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Article

Reconciliation Versus Justice? It Depends on the Context: The Role of Symmetric and Asymmetric Violence in Predicting Postconflict Attitudes

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Abstract

Whether attitudes toward postconflict justice and reconciliation are complementary or contradictory has been long debated. We posit that the answer to this question is context-dependent. Multilevel analyses of two large-scale surveys among war-affected communities in the former Yugoslavia (total $N = 11{,}843$), combined with geo-coded data on conflict events, demonstrate that a crucial contextual determinant is the prevalence of asymmetric violence in communities: The more a community was exposed to events of asymmetric violence, which disproportionately affect one group, the more the support for justice was linked to rejecting reconciliation. These findings were conceptually replicated with two different data sets and different operationalizations of justice and reconciliation attitudes. Conversely, in one study, the more a community was exposed to symmetric violence, which affects members of all adversary groups, the more the justice and reconciliation were perceived as compatible. This study shows the importance of a contextualized approach to understanding intergroup attitudes in postconflict settings.

Keywords

reconciliation, justice, asymmetric violence, symmetric violence, multilevel analyses

In the aftermath of violent conflict, there are two pressing imperatives. The first is to identify, apprehend, and bring the perpetrators of violence to justice. The second is to bring the conflicting parties together and overcome their antagonism. But how do these two imperatives relate to each other? Is justice compatible or incompatible with reconciliation? The literature on this is divided. Some studies suggest that pursuing perpetrators undermines reconciliation. Others suggest that the pursuit of justice facilitates reconciliation. In this article, we seek to reconcile these divergent findings by examining whether the relationship between justice and reconciliation varies as a function of the context. Specifically, we propose that where asymmetric violence was prevalent, justice and reconciliation are incompatible. Conversely, where symmetric violence was prevalent, justice and reconciliation are compatible.

Asymmetric violence is defined as the use of force by armed members of one group against unarmed civilians of another, specific group (Fjelde et al., 2019). It is characterized by extreme power differences between both sides (Kteily et al., 2013), resulting in casualties primarily in one group. By contrast, symmetric violence simultaneously affects members of all sides (e.g., due to armed battles; Raleigh et al., 2010), resulting in casualties in all groups. We hypothesize that symmetric and asymmetric violence are characterized by two qualitatively distinct types of collective victimization, which are linked to distinct perceptions of the relationship between justice and reconciliation.

The Relationship Between Attitudes Toward Reconciliation and Justice

Improving intergroup relations in postconflict societies involves two core elements: reconciliation and justice. Reconciliation can be defined as "a process that leads to a stable end to conflict and is predicated on changes in the nature of adversarial relations between the adversaries and each of the parties' conflict-related needs, emotions, and cognitions" (Nadler et al., 2008, p. 4). Its goal is the establishment of relations based on equality, trust, and positive identities (Nadler & Shnabel,

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2015). Reconciliation involves changes in several facets of intergroup relations. Some scholars focus on removing barriers such as hostile intergroup attitudes and emotions (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004). For example, some argue that letting go of collective blame for past atrocities is central to reconciliation (Biruski & Penic, 2014; Lickel et al., 2006). Others examine how to overcome segregation and facilitate intergroup contact, which may impact intergroup attitudes and emotions (Hewstone et al., 2006). Yet others focus on forgiveness toward adversaries (Shnabel & Nadler, 2015).

Justice includes respecting others' human rights (HR) and holding transgressors accountable. This is referred to as transitional justice (Teitel, 2002), which has become a common intervention following wars. Transitional justice is rooted in the normative assumption that postconflict societies need "to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation" (United Nations Security Council, 2004, p. 2). It includes both restorative and retributive justice measures (Wenzel et al., 2008), such as war crimes prosecutions, truth commissions, and reparations (David, 2017). Social psychological research examines people's support for transitional justice principles (e.g., condemnation of HR violations; Elcheroth, 2006) and measures (e.g., support for international criminal tribunals; Li et al., 2018).

However, does justice after violent conflicts help or hinder reconciliation? The interdisciplinary literature is divided on this question. For *compatibilists*, holding perpetrators accountable enables a culture of HR where all rights violations are impartially condemned, and all victims receive impartial respect. This is argued to be a prerequisite for reconciliation (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004). For *incompatibilists*, justice further divides fragile postconflict societies: Prosecuting and punishing perpetrators can reinvoke resentment, fuel revenge, and destabilize peace (Clark, 2008). According to this position, reconciliation must be prioritized, even at the expense of justice (Albin, 2009).

Social psychological research provides no more consensus. There is a body of compatibilist work that sees justice and reconciliation as mutually reinforcing (e.g., Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004). For example, positive intergroup contact—an indicator of reconciliation—predicted readiness to condemn HR violations on both sides (Čehajić et al., 2009). Acknowledging and condemning HR violations also predicted support for reconciliation through increased intergroup trust (Hameiri & Nadler, 2017).

