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THE NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF COLLECTIVE VICTIMHOOD BELIEFS

THESES EXCERPT FOR THE PhD DISSERTATION

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Contents

I. INTRODUCTION

Collective victimhood has been an important area of interest in social psychology over the past decade, with an array of scholarly papers from different cultural backgrounds and different theoretical approaches (see Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Noor et al., 2012; Vollhardt, 2020). However, little is known about how collective victimhood is represented in historical narratives; and how the structural and compositional linguistic details of the group-narratives may affect the interpretation of historical events.

This work provides a theoretical overview of the scientific notions of collective remembering (Halbwachs, 1980) from a social psychological point of view, with an emphasis on collective trauma (Erős, 2007). These phenomena are synthetized in the concept of collective victimhood consciousness (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Vollhardt, 2020). The focus of the dissertation is the narrative structural attributes of the construction of intergroup conflict narratives and the constructive nature of victim and perpetrator roles. Exploration of these questions is anchored in the wider theoretical basis of social representations- (Farr & Moscovici, 1984) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This work contributes to the field of collective victimhood research by emphasizing the narrative psychological aspects of collective memory and its relation to national history and history education, while it also offers a systematic comparison in a cross-cultural setting.

The goal of the dissertation is to empirically test assumptions of a specific narrative organization of the belief system of victim groups, which can be characterized with what is called collective victimhood consciousness. The narrative structural properties of a victimhood-based narration will be systematically tested with the toolkit of the scientific narrative psychological approach in the context of history and historical knowledge. The studies described here aim to provide valuable insights into the phenomena of the narrative construction of historical representations, and collective victimhood beliefs, both in terms of the novelty of the applied methodology, and the theoretical approach of narrative psychology.

This work aims to prove that the narrative structural properties of an account of past conflict provides a tool for an identity-congruent interpretation of past events, even to an extent where the moral roles of victims and perpetrators fade into an ambiguity. The work emphasizes that in narrating group-related events not only *what* is told matters but *how* it is told as well.

I.1. Narrative templates of history

Narratives of the group play a significant role in creating common vintage points, which help to pinpoint the guidelines of remembering, by which schemas of remembering emerge.

Narratives are a central tool for elaborating emotions relevant from the group perspective, defining roles in events that relate to the group, and most importantly they provide meaning for group members (Fülöp et al., 2013; Wertsch, 2008b). Arguing for the narrative organization of collective memory, Wertsch (2008) points out that narration is a cultural instrument, which makes it possible to connect events that have a temporal distance. Historical narratives are also "*cultural tools*" (Bruner, 1990). By narration, these events become a meaningful whole, that form a schematized plot. In some theoretical approaches collective memory may be considered as a thematically organized and schematized representation of events, which Wertsch (2008) refers to as *narrative templates*. These narrative templates are specific to each cultural tradition and provide a frame of reference for interpreting the past and present challenges faced by group members.

I.2. Collective victimhood

Collective traumas disrupt the group's psychological integrity, and group members might struggle with the reintegration of the traumatic experiences into their history (Hirschberger, 2018; Volkan, 2001). Victimization may result from a series of ongoing atrocities, while it can also originate from one specific event (Bar-Tal et al., 2009). Encountering these kinds of recurrent oppression and defeats may lead to the prevailing feeling of being victimized, making the group unable to mourn their losses (Volkan, 2001). This phenomenon is referred to as self-perceived collective victimhood (Bar-Tal et al., 2009). At the core of self-perceived collective victimhood are widely shared group-beliefs that consist of the perception that the group was unjustly, deliberately, and undeservingly harmed in the past by the fault of outgroups (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; David & Bar-Tal, 2009; Schori-Eyal et al., 2014).

Collective victimhood beliefs have numerous cognitive, affective, and behavioral consequences. These groups can often be characterized with a compulsive alertness that becomes part of the beliefs system used to interpret social relations. These beliefs contain the idea that the ingroup is vulnerable, distrustful, and helpless (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003; Schori-Eyal et al., 2014). This belief system governs a society to a world, that is perceived uncertain, and dangerous, which gives base to the biased and unrealistic perception of intergroup conflicts – both past and present (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Mészáros et al., 2017).

