology influenced all dependent variables via the outgroup's humanization. Thus, our analysis suggests that the humanness attributed to the outgroup helper can be regarded as a mediator of the apology's effect on the dependent variables. Nevertheless, concerning its direct effects, the apology significantly influenced attributed empathy only, thereby suggesting that only in this case the effect was not fully mediated by the outgroup's humanization.

Table 4
The direct and indirect effects (Experiment 3).

	Apology (direct effect)	Humanization (direct effect)	Indirect effect of apology via humanization
Humanization	$B = -.58$, $p < .001$		
Empathy	$B = -.25$, $p = .018$	$B = .46$, $p < .001$	$B = -.27$ ($SE = 0.08$), CI 95% [−.46, −.13]
Altruistic motives	$B = -.21$, $p = .092$	$B = .64$, $p < .001$	$B = -.38$ ($SE = .10$), CI 95% [−.60, −.20]
Help acceptance	$B = -.09$, $p = .563$	$B = 1.16$, $p < .001$	$B = -.68$ ($SE = .13$), CI 95% [−.96, −.42]
Intergroup contact	$B = -.07$, $p = .652$	$B = 1.08$, $p < .001$	$B = -.64$ ($SE = .13$), CI 95% [−0.91, −.39]
Feeling at peace	$B = -.24$, $p = .081$	$B = 0.61$, $p < .001$	$B = -0.36$ ($SE = 0.09$), CI 95% [−0.57, −0.19]

5.3. Discussion

The results of Experiment 3 not only confirmed our previous findings for the outgroup helper condition but also extended them in two ways. First, we compared the effect of a normative apology with that of the normative rejection of an apology. Participants attributed more empathy as well as altruistic motives and were more willing to accept the help offered in the normative apology condition than in the rejected apology condition. The analyses also confirmed that these effects again could be generalized to the two measures of intergroup reconciliation: the willingness for future intergroup contact and feeling at peace with the outgroup. Second, the experiment provided initial empirical evidence in support of the idea that outgroup's humanization mediates the effect of a normative apology on all of the dependent variables.

6. General discussion

The overarching goal of our research was to examine whether certain forms of intergroup apologies (interpersonal and normatively endorsed apologies vs. institutional apologies, normatively rejected apologies and the lack of apology) improve how members of a victim group react to offers of help from members of an offending outgroup. In the process, we also sought to examine whether the positive effect of these apologies could be generalized to measures of intergroup reconciliation, namely willingness to engage in future intergroup contact and feeling at peace with the outgroup. The results of the three experiments consistently supported our hypotheses, and the effect sizes were generally large. Overall, the recipients of the help reacted more positively to the

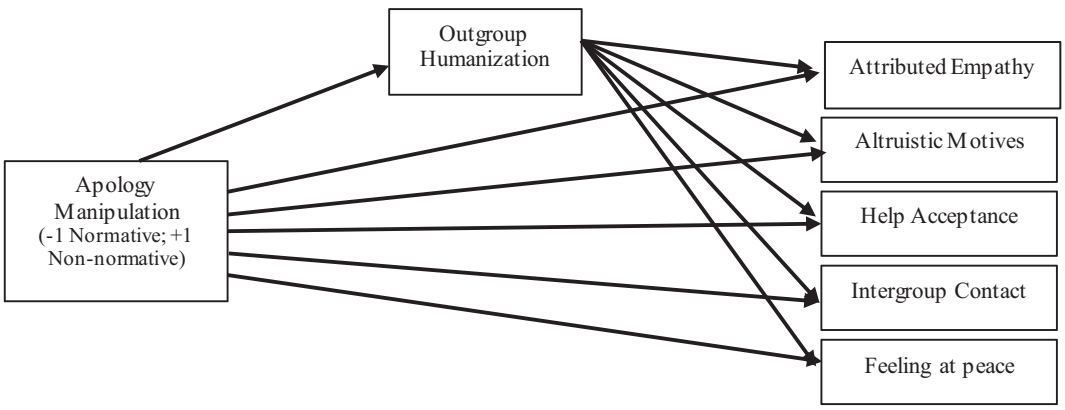

Fig. 1. The conceptual path model tested in Experiment 3.

prosocial behavior of the outgroup members when they had read an apology offered by an outgroup member (i.e., interpersonal apology) or supported by most of the outgroup (i.e., normative apology), than when it was offered by an institution, rejected by most outgroup members or else when no apology-related information was provided. Normative apologies also enhanced positive perceptions of the outgroup by increasing the participants' feeling of peace about the outgroup and their general willingness to engage in contact with outgroup members. Furthermore, the participants' willingness to humanize the outgroup mediated the effect of normative apologies on all dependent variables (i.e., participants' reactions to the help offered and their willingness for intergroup contact and reconciliation).