Other studies, however, support the argument that transitional justice undermines reconciliation. For instance, endorsing justice predicted increased support for violence and less openness to reconciliation (Li et al., 2018). This effect may be particularly pronounced when retributive justice is implemented, rather than restorative justice (Clark, 2008). A growing body of social psychological research suggests more generally that harmony-promoting initiatives are incompatible with justice and equality because of their "sedative effect" on disadvantaged groups' engagement in collective action for social change (e.g., Dixon et al., 2012; Reicher, 2007; Saguy et al., 2009). In the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, for example, Palestinians' support for reconciliation predicted decreased involvement in collective action against the occupation (Albzour et al., 2019).

Context-Dependency of Perceiving Justice and Reconciliation as Compatible: The Role of Symmetric Versus Asymmetric Violence

What helps explain why support for reconciliation is sometimes linked to increased, and at other times decreased, support for justice? We argue that perceived compatibility of justice and reconciliation is linked to the context—specifically, what type of collective violence prevailed: whether both sides inflicted and suffered harm (i.e., *symmetric violence*) or one side predominantly inflicted harm while the other predominantly suffered (i.e., *asymmetric violence*).

Asymmetric violence can take on different forms, including organized hate crimes, riots, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. While these different kinds of asymmetric violence imply different scopes of atrocity, they all have in common two defining characteristics: Victims are targeted not because of their involvement in the fighting but because of their group membership, and they are at the receiving end of strong power differentials through the one-sided violence (Penic et al., 2017). For example, in the largest instance of asymmetric violence perpetrated in the former Yugoslavia—the Srebrenica genocide—more than 8,000 Muslims were killed by Serbian armed forces in only a few days. Asymmetric violence typically divides local communities into groups, based on exclusionary group identities (Penic et al., 2017). It is related to a narrowed scope of justice and a decreased likelihood that people will impartially condemn HR abuses (Spini et al., 2019). When justice only focuses on one group—which is likely after asymmetric violence that was primarily committed by one group—it may be seen as divisive and opposite to reconciliation goals. We therefore expect that high prevalence of asymmetric violence will be linked to an antagonistic understanding of justice and reconciliation: In communities more strongly affected by asymmetric violence, support for justice will predict less support for reconciliation.

Conversely, symmetric violence affects the entire local community across ethnic groups. For example, armed battles between two armies in ethnically heterogeneous communities frequently harm civilians regardless of group membership (Maček, 2009). Weapons that indiscriminately affect communities, such as drones or shelling, also have this effect. For example, during the Siege of Sarajevo, due to heavy shelling and continuous battles, more than 5,000 civilians from all conflicting sides (i.e., Serbs, Croats, Muslims) were killed (Tokača, 2012). Symmetric violence often results in similar death rates on both conflicting sides (Spini et al., 2019). However, even when there are different rates of victimization on both sides, they are presumably experienced differently than

asymmetric (i.e., identity-based) targeting. For example, in instances of symmetric violence, people may be more aware that out-group members suffered and that in-group members also perpetrated atrocities (Penic et al., 2018). Moreover, when violence affects the local community indiscriminately across groups, a sense of common fate may arise, along with solidarity and preserving social bonds (Drury et al., 2016). Studies show that in communities heavily affected by symmetric violence, interethnic contact was preserved, and ethno-nationalism rejected, more strongly than elsewhere—including communities that were not exposed to violence (Penic et al., 2017). We propose that, contrary to asymmetric violence, high prevalence of symmetric violence is conducive to the compatibilist understanding of justice and reconciliation. Thus, where symmetric violence was prevalent, we expect support for justice to be inclusive and linked to reconciliation.

To summarize, we posit that the relationship between support for justice and reconciliation depends on the local context. We hypothesize that the prevalence of two types of communal violence will moderate the effects: Where prevalence of asymmetric violence in communities is high, willingness for reconciliation will predict less support for justice (i.e., support the incompatibility perspective). Conversely, where symmetric violence was prevalent, willingness for reconciliation will predict increased support for justice (i.e., support the compatibility perspective).

Overview of Studies

We employed a multilevel approach, combining large-scale, nationally representative survey data and external geo-coded data on conflict events. We test the cross-level moderation hypothesis that the relationship between support for reconciliation and justice varies across contexts and depends on the communal prevalence of symmetric and asymmetric violence.

We examine the hypotheses in the postwar context of the former Yugoslavia. The dissolution of Yugoslavia led to several violent conflicts that resulted in over 360,000 deaths and more than 4 million displaced persons (Perica, 2002): the Ten-Day War in Slovenia (1991), the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995), the Bosnian War (1992–1995), the Kosovo War (1998–1999), including the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's bombing of Serbia (1999), and the insurgency in the Republic of Macedonia (2001). Before the war, many local communities were ethnically heterogeneous, inclusive and cohesive (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017). Studies show that the violence deeply transformed ethnic relations and led to increased ethnic intolerance (Sekulić et al., 2006). War victimization was most severe in Kosovo and Bosnia–Herzegovina, followed by Croatia and Macedonia. Despite variation in war victimization across countries and ethnic groups, most suffered some degree of victimization, and some members of all groups were involved to some degree in perpetrating atrocities. Moreover, the level and structure of violence varied greatly at the local (i.e., communal or regional) level, and many regions were less affected by the wars. In some regions, there were civil wars, with battles between armed forces affecting civilians from all local ethnic groups. Yet, in some municipalities and regions, warfare developed into genocidal violence, where armed forces targeted civilians to achieve control over and ethnically cleanse these areas (Weidmann, 2009). The former Yugoslavia, therefore, is well suited for studying effects of different types of communal exposure to war violence.