Vollhardt (2009) distinguishes between exclusive and inclusive forms of victimhood consciousness, which are both *comparative* ways of constructing victimhood consciousness.

Individuals who think in a more *exclusive* way about their nation's victimhood are more prone to sense that their group's hardships are unique and cannot be compared to other groups'

suffering, which leads to an inflexible, monopolized category of victimhood. Exclusive victimhood may result in competitiveness over public recognition of their suffering and might deepen existing intergroup conflicts (Noor et al., 2012; Shnabel et al., 2013). Group members with higher levels of exclusive victimhood beliefs strive to elevate their suffering above others'. This exclusionary nature of victimhood consciousness often leads to competitiveness – or competitive victimhood (Noor et al., 2012) –, which is associated with a decrease in the willingness to take responsibility (Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). Their ability to show empathic concern and perspective taking towards outgroups may also become compromised (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Mack, 1990).

Comparative victim beliefs may target former or current intergroup conflicts, but they can also convey a general feeling of distinctiveness and uniqueness of the sufferings that might result in the devaluation of hardships of *unrelated* groups as well. Noor et al. (2017) suggests that competition over the victimhood status can occur along numerus attributes: e.g., similarities in the physical qualities of the conflict, such as lost lives; material qualities, such as lost resources; cultural qualities, such as a ruptured way of life; and psychological qualities, such as the aftermath of trauma. A problem with a one-sided victim perspective is that the victimized group may become prone to retaliation (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Noor et al., 2012). However, this retaliation is framed as a justified response to the harms suffered in the past. As a result, a cycle of violence can appear that makes the conflict intractable (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Vollhardt, 2009).

Despite its negative consequences on intergroup relations (i.e., Hirschberger, 2018), placing the ingroup in a victim role can be an adaptive strategy in terms of group identity. Gaining recognition of the victimized position is especially important if the group's position is not obvious.

I.3. Victim beliefs in narration

Narratives are a central means of social communication that convey conceptions of the national past (Liu & László, 2007; Wertsch, 2008), and historical narratives are primarily responsible for the elaboration and transmission of traumatic events (Fülöp et al., 2013; Pennebaker & Susman, 1988). The experimental approach allows us to observe how the structural and compositional properties of narratives may affect the interpretation of historical events and allow for a comparison in cross-cultural contexts. Narrative psychological analysis can provide frameworks for history writing and history teaching, and by creating more self-reflective narratives, historical consciousness can be facilitated. In a decade long study László et al. (2013) showed that the social function of collective victimhood beliefs in Hungarian

remembering is provided by unique narrative constructional strategies. They reviewed and content-analyzed layman historical narratives, history textbooks, and magazine articles to prove that collective victimhood beliefs are constructed by a certain narrative structural composition: collective victimhood can be best grasped through the linguistic correlates of agency, social evaluations, and psychological perspectives in narratives (Fülöp et al., 2013; Vincze et al., 2013). The reasoning of narrative social psychology is that by analyzing the narrative compositional characteristics of stories, one can gain access to the identity states, fragilities, and coping mechanisms of the group (Ehmann et al., 2013; László et al., 2013; László & Ehmann, 2013; Rohse et al., 2013).

The study revealed that the historical representations bear a perspective that is not immediately apparent for either the reader, or the storyteller, while strongly influencing the notions of the past (László, 2013). It is worth studying how narration, and its structural properties influence the process of social construction, and how it relates to the present identitary and epistemic needs (Licata & Mercy, 2015) of the group. In the following section, I will provide a brief overview of the narrative structural properties that has been linked to the phenomena of collective victimhood.

Assignment of victim and perpetrator roles can be accomplished in – at least – two ways: through the content or factual properties of the story (i.e., who initiated the conflict, who is the beneficiary and the injured party of the conflict) or by the narrative structural composition of the story (i.e., intergroup distribution of activity and passivity, negative and positive emotions, or evaluations). Victims can be seen as perpetrators, or perpetrators can be placed in the role of a victim (Jenei et al., 2020). Efforts for creating a usable past and adjusting event interpretations to the existing narrative historical templates can lead to systematical uses of narrative structural forms, that lead to an acceptable representation of the ingroup's role. It is achieved by creating a semantic role that is dissociated from the actual facts of the events (Ehmann et al., 2013; László et al., 2013). As reveled by the studies of László, linguistic correlates of agency, psychological perspective, and social evaluations can be good indicators as to what qualities the collective identity of a group entails.