The findings are potentially important for several domains of research. While institutional apologies may be viewed as being instrumental and/or politically motivated, instead of genuine expressions of remorse and/or empathy for the suffering of victims (Halabi et al., 2018; Insko, Kirchner, Pinter, Efaw, & Wildschut, 2005; Philpot & Hornsey, 2008), interpersonal apologies appear to alleviate such suspicions (Halabi et al., 2018; Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). Therefore, our results replicate and extend past findings by indicating that interpersonal apologies enhance positive reactions to offers of help from outgroup members. Furthermore, considering the lack of scholarly attention to the positive effect of normative apologies on intergroup relations (cf. Okimoto et al., 2019; Wenzel et al., 2017), we used a normative apology to test our general hypothesis in Experiments 2 and 3. To our knowledge, our research was the first to demonstrate the potential of such apologies to reduce a victim group's adverse reactions to an outgroup's prosocial behaviors. It was also the first to show that such apologies enable humanization of the outgroup, which in turn improves positive reactions to both the outgroup's prosocial behavior and intergroup reconciliation.

Concerning the (null) effects of institutional apologies in the context of helping behavior, Shnabel and Nadler's (2008) needs-based model of reconciliation suggests that apologies can facilitate reconciliation by restoring the victim's sense of agency. Put differently, when an apology is offered, the victim has the power to accept or reject it. However, when the victim feels forced to accept the apology, that agency can be undermined (e.g., Harth et al., 2011; Kachanoff, Caouette, Wohl, & Taylor, 2017). The structural implications of intergroup apologies can also threaten group members, especially when the apologies are perceived as justifying the offender's position and reducing the perceived need for reparation (Wohl, Hornsey, & Philpot, 2011). These threats to structure and agency may be especially high in the case of institutional apologies, compared with interpersonal or normative apologies, because institutional apologies are generally perceived as being instrumental (e.g., Halabi et al., 2018; Philpot & Hornsey, 2008). Therefore, in our research, institutional apologies arguably exerted less impact on participants' responses because such apologies threatened them. At the same time, that interpretation less plausibly explains the effects in the control condition, in which participants did not receive any information about the apologies, and in the condition in which rejecting the apology was normative.

Our work also contributes to literature addressing intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; White et al., 2020). Indeed, in less harmonious intergroup contexts, members of different groups tend to avoid each other, and when contact does occur, ingroup members are often highly suspicious of outgroup members' behaviors, even when they are seemingly prosocial (e.g., Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, & Andrighetto, 2020a; Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, Andrighetto, & Durante, 2020b; Halabi et al., 2016). In that light, our findings underscore the relevance of intergroup apologies, which in our research appeared to encourage both present (i.e., participants' willingness to accept help) and future intergroup contact by accentuating the outgroup's human qualities. Thus, our findings contribute to this field by providing further evidence of the apology's power to create the conditions necessary for enhancing positive intergroup interaction.

Our findings may also be relevant to literature addressing prosocial behavior. To date, such work has shown that recipients of help increase their attribution of empathy and altruistic motives to outgroup helpers, particularly upon perceiving an outgroup member's capacity to help (Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, & Andrighetto, 2020a; Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, Andrighetto, & Durante, 2020b). Our research revealed that the detrimental effect of negative expectations for intergroup interaction may diminish when ingroup members consider an apology from outgroup members to be genuine. Moreover, this result is consistent with past findings showing that perceiving an outgroup apologizer or an apology as being genuinely empathic toward a victim's suffering positively impacts the recipient's reactions to the apology and expectations of future intergroup interactions (Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003; Ohbuchi & Sato, 1994). On top of that, our results reveal that normative apologies can increase people's willingness to engage in intergroup contact and their feeling of being at peace with the outgroup.

Last, findings from Experiment 3 may additionally contribute to the literature on intergroup humanization and infrahumanization. Leyens et al. (2000) observed that individuals attribute outgroup members with far less capacity than ingroup members to experience secondary emotions (i.e., exclusively human emotions). This propensity to view the offending group as being less human prevents apologies from improving intergroup relations (Wohl et al., 2012). Furthermore, victims appear to devalue their former adversaries' apologies because of past wrongdoing (e.g., Ross & Stillinger, 1991) and because they believe these adversaries also view them as less human (Bastian & Haslam, 2010). Our work adds to such literature by revealing that normative apologies enhance the humanity that members of victim groups attribute to entire offending outgroups, which in turn influences their perception of intergroup aid and intergroup reconciliation. Normatively supported apologies could also fuel the perception that the outgroup perceives the ingroup as being more human—that is, *meta-humanization* (e.g., Kteily et al., 2016). Such suggestion is also consistent with recent findings showing that humanizing information from outgroup members affects victims' reactions to offers of help from outgroup members and their openness to intergroup reconciliation in post-conflict contexts (e.g., Borinca, Tropp, & Ofosu, 2021).