Method

Participants and Procedure

To test the findings' replicability, we used data from two large-scale population surveys in former Yugoslavia (for more information, see Supplemental Materials [SOM]).

Study 1. The Southeast European Social Survey Programme (SEESSP; Simkus, 2007) was conducted in 2003/2004 in all countries of the former Yugoslavia, except Slovenia, and is representative of these countries' adult populations ($N = 9{,}589$). The missing data showed a systematic pattern (Little's MCAR test: $\chi^2 = 24.43$, $df = 9$, $p = .004$); however, due to the large sample size and small percentage of missing data on outcome variables (5.16%), cases with missing values were deleted listwise (Allison, 2002), resulting in the final sample size of 8,282.

Study 2. The Transition to Adulthood and Collective Experiences Survey (TRACES; Spini et al., 2011) was conducted in 2006 in all former Yugoslav countries and is representative of people born between 1968 and 1974 who were young adults during the wars ($N = 2{,}254$). The missing data did not show a systematic pattern (Little's MCAR test: $\chi^2 = 20.41$, $df = 21$, $p = .50$). Cases with missing values were therefore deleted listwise, and the final sample size ranged from 2,012 to 2,030 (depending on the outcome variable).

Measures

Our studies involve secondary analyses of the TRACES and SEESSP data sets, which were not designed to test our research questions but both include different measures of support for justice and reconciliation. These different operationalizations of key constructs allowed for a conceptual replication of our findings. In both studies, all multi-item measures had good reliabilities (see SOM).

Support for justice. We examined four measures of support for justice, including support for retributive justice in both studies and support for HR in Study 2.

Retributive justice. In Study 1, 1 item assessed *support for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY*) on a 1- (*strongly disagree*) to 5-point (*strongly agree*) scale: "I support the efforts of the International court to try war criminals from the war in this country, regardless of what side they were on." Because the ICTY is the main transitional

justice mechanism for the former Yugoslavia, this measure has high ecological validity.

In Study 2, 2 items assessed *accountability of combatants* on 7-point scales from 1 (*combatants should never be charged*) to 7 (*combatants should absolutely be put on trial*): "... when combatants mistreat prisoners" and "... when combatants shoot at people who do not carry a weapon."

Support for HR. It was assessed in Study 2 with two measures: *Condemnation of HR violations* was assessed with a vignette (see SOM) describing a violation of the International Humanitarian Law. Participants rated 2 items on 1- (*very strongly disagree*) to 7-point (*very strongly agree*) scales: "In such a situation, some political leaders within that country have to change their policies in order to stop such things" and "Even in war, such things should never happen; they are completely unacceptable." *Respecting others' HR* was assessed with 5 items (e.g., "Respecting human dignity requires that, even in times of war, it is necessary to treat others as one would like to be treated oneself"), rated on 1- (*very strongly disagree*) to 7-point (*very strongly agree*) scales.

Support for reconciliation. In Study 1, reconciliation was operationalized with two measures: One item assessed *forgiveness*: "I can never forgive the members of other nationalities in this country for what they have done during the war, and I want nothing to do with them." The item was reverse-coded and rated on a 1- (*strongly agree*) to 5-point (*strongly disagree*) scale. *Opposition to ethnic separatism* was measured with 7 reverse-coded items on scales from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*), for example, "It is best that villages, towns, and cities should be composed of only one nationality."

In Study 2, reconciliation was operationalized with a 5-item measure of *rejection of out-group blame* (Branscombe et al., 2004), for example, "Other groups have benefited at the expense of my group for generations." Items were reverse-coded and rated on 7-point scales from 1 (*very strongly agree*) to 7 (*very strongly disagree*). Previous studies in the former Yugoslavia emphasize rejection of out-group blame as a key aspect of postconflict reconciliation (Biruski & Penic, 2014; Jelic et al., 2013).

Symmetric and asymmetric violence (context-level data). To compute indicators of symmetric and asymmetric violence at the regional level, we used the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset (ACLED; Raleigh et al., 2010) that codes different types of violent events in the Yugoslav wars. For each event, the ACLED provides information on the location, timing, and main actors. These events were mapped onto the different regions distinguished in the geographically stratified surveys, where the territory of the former Yugoslavia was divided into 80 contiguous geographic regions, corresponding approximately to present-day counties.