Overall, László's studies involving Hungarian history teaching materials showed that the Hungarian group can be described by a narrative structural composition that tells a story of a fragile national identity. There is a general lack of *agency* on the Hungarian side as compared to outgroups. Hungarians tend to be described as passive, and unintentional, who act under constraints. This lack of agency is most present in negative events, while there is not much difference between the description of the Hungarian group and the rival outgroups in positive

events. The intergroup distribution of narrative markers of *social evaluations* shows a similar picture. The Hungarian group is described as more positive in both negative and positive events, while outgroups are negatively evaluated, especially in negative events. It can also be observed that the outgroups' *mental states* are more often presented, however with a negative content. These results show a self-serving bias: a divided historical arch in which losses and defeats follow the glorious distant past. The overly positive self-assessment achieved by the devaluation of rival groups in negative events – especially in ones in which the Hungarians were perpetrators – paired with the biased use of language signal a victimhood role, according to László (David & Bar-Tal, 2009; László & Fülöp, 2011). These findings and the accumulated empirical results (Csertő et al., in preparation; László, 2013; Mészáros et al., 2017; Szabó, 2020; Vincze et al., 2021) indicate that the Hungarian national identity is characterized by a sense of collective victimhood (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Presenting a group as a passive but positive actor, which is helpless against the outgroup's harm, easily attracts empathy and protects the group from blame. Recently Csertő et al., (in preparation) also confirmed that this narrative compositional pattern can be detected in numerous Hungarian historical accounts, even concerning events in which Hungarians played a perpetrator role. These results suggest that people who conceive the Hungarian group as a victim group are more prone to using this linguistic composition when talking about historical conflicts. It also implies that the use of this specific narrative composition may positively influence the image the outgroups hold of the ingroup, in some cases, by creating a distorted, ingroup favored representation of events, that lacks self-reflection (Hirschberger et al., 2016; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008).

I.4. Transmitting defensive event representations in education

History education as a form of shared discourse and a stage of socialization is crucial in developing national identity by transmitting event interpretations and assisting in acquiring the normative explanations of history (Aldrich, 2005; Bilewicz et al., 2017). Besides its role in forming a coherent national identity and the ability to integrate complex perspectives of historical actors, it may also lead to the development of dysfunctional group narratives and dichotomized viewpoints (Alridge, 2006; Carretero & van Alphen, 2014; Psaltis, Mccully, et al., 2017; van Alphen & Carretero, 2015; Wertsch, 2002).

Some scholars stress that for the last century, Hungarian history teaching has been characterized by a mythical and conservative, schematic narration of events with little regard for outgroup perspectives (Jakab, 2008). Despite efforts to integrate a multi-perspective approach in the curricula, meaningful change is still in the early stages of development due to

a nation-centric viewpoint in the teaching of history (Fischerné Dárdai & Kojanitz, 2007; Kaposi, 2010). Not only a conservative approach is present with a strong central control over the curriculum (Csapó, 2015), but analysis of history textbooks and lay historians' accounts revealed a regressive historical trajectory with a narrative template of initial victories followed by defeats and losses (Kovács et al., 2012; László, 2013).

The narrative structural properties of these textbooks which is the main topic of the dissertation has a significant role in this meaning creating process of social construction. The identity threat of a negative event can be mitigated by the narrative structural composition without changing the objective facts. The phenomenon can be seen as functional because it helps to maintain the belief system that averts responsibility, while keeping the moral high ground (David & Bar-Tal, 2009; László & Fülöp, 2011). In a way, being a victim or a perpetrator is a matter of perspectives, and intergroup relations. A specific quality of victimhood-based narration is that it provides a stability and continuity for the national identity, by providing a distinctive, schematized point of view, which is independent of the real causalities of the events (Hirschberger, 2018). While the presented linguistic correlates are psychologically important in their own terms as well, together, as a specific narrative structural composition, they are related to the victimhood-based narration of history. Together they provide a toolset for accommodating the narrative historical templates of the group (László & Fülöp, 2011; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Wertsch, 2002). One of the main results of the Hungarian literature of collective victimhood is that the victim perspective is not only present in stories of victimization. The identity-congruent narrative structural composition is present in narratives where the Hungarian group was in a perpetrator role as well. The probable reason behind this phenomenon is an effort to protect the national identity through the victimhood beliefs conserved in the narrative structural composition of the national tales (László, 2013).