6.1. Limitations and future directions

Despite the contributions of our findings, some limitations should be considered in future research on the topic of intergroup help and apologies. To begin, in our research outgroup humanization mediated the effect of apologies on all dependent variables. However, considering the concerns of mediation analyses, we cannot rule out alternative causal links between the factors investigated. In fact, in Experiment 3, we ran alternative models in which the primary dependent variables were positioned as mediators and the outgroup's humanization as the final outcome. The results suggested that the outgroup's humanization could be regarded either as the mediator of the predicted effects or as the primary dependent variable. Because we cannot conclude with certainty that the outgroup's humanization played only a mediating role in our model, further research is required in order to provide more cogent evidence supporting the hypothesis that the outgroup's humanization accounts for the investigated effects.

Second, we did not observe an interaction between intergroup apology and the helper's group membership on willingness for intergroup contact (Experiments 1 & 2) and feeling at peace with the outgroup (Experiment 1). Indeed, results showed that the intergroup apology's positive effect on the two dependent variables assessed at the intergroup level appears both in the ingroup and the outgroup helper conditions. This finding is consistent with past research on the positive effect of genuine intergroup apologies (e.g., Halabi et al., 2018) and, in the present paradigm, suggests that intergroup apologies have the power to improve intergroup reconciliation regardless of whether the offer of help comes from an ingroup or outgroup member. In fact, the ingroup

helper condition might either constitute a mere control condition or highlight the ingroup's prosocial tendencies and control for ingroup bias. That being said, the apology's positive effect on intergroup reconciliation could wane when an outgroup member acts negatively instead of positively toward individuals. Further research is thus needed to investigate the effect of intergroup apologies under such conditions.

A third limitation concerns the nature of the only type of intergroup contact investigated—an offer of spontaneous help—that resembled a mental simulation of a positive interaction between participants and an imagined outgroup member—that is, *imagined contact* (e.g., Crisp & Turner, 2009). Because we examined no other types of intergroup contact, further research is needed to determine whether intergroup apologies might also influence individuals' reactions to other forms of contact, including extended contact, vicarious contact, and e-contact (Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004; White, Turner, Verrelli, Harvey, & Hanna, 2019; Wright, Aron, McLaughlin-Volpe, & Ropp, 1997). For instance, research has shown similar results both in this paradigm and in a vicarious form of contact in which participants reacted to a real situation (Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, & Andrighetto, 2020a; Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, Andrighetto, & Durante, 2020b), which lends some validity to our method. However, because imagined contact exerts an inconsistent impact on long-term change (Ioannou, 2019), future research should examine whether our findings in intergroup interactions apply to long-term changes.

Last, whereas our research focused on the effects of who apologizes and on whose behalf, other factors may contribute to improving people's reactions to offers of help from outgroup members. For instance, instead of apologizing for the past, information conveying that an outgroup feels empathy for and cares about the ingroup, or else that the outgroup is willing to make amends for past offenses or is already doing so, could also contribute to enhancing the outgroup's humanization and therefore improve reactions to specific situations involving help from the outgroup. Thus, although intergroup apologies appear to be increasingly common in real-world intergroup contexts and are particularly relevant in post-conflict contexts, future research needs to investigate the potential positive effects of alternative signals of reconciliation from outgroups.

6.2. Conclusion

Although individuals in post-conflict societies generally want a better future, many struggle to leave the past behind, primarily because between-group tensions both past and present prevent them from seeing outgroups in a more positive light. However, no matter how tense and tragic relationships may have been, certain factors can allow people to (re)connect on a human level. Our work has shown that interpersonal and normative apologies enhance the outgroup's attributed humanity, which helps members of victim groups to view offers of help from outgroup members more positively and express greater willingness to engage in immediate and future intergroup contact. In other words, combining prosocial outgroup behaviors with interpersonal and normative apologies appears to be a promising way to not only overcome barriers between groups but also promote better relations between former adversaries. In post-conflict societies, governments could also help people to leave the past behind and look forward to a better future by promoting the simultaneous deployment of these two reconciliation strategies.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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