Our indicator of asymmetric violence measures regional prevalence of identity-based attacks on civilians by armed forces (1,210 events, ranging from 0 to 175 across regions) and was operationalized as the log-transformed number of events involving intentional violence by armed forces against unarmed civilians belonging to a specific ethnic group in a region (e.g., attacks on members of the local ethnic minority) over the entire span of the local conflict. The indicator of symmetric violence measures the prevalence of violent events resulting in victimization across ethnic groups and was operationalized as the log-transformed number of war events that occurred in a region over the duration of the local conflict where (at least) two opposing ethnic groups were victimized (in 167 out of 818 battle events, both groups were victimized, ranging from 0 to 26 across regions; Penic et al., 2017, 2018; see SOM). Regions in the former Yugoslavia can be differentiated based on these types of violence. Indicators of symmetric and asymmetric violence were not correlated ($r = .15$, $n = 80$, $p > .05$). As shown in Figure 1, some regions that were exposed to violence faced both types of violence (e.g., some regions in Bosnia and Herzegovina), while other regions were predominantly exposed to symmetric (e.g., in Croatia) or asymmetric violence (e.g., in Kosovo).

Control variables. At the individual level, we controlled for sociodemographic variables: sex, education level, employment status, age, and local ethnic majority versus minority group status. Previous studies show that men, less educated, and unemployed people support reconciliation less (Dyrstad et al., 2015). Some studies suggest that older generations support reconciliation more, due to their past experiences of positive cohabitation with other ethnic groups in the former Yugoslavia (Ajdukovic & Biruski, 2008). In the TRACES data set (Study 2), we further controlled for war victimization and combatantship (see SOM).

At the contextual level, we controlled for regional ethnic homogeneity at the time of the surveys (because in heterogeneous areas, intergroup relations may be more interdependent; Hall et al., 2018), economic conditions (as classic theories of intergroup competition predict worsened relations under economic scarcity; Hovland & Sears, 1940), and ethno-national group membership (to rule out that the relationship between reconciliation and justice depends on one's group belonging rather than on the local violence; see SOM). Additionally, we controlled for overall victimization levels in the regions, to confirm that the relationship between reconciliation and justice depends on the type, and not just the overall intensity of violence. Finally, we controlled for the overall distribution of victims across groups in regions, operationalized with the generalization of risk index (GRI; Spini et al., 2019; see SOM). The index is based on the absolute differences in victim rates across n groups in a region. High GRI scores indicate that the risk of being a victim is evenly distributed across groups, and low scores indicate that violence is particularized over one or several groups. We test whether the events-based measure better explains the relationship between justice and reconciliation than the measure based on group-level victim counts. For example, an equal number of victims among two opposing groups in a region could result from symmetric violence or from cycles of asymmetric, violent revenge.

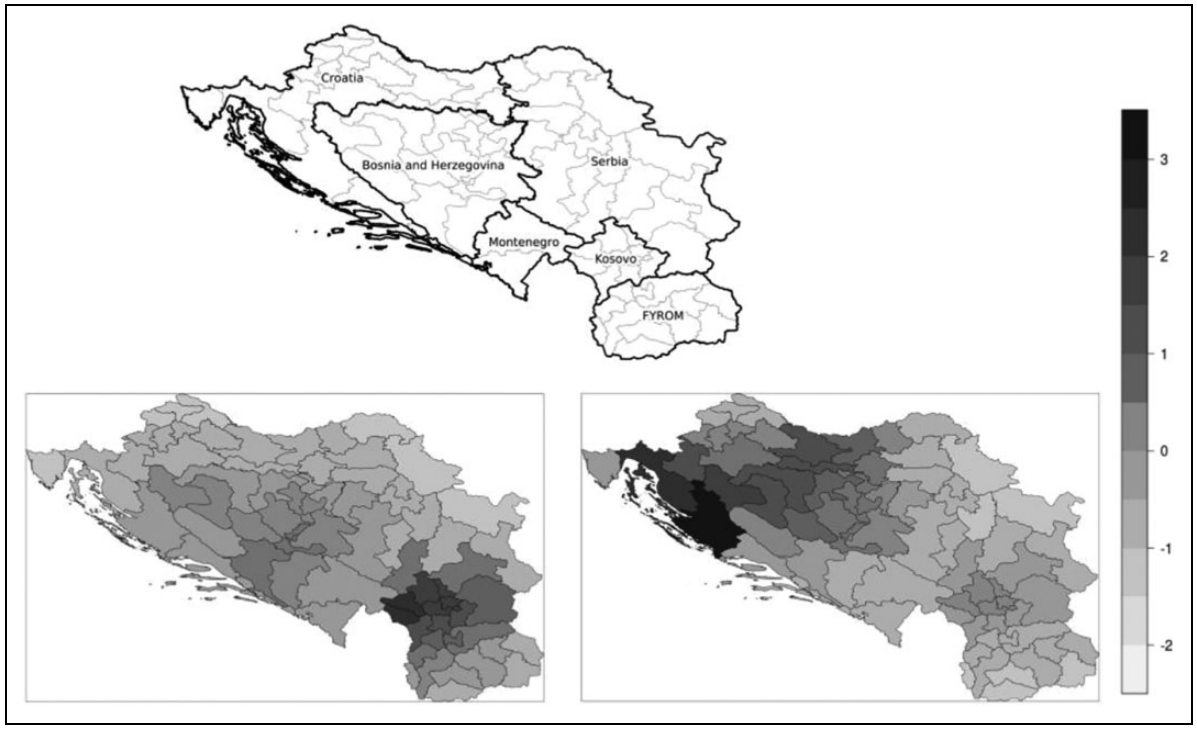

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of asymmetric (bottom left) and symmetric violence (bottom right; for six former Yugoslav countries included in both surveys). Variables were standardized to allow plotting on the same scale (stronger prevalence of violence shown in darker shades).