I.5. Goals

Numerous Hungarian studies have been conducted in order to examine the phenomena of the narrative properties of historical accounts in light of collective victimhood (for a summary see: László, 2013). However, to verify the role of the narrative structural composition described by László in maintaining and transmitting the victim position of a national group have not yet been tested. The present dissertation is an attempt to highlight that the specific narrative structural composition of historical narratives can transmit the psychological states and belief system of a victimized group, or even construct a victimized position regardless of the factual details.

The following studies build upon the social perception paradigm, in which actors of historical accounts of an intergroup conflict are evaluated by the participants. In the presented narratives, the narrative structural properties are systematically manipulated, implicitly presenting one or the other *target group* in the semantic role of the victim of the events, regardless of their roles defined by the factual details of the narratives.

One of my main questions regards the ambiguous situations where the victim or perpetrator positions cannot be so easily defined, which leaves room for subjective interpretation. How can the narrative structural properties of an event description affect the perception of the actors' roles? Can a perpetrator group be positioned as a victim simply by changing the structural compositional properties of a story? Two studies will be presented here that are designed to answer these questions.

1) The goal of *Study I.* was to establish the methodological foundations. In this section the general applicability of the experimental manipulation was tested, and its effect was measured. The focus of this phase of the studies is the verification of the effect of the narrative structural properties on the perception of the actors' victim position. The study also widens the context of the narrative structural organization of the victimhood narrative by placing the question in an intercultural setting. It was tested whether the narrative structural qualities of stories of victimization have a general effect on the perception of semantic victim and perpetrator positions; and whether the question can be interpreted in cultures different from the Hungarian. A methodologically identical study conducted in Finland will be presented, to identify cultural differences in the perception of these victimhood narratives. As a cross-cultural research method, the study is designed to make indirect assumptions about the Hungarian-specific qualities of the perception of victimhood narratives, by searching for both individual and group level cultural differences that affect the presumed relationship between the narrative structural organization and the perception of the target groups.

2) The goal of *Study II.* is to provide a social weight, or identity-relevance to the findings of Study I. by changing the context of the narratives to a culturally sensitive topic from the Hungarian history's point of view. It is assumed that the perception of the victimhood narrative is dependent not only on the narrative structural organization and the socio-cultural background, but also on the

national-historical context in which these are interpreted. By presenting identity-relevant actors, the national historical narrative templates are assumed to hold a more accentuated effect over the perception of the narratives, besides the narrative structural composition, which may lead to a more identity-dependent result of the same methodological approaches. The most important question of this study is whether the established effects of the narratives can be transferred to events important in terms of the Hungarian national identity.

The two studies together provide a unique insight into the qualities of the narrative construction of collective victimhood with a two-fold aim:

The studies attempt to experimentally verify if it is possible to present a perpetrator as a victim of the conflict using narrative tools. On the other hand, it is aimed to think further by trying to use these narrative strategies to bring the perspectives of historically challenged outgroups' closer to the reader, providing empirical foundations to psychologically constructive ways of history teaching, challenging the historical canon and facilitating critical historical thinking.

II. GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE APPLIED RESEARCH METHODS

The applied research methods build on the traditions of the scientific narrative psychological approach and were identical in both studies. In the experimental design, participants were randomly assigned to read one of two fictional stories of an intergroup conflict presented as history textbook excerpts. In Study I. the target groups were chosen as actors of the stories with careful attention to not having historical links to either the Hungarian or the Finnish history. The story's plot displays the Kyrgyz and Uzbek groups in Study I., and the Romanian and Hungarian groups in Study II., describing their long-lasting territorial conflict, from which the story flashed a violent episode. The experimental manipulation included the systematic manipulation of the narrative structural characteristics of the stories, in order to create a *congruent* and *incongruent* version of the event concerning the semantic roles of the actors (i.e., victim or perpetrator) and their roles defined by the factual content of the stories.