Results

Analytic Procedure

We performed multilevel analyses with cross-level interactions to test whether the relationship between support for justice and reconciliation depends on the local prevalence of asymmetric and symmetric violence. The tested cross-level interaction model is shown in Equations 1–3. We tested two models in Study 1 (with two measures of support for reconciliation [X_{Reconc}, Equation 1]) and three models in Study 2 (for three outcome measures indicating support for justice). In all cross-level interaction models, the indicator of reconciliation was group-mean centered (Equation 1). In all models, we controlled for the individual-level predictors described earlier, which were entered to equations non-centered (denoted with X_{control} in Equation 1). We tested cross-level interactions with indicators of both types of violence simultaneously (W_{AsymV} and W_{SymV}, Equations 2 and 3) to test their net effects, following recommendations for estimating cross-level effects with multilevel modelling (Aguinis et al., 2013). All analyses were performed with R package lme4 (Bates et al., 2015), with restricted maximum likelihood estimation.

$$\text{(Level 1)}: \; Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}\left(X_{\text{Reconc.}ij} - \bar{X}_{\text{Reconc.}ij}\right) + \beta_{2-k}X_{\text{Control}ij} + r_{ij} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{(Level 2)}: \; \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}W_{\text{Asym}V_j} + \gamma_{02}W_{\text{Sym}V_j} + u_{0j} \quad (2)$$

$$\text{(Level 2)}: \; \beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}W_{AsymVj} + \gamma_{12}W_{SymVj} + u_{1j} \quad (3)$$

Study 1

We first examined the slope variances for both constructs of interest, finding that they were significantly different from zero; for forgiveness: slope variance = .04; model comparison (compared to the model without random slope): $\chi^2(2) = 171.22$, $p < .001$; for rejection of ethnic separatism: slope variance = .10; $\chi^2(2) = 226.08$, $p < .001$. This indicates that the relationship between support for reconciliation and justice varies across regions. Next, we tested whether this variation can be explained by the regional prevalence of asymmetric violence (Table 1). We find statistically significant, negative cross-level interactions for both measures of reconciliation (forgiveness: $b = -.24$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$; opposition to ethnic separatism: $b = -.41$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$). As hypothesized, in regions with higher levels of asymmetric violence, support for reconciliation predicted less support for justice. To probe the interactions, we performed simple slope analyses (with the R package "jtools"; Long, 2018) for two values of the contextual moderator variable: absence of asymmetric violence (i.e., the minimal value [0] on the indicator of asymmetric violence) and maximum (i.e., 2 *SD* above the mean) prevalence of asymmetric violence (Figure 2).

We found a similar pattern for both indicators of reconciliation (Figure 2): In regions that were not exposed to asymmetric violence, the relationship between reconciliation and support

Table 1. Multilevel Models of the Cross-Level Moderation of the Relationship Between Support for Justice (ICTY) and Reconciliation (Forgiveness/Opposition to Ethnic Separatism) With Asymmetric and Symmetric Violence.

	Support for ICTY	
Predictor	Nonstandardized Estimates (*b*), 95% Confidence Intervals (in Brackets)	
Intercept	2.54** [2.25, 2.82]	2.92** [2.65, 3.20]
Individual level		
Forgiveness	0.17** [0.09, 0.25]	0.01 [−0.01, 0.04]
Opposition to ethnic separatism	0.14** [0.11, 0.18]	0.31** [0.19, 0.43]
Communal level		
Asymmetric violence	0.33* [0.08, 0.58]	0.23 [−0.03, 0.48]
Symmetric violence	0.63* [0.13, 1.14]	0.63* [0.12, 1.15]
Cross-level interactions		
Forgiveness × Asymmetric violence	−0.24** [−0.33, −0.15]	
Forgiveness × Symmetric violence	0.11 [−0.08, 0.30]	
Opposition to ethnic separatism × Asymmetric violence		−0.41** [−0.55, −0.27]
Opposition to ethnic separatism × Symmetric violence		0.37* [0.09, 0.66]
Random effects (*SD*)		
Individual	1.18 [1.16, 1.20]	1.18 [1.16, 1.20]
Communal	0.49 [0.41, 0.58]	0.51 [0.42, 0.59]
Slope	0.15 [0.11, 0.19]	0.23 [0.17, 0.29]
Model fit		
Deviance	26,555	26,497
χ^2 [a](*df*)	22.5**(2)	29.18**(2)

Note. Study 1, $N = 8{,}282$, $n = 72$. ICTY = International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Models controlling for gender, age, education years, employment, and belonging to local ethnic majority.
[a]Comparison to the model without cross-level interactions.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

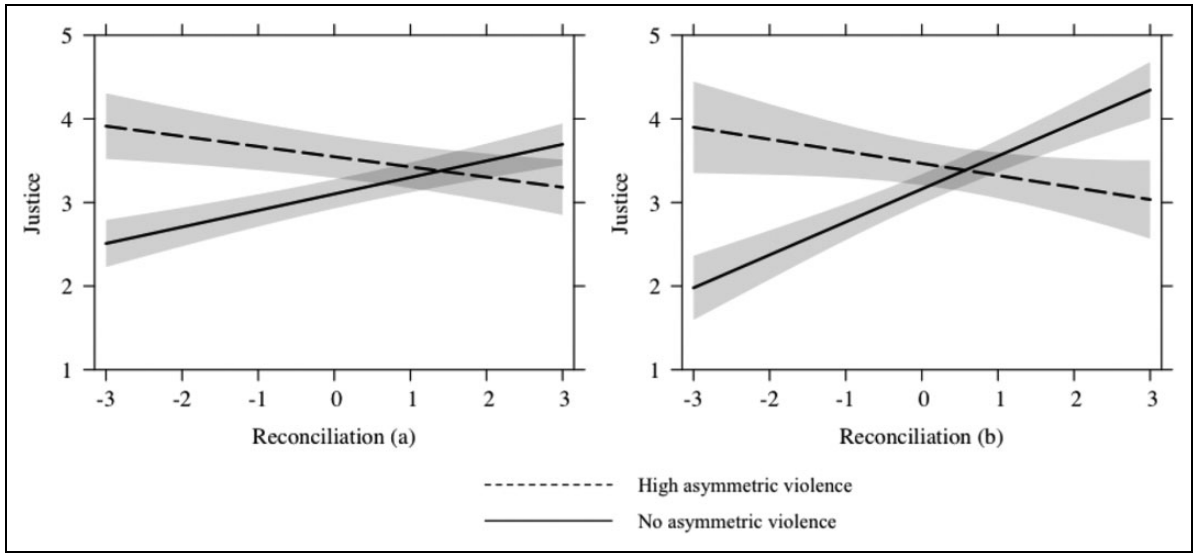

Figure 2. Moderation of the relationship between support for reconciliation ((a) forgiveness and (b) opposition to ethnic separatism) and justice (support for the ICTY) by communal prevalence of asymmetric violence. ICTY: International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

for the ICTY is positive. We find the opposite pattern in regions that were heavily affected by asymmetric violence: Here, the more the people *oppose* reconciliation, the more they support the ICTY.

Next, we examined whether the relationship between reconciliation and support for the ICTY depends on the regional prevalence of symmetric violence. As hypothesized, we find a statistically significant, positive cross-level interaction for opposition to ethnic separatism ($b = .37$, $SE = .15$, $p = .01$). In regions heavily affected by symmetric violence, the relationship between reconciliation and support for the ICTY is *positive* ($b = .31$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$). However, we did not

Table 2. Multilevel Models of the Cross-Level Moderation of the Relationship Between Support for Justice (Condemnation of HR Violations/ Respecting Others' HR/Accountability of Combatants) and Reconciliation (Rejection of Out-Group Blame) With Two Types of Communal Violence.

Predictor	Condemnation of HR Violations	Respect of Others' HR	Accountability of Combatants
	Nonstandardized Estimates (*b*), 95% Confidence Intervals (in Brackets)		
Intercept	5.60** [4.65, 6.54]	4.95** [4.09, 5.81]	5.58** [4.59, 6.56]
Individual level			
Rejection of out-group blame	−0.03 [−0.11, 0.06]	0.02 [−0.07, 0.11]	−0.03 [−0.14, 0.07]
Communal level			
Asymmetric violence	−0.43** [−0.71, −0.15]	−0.41** [−0.65, −0.16]	−0.14 [−0.42, 0.15]
Symmetric violence	0.40 [−0.16, 0.97]	0.53* [0.02, 1.03]	0.29 [−0.28, 0.86]
Cross-level interactions			
Rejection of out-group blame × Asymmetric violence	−0.27** [−0.39, −0.15]	−0.20** [−0.33, −0.07]	−0.23** [−0.37, −0.09]
Rejection of out-group blame × Symmetric violence	0.18 [−.07, 0.42]	0.03 [−0.23, 0.28]	0.02 [−0.27, 0.30]
Random effects (*SD*)			
Individual	1.20 [1.16, 1.24]	1.09 [1.06, 1.13]	1.25 [1.20, 1.28]
Communal	0.53 [0.43, 0.63]	0.47 [0.38, 0.56]	0.54 [0.43, 0.64]
Slope	0.18 [0.13, 0.24]	0.21 [0.15, 0.26]	0.23 [0.17, 0.29]
Model fit			
Deviance	6,665.8	6,293.1	6,770.0
χ^2 [a](*df*)	17.39**(2)	9.12*(2)	10.16**(2)
N	2,030	2,022	2,012

Note. Study 2, TRACES; $n = 80$. HR = human rights; TRACES = Transition to Adulthood and Collective Experiences Survey. Models controlling for gender, age, education years, employment, belonging to local ethnic majority, war victimization, and experience of combat.
[a]Comparison to the model without cross-level interaction.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

replicate the finding for the second reconciliation measure: The cross-level interaction for forgiveness was not significant ($b = .11$, $SE = .10$, $p = .27$; see Table 1).