Assignment of victim and perpetrator roles can be accomplished in two ways: through the content or factual properties of the story (i.e., who initiated the conflict, who is the beneficiary and the injured party of the conflict) or by the narrative structural composition of the story (i.e., intergroup distribution of activity and passivity, negative and positive emotions, or evaluations). In both versions of the story, the factual elements were invariant. The initiator

of the atrocities and the beneficiary party of the outcome was the Kyrgyz/Romanian group, while the Uzbek/Hungarian group was the sufferer in both story versions (see Fig. 1). In this sense, the Kyrgyz/Romanian group can be considered to be a perpetrator of this event, while the Uzbek/Hungarian group is the victim of the events.
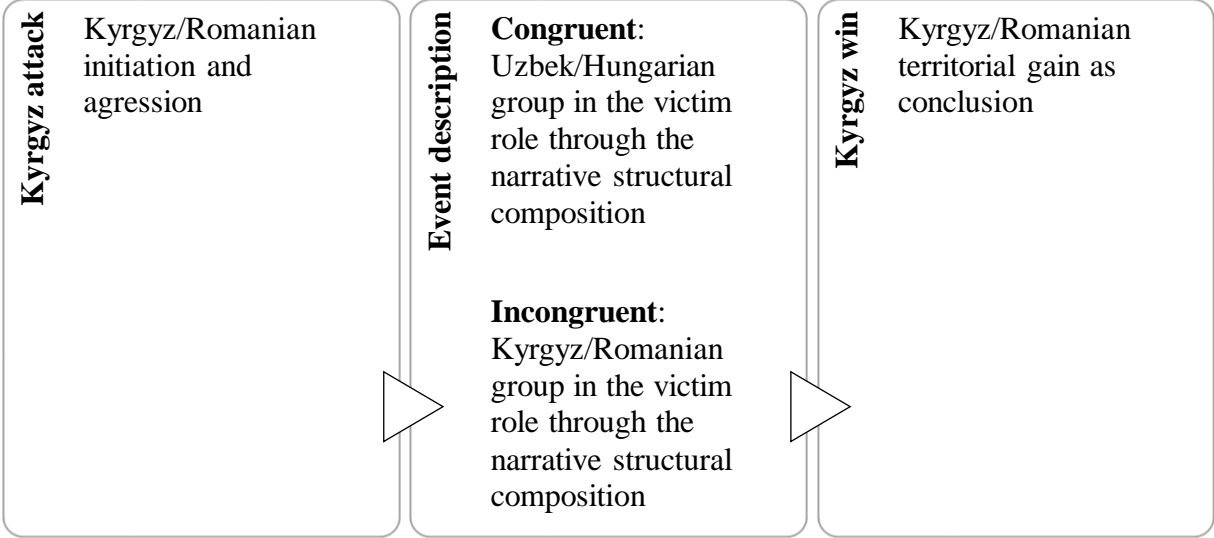
| **Kyrgyz attack** | Kyrgyz/Romanian initiation and agression | **Event description** | **Congruent**: Uzbek/Hungarian group in the victim role through the narrative structural composition | **Kyrgyz win** | Kyrgyz/Romanian territorial gain as conclusion |
| | | | **Incongruent**: Kyrgyz/Romanian group in the victim role through the narrative structural composition | | |

Fig. 1. Structure of the narratives

In the congruent experimental setting, the narrative structural composition corresponded with the roles defined by the factual properties of the narrative. Negative evaluation and higher activity with negative intentions were attributed to the conflict-initiator Kyrgyz/Romanian group, while the Uzbek/Hungarian group was presented with lower activity, higher empathy-inducing negative emotions, and positive evaluations compared to the Kyrgyz/Romanian group. In the incongruent narrative, the relative allocation of victimhood narrative markers was reversed: the Kyrgyz/Romanian group was placed in a "victimized" role by the means of attributing lower activity and higher frequency of empathy-inducing emotions, and positive evaluations compared to the Uzbek group. In this case, the Uzbek/Hungarian group was presented with relatively higher activity, hostile intentions, and negative evaluations with a lack of empathy-inducing emotions. The frequency and the actual qualities – or content – of the linguistic markers attributed to the target groups were identical in the two experimental settings.