Study 2

We used the same analytic procedure as in Study 1. The slope variances for all three outcome measures varied significantly across geographic regions; condemnation of HR violations: slope variance = .05; $\chi^2(2) = 73.82$, $p < .001$; respecting others' HR: slope variance = .05; $\chi^2(2) = 71.95$, $p < .001$; accountability of combatants: slope variance = .06; $\chi^2(2) = 90.39$, $p < .001$. Moreover, there were significant, negative cross-level interactions between reconciliation and the regional prevalence of asymmetric violence for all three measures of support for justice (condemnation of HR violations: $b = -.27$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$; respecting others' HR: $b = -.20$, $SE = .07$, $p = .003$; accountability of combatants: $b = -.23$, $SE = .07$, $p = .002$; see Table 2). We then performed simple slope analyses (see Figure 3).

For all three measures of support for justice, we found the same pattern: The more a region was exposed to asymmetric violence, the stronger the negative effect of support for reconciliation on support for justice. Specifically, in regions that were not exposed to asymmetric violence, rejecting out-group blame did not predict support for justice; however, in regions with high prevalence of asymmetric violence, this effect was statistically significant and *negative*: Here, people who blamed the out-groups more for past atrocities expressed most support for justice (see Figure 3).

All cross-level interactions with the regional prevalence of symmetric violence were nonsignificant (condemnation of HR violations: $b = .18$, $SE = .13$, $p = .16$; respecting others' HR: $b = .03$, $SE = .13$, $p = .84$; accountability of combatants: $b = .02$, $SE = .15$, $p = .91$; see Table 2).

Robustness Checks

We performed additional analyses on both data sets to examine the robustness of the statistically significant cross-level interactions with asymmetric violence and rule out alternative explanations (see SOM for details). The moderating effect of regional asymmetric violence remained statistically significant in all models when controlling for regional ethnic homogeneity, the regions' economic conditions, overall levels of victimization, and the regional distribution of risk of victimization across groups (see Tables S2–S5). We also controlled for self-reported ethno-national groups membership (intercept and slope variance) by countries ($n = 16$), in cross-classified multilevel models. We found that the cross-level interactions between all measures of reconciliation and regional prevalence of asymmetric violence remain statistically significant for all outcome measures (see Table S6).

We also computed additional multilevel analyses regressing indicators of symmetric and asymmetric violence on the absolute difference between support for justice and reconciliation,

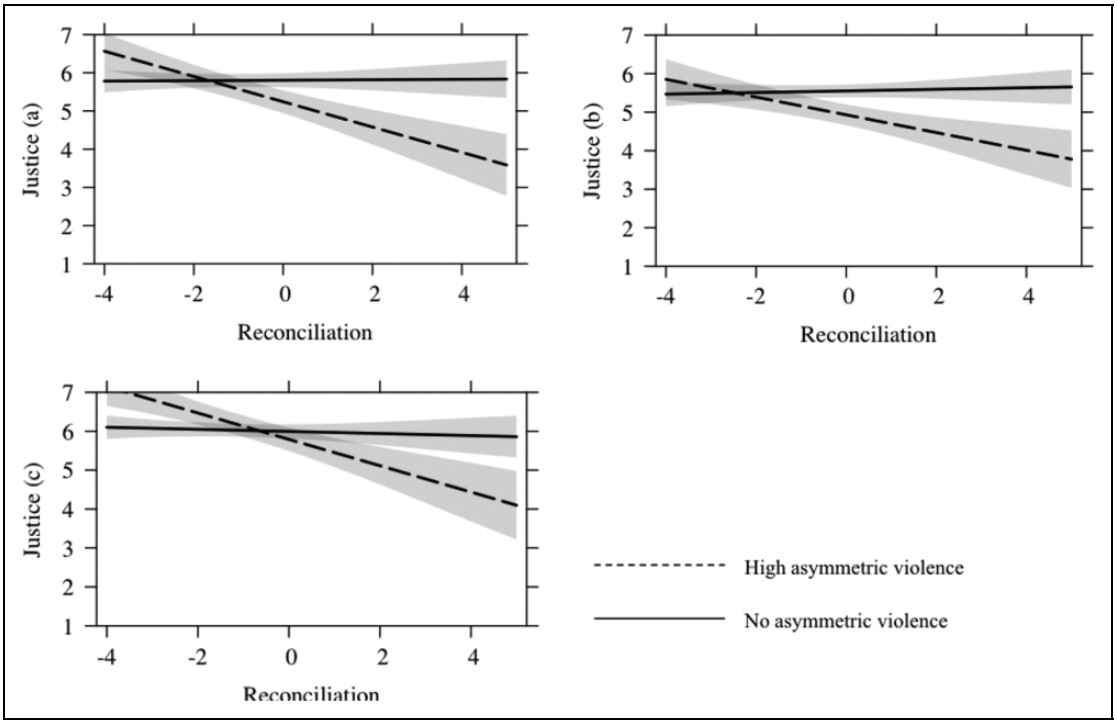

Figure 3. Moderation of the relationship between support for reconciliation (rejection of out-group blame) and justice ((a) condemnation of HR violations, (b) respecting others' HR, and (c) accountability of combatants) by communal prevalence of asymmetric violence. HR: human rights.