After reading the narrative, participants were asked to answer questions concerning the two target groups in the story, as well as their own demographic data and their beliefs concerning history and empathy. Half of the participants answered these questions before, and

the other half after the introduction of the manipulated narratives to avoid any priming effects. The specific attributes of each Study is presented in the table below.

	Study I.	Study II.
Experimental setting	Uzbek-Kyrgyz intergroup conflict	Hungarian-Romanian intergroup conflict
Sample	N = 551; 415 Hungarian & 116 Finnish	N = 238
Measures	Victimhood of the target groups	Victimhood of the target groups
	Dangerous beliefs IGBI (Eidelson, 2009)	Dangerous beliefs IGBI (Eidelson, 2009)
	Group level emotions (following László, 2013)	Group level emotions (following László, 2013)
	Empathy IRI (Davis, 1980)	Empathy IRI (Davis, 1980)
	Collective victimhood consciousness GCVS Global Collective Victimhood Scale (Mészáros, 2017; Szabó et al., 2020; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015)	Collective victimhood consciousness GCVS Global Collective Victimhood Scale (Mészáros, 2017; Szabó et al., 2020; Vollhardt & Bilali, 2015)
		Questions relating to personal involvement in the conflict
		Questions relating to the perceived agressiveness and responsibility of the Hungarian and Romanian national groups
Goal	Verification of the effect of the narrative structural properties on the perception of the actors' victim position in a cross cultural context	Testing the narratives in an identity-relevant research context

III. STUDY I. – THE PERCEPTION OF INTERGROUP CONFLICTS' NARRATIVE CONSTRUCTION

The first study was designed to test the effect of the narrative structural qualities of the victim narrative (László, 2013) in the perception of historical narratives and – indirectly – in the narrative event construction. By assessing the effects of the victim and perpetrator roles created by the narrative structural composition, assumptions can be made about the defensive narrative strategy by which a group-favored, "usable" representation of an event of victimization can be constructed. The intercorrelation of the related individual and group level qualities (national identification, collective victimhood beliefs about the Hungarian history, trait empathy) and the susceptibility to the linguistic manipulation provides points of reference for assessing how the narrative organization of the victimhood narrative creates biased event interpretations and which functions it holds in terms of national identity. By assessing the group-based emotions attributed to the conflicting groups, overlaps of the perception of outgroups' emotional characteristics and the perception of the emotional orientation of the Hungarian historical trajectory can be identified.

Study I. observes differences in two cultural contexts: Hungary and Finland, two EU-member countries, which are both located on the Eastern border of Europe, and whose histories share many common themes. The 20th century history of both Hungary and Finland share the theme of oppression and a fight against alien forces (e.g., revolt against the Austro-Hungarian

Monarchy in Hungary and historical battles against Russia in Finland) and losses (e.g., territory losses in WWI). However, the two countries have constructed a different understanding of their national history. Hungarian historical writing emphasizes historical losses and defeat, while Finnish historical writing accentuates the perseveration of independence through historical challenges (Hakoköngäs & Sakki, 2016; László, 2013).

It is assumed that the linguistic features of the national historical narrative templates and the emotional orientations coded in them provide a frame of reference for perceiving the suffering of outgroups. Based on the theoretical foundations and methodological approaches described above, I hypothesize that [H1] the victimhood narrative composition may alter the perception of a group's victim position, even when their roles which are defined by their actual actions (here: victim or perpetrator) are ambiguous. I also assume that [H2] this effect is present regardless of the nationality of the participants. Complimenting this assumption, I also assumed that [H3] the participants would attribute more hostile (hatred, anger, disgust) and depressive (sadness, disappointment) emotions to the group placed in the semantic victim role in both the Hungarian and Finnish samples, as these emotions relate to the feelings of collective victimhood: negative events are characterized by attribution of emotions which signal a negative emotional tone. Regarding, the underlying psychological attributes of these effects, I suppose that [H4] the narrative structural composition's effect is mediated by the extent of the perceived vulnerability, distrust, and helplessness ("dangerous beliefs") of the target groups. In addition, I presumed that the effect of the victimhood narrative composition depends on the prevalence of ingroup collective victimhood consciousness in the participant's socio-cultural background. Based on this assumption, I hypothesize that [H5] the strength of the victimhood-oriented narrative composition's direct effect depends on the participants' global exclusive collective victimhood attributes in the Hungarian sample, but not in the Finnish one.

III.1. Results

The results fit the literature, while they also provide important complements. Moreover, they verify László's (2013) assumptions about the narrative structural attributes of the victimhood narrative. The manipulated narrative structural composition of such historical accounts affected the group perception in a meaningful way. Although the Kyrgyz group was the initiator and the major beneficiary of the conflict in the incongruent setting, the manipulated narrative structural composition (i.e., low agency, negative empathy-triggering emotions, and positive evaluations attributed to the Kyrgyz group; higher agency, a lack of emotions, negative evaluations, and hostile intentions attributed to the Uzbek group) still directed the participants'

perception leading to perceive the Kyrgyz group as being more victimized than the Uzbek group [H1]. It can be concluded that the narrative composition described by László indeed has an important function in transmitting and maintaining the belief system related to victimhood, while the results also suggest that the narrative manipulation had the same effect on the perception of the two target groups in both the Finnish, and the Hungarian sub-samples [H2]. It is an important result, that the perception of an aggressor group was open to change as a result of manipulated the narrative structural properties. The Kyrgyz group's perceived emotional states were open for change in accordance with their perceived victim position in both samples: their intensity proved to be related to the Kyrgyz group's perceived victim position; and their intensity also changed with the change of the semantic role of the perpetrator group. However, in the case of the victim Uzbek group, the intensity of the hostile emotions attributed to them did not change with their changing semantic roles. A fair assumption is that their victim role transmitted by the factual information prevented the participants to attribute more intense hostile emotions to them, even though their perceived victim position did change with the semantic position that was conveyed by the linguistic properties of the narratives. These results – at least in part – confirm the assumptions about the intensity of emotions attributed to the conflicting groups, while providing an interesting discrepancy [H3]. The results of the conditional process analysis show that the victimhood-oriented composition of the story (incongruent) can change the perceived victim position of a perpetrator group (Kyrgyz), which is mediated by the dangerous beliefs (perceived vulnerability, distrust, and helplessness) attributed to the perpetrator group in both samples [H4]. Dangerous beliefs are worldviews that convey the threatening nature of the outside world, and which usually co-appear with the victimhood consciousness (David & Bar-Tal, 2009; Mészáros, 2017). This result supports the previous findings, highlighting the importance of these associated beliefs in the mediation between the narrative structural composition and the perception of a perpetrator group's "victim" role. The analysis also revealed that the direct effect of the narrative composition was dependent on the degree of the participants' exclusive victim beliefs for the Hungarian sample, which means that the participant's higher level of exclusive victimhood consciousness reduces the likelihood of accepting the victimized depiction of the perpetrator group. Results show a slightly different picture for the Finnish sample. The manipulation also showed an effect on estimating the victimhood of the target group; nevertheless, the direct effect did not depend on the participants' own collective victim beliefs [H5].

It is important to note that in this study the outgroups portrayed in the experimentally manipulated narratives were assumed to be neutral to both the Hungarian and the Finnish

participants. This assumption is verified by the lack of main effects in the analyses of variance, suggesting that the participants did not hold any pre-supposed beliefs of the Uzbek and Kyrgyz groups. Constructing the experimental setting this way lets one examine the "pure" effect of the narrative structural properties that are the focus of this dissertation. It is established that the narrative organization described by László indeed has an effect on how harshly a victimized group is perceived, or how a perpetrator group's actions can be diminished. However, these studies are in some way presented in a social vacuum, which can provide a foundation for a clear-cut examination of the phenomenon on the one hand but strips the question of its social context on the other hand. For this reason, a second study was conducted in which the same experimental setting was placed in a social context that is relevant and known in terms of Hungarian history, and Hungarian national identity.