as a potentially more straightforward measure of congruence between justice and reconciliation. The impact of asymmetric violence was statistically significant and positive in both models with the SEESSP data and in one model with the TRACES data, indicating that in regions with higher prevalence of asymmetric violence, the absolute difference between support for justice and reconciliation was stronger. By contrast, the impact of symmetric violence was statistically significant and negative in both models with the SEESSP data but was not significant in models with the TRACES data (see Table S7).

Discussion

Whereas goals of justice and reconciliation are portrayed by some as compatible and by others as antagonistic, our findings demonstrate that this relationship depends on the context—specifically, the local prevalence of different forms of collective violence. Using data from two representative surveys in former Yugoslavia, we find support for our hypothesis that asymmetric violence is linked to an antagonistic understanding of reconciliation and justice: In places that were heavily affected by asymmetric violence, the strongest support for justice is expressed by people who oppose reconciliation. We find mixed results for our hypothesis that symmetric violence is associated with a compatibilist understanding of reconciliation and justice: The more a community was exposed to symmetric violence, the more the people who oppose ethnic separatism supported the ICTY. However, for other measures of reconciliation and justice, symmetric violence did not moderate the effects of support for reconciliation on support for justice. Future research should clarify the role of symmetric violence.

The finding that asymmetric violence, rather than collective violence per se, is linked to an antagonistic understanding of reconciliation and justice is reliable: The cross-level interactions with asymmetric violence as a moderator were robust and consistent. They held when controlling for several individual and contextual-level variables, thereby ruling out alternative explanations. These findings were replicated across two representative surveys conducted at different times with different operationalizations of the main constructs. Moreover, we operationalized communal violence with external geo-coded data, rather than relying on self-report data.

Recently, there has been a proliferation of conflict event data sets, which code the location and timing of different types of conflict events in various conflicts (Raleigh et al., 2010). As our studies show, these data sets are invaluable for contextual social psychological research (Pettigrew, 2018; Reicher, 2004) on psychological responses to collective victimization. While our indicators assess cumulative exposure to violence throughout the entire conflict, the conflict event data sets could be used in future studies to assess more fine-grained microdynamics of violence. Due to the small number of contextual units, we did not have sufficient statistical power to test how the timing of asymmetric versus symmetric violence affects the outcomes, and how they interact. Future studies could address

these questions. For example, high prevalence of symmetric violence may predict a compatibilist understanding of justice and reconciliation only when asymmetric violence in the region over time is low, which would explain the less consistent effect of symmetric violence in our study.

Future research should further examine the psychological mechanisms underlying the differential impact of distinct types of violence. We believe a key mechanism is how people categorize the victims and construe collective victimhood. In asymmetric violence, where members of one group are disproportionately targeted, victimhood is likely construed in more exclusive ways; while in symmetric violence, where people were aware of victims on all sides, categorizing all who suffered as one (i.e., inclusively; Vollhardt, 2015) may be more common. This could result in different views on the goals of the transitional justice process; and when justice is construed in exclusive terms, it may be incompatible with reconciliation. However, while we suggest that the type of violence people were exposed to is linked to different perceptions of victimhood and categorizations of victims, this relationship is not deterministic. For example, the role of leaders and other influence agents in making such a link is critical (Haslam et al., 2010). In the former Yugoslavia, elites typically construed collective victimhood in exclusive, ethnic terms (Subotić, 2009). The congruence between local experiences and elites' perspectives in contexts of asymmetric violence may explain the stronger consistency of our findings for this type of violence. Thus, examining the role of leadership in the links between violence and victimhood construals is another important avenue for future research.

We acknowledge several limitations of our studies. First, future studies are needed in other postconflict settings to test the findings' generalizability. For example, ethnically heterogeneous communities in the former Yugoslavia were typically tolerant before the wars. Conversely, in communities that were already divided, subsequent symmetric victimization may give rise to competitive victimhood (Noor et al., 2012). Second, the nature of the data does not allow to draw causal conclusions, and we are not claiming a certain directionality of these relationships. Third, we do not suggest that the type of violence is the only contextual moderator. For instance, the stage of conflict and how much time has passed since the end of the hostilities also matters (Albin, 2009).

In sum, the present findings underline the need for a contextualized approach to examining the aftermath of violent conflict and the need to move beyond generic assessments of whether reconciliation or justice should be prioritized. Whether people support transitional justice and/or reconciliation—arguably, a crucial determinant of the success of interventions aimed at these goals (Gibson, 2006)—is rooted in their local context and depends on the type of violence that prevailed in their community.

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Supplemental Material

The supplemental material is available in the online version of the article.

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