IV. STUDY II. – THE DEFENSIVE PERCEPTION OF INTERGROUP CONFLICT NARRATIVES

It is assumed that the perception of the narrative structural composition of victimhood is not only dependent on the narrative organization itself, but also the socio-cultural and historical context in which these are interpreted. Using the same event descriptions but replacing the parties involved with identity-relevant actors, the effect of the narrative structural properties of victimhood narratives on the perception of the target groups' victim position is examined. The victim Uzbek group was replaced with the Hungarian group, while the perpetrator Kyrgyz group was replaced with the Romanian group. With this modification, the congruent and incongruent experimental conditions became identity-congruent and identity-incongruent conditions, respectively. It is assumed that the linguistic structural properties of the narratives would have a similar effect on the perception of the target groups, nevertheless with a less robust intensity. While I expect that the experimental manipulation might lead to a forced acceptance of the outgroup perspective, it is reasonable to assume that this effect would be more nuanced than in Study I., since by presenting identity-relevant actors, existing schematic narrative templates of the national ingroup might also guide the perception of the events. In this sense, the Hungarian group was a victim, and the Romanian group was a perpetrator in terms of the factual details of the narratives. It is an important question of the present study whether tendencies can be observed in the effect of the narrative structural composition on the identity-congruent and incongruent narrative settings, while keeping details and facts in congruence of the established narrative templates of the Hungarians.

Although the Treaty of Trianon was not explicitly mentioned in the stories, the terms indicating geographical locations or dates involved in the territorial conflict were replaced with

ones that are related to the historical setting of the Treaty. In the identity-congruent condition, the Hungarian victimhood is emphasized, while in the incongruent condition, the Romanian victimhood is highlighted. Thus, the congruent condition builds on the Hungarian narrative templates, in which the Hungarian victimhood is present.

Following the observations made in Study I., new independent variables were introduced as well. Initial attitudes of the participants about the Hungarian-Romanian conflict, and the personal effect of the Trianon Treaty on the lives of the participants were measured. Additionally, the centrality of victimhood beliefs was also measured as a control variable, as suggested by the latest results of experts of the field (Vollhardt et al., 2021).

Because of the identity-relevance of the experimental setting, the perceived aggressiveness, and hostility of the target groups was also measured, as it is expected that these perceived attributes play a significant role in the perception of the victim and perpetrator roles. New information about the ingroup is measured against the narrative templates of the distant historical events, and only those fragments can be meaningfully interpreted which complies to the needs of group identity (Liu & Hilton, 2005), and the ingroup's moral image becomes salient (Hirschberger et al., 2016). It is assumed that not only the dangerous beliefs of the outgroup, but the ingroup's moral image as well (here: aggressivity, and responsibility) lead the perception of the participants. It is proposed that the perceived Hungarian aggressivity and responsibility in the event descriptions will mediate the relationship between the narrative structural composition, and the Romanian victimhood.

Based on these theoretical cornerstones, I assume that [H1] the experimental manipulation – the narrative structural properties – will alter the Romanian group's perpetrator position, while [H2] the participants would attribute more hostile (hatred, anger, disgust) and depressive (sadness, disappointment) emotions to the group placed in the semantic victim role. Regarding the underlying individual and group-level constructs, I assume that [H3] a direct effect of the manipulation will be present, as in Study I. While I propose that the linguistic structural properties would have an effect on the perpetrator group's perception, I also assume, that the participants' focus would also shift towards protecting the ingroup's moral image. In this sense, the ingroup's perceived aggressivity, and responsibility become important attributes that may orient the perception of not only the Hungarian ingroup, but also the Romanian outgroup. Thus, it is assumed that [H4] the effect of the narrative structural composition is mediated not only by the extent of the perceived dangerous beliefs of the perpetrator group, but the perceived responsibility and aggressiveness of the Hungarian group as well. Exclusive victimhood beliefs may take part in the perception of the narrative structural composition, as a

defensive strategy. For this reason, I hypothesize that [H5] the strength of the victimhood-oriented narrative structural composition's direct effect depends on the participants' global exclusive collective victimhood beliefs.

IV.1. Results

Narrative templates not only provide a kind of "plot", or schema. They also provide the knowledge of who the enemies and allies of the group are (Hilton & Liu, 2017; Liu & Hilton, 2005). In the case of Study II. the Romanian group can be considered a group whose role in the past is a "wrongdoer" in the Hungarian historical knowledge (Turda & Laczó, 2020). This provides an opportunity to examine the narrative templates of the Hungarian participants in a meaningful social context. Acknowledging the Romanian perspective in an event description that is important in terms of Hungarian history would be supposedly challenging the Hungarian narrative templates, inducing a defensive interpretation of the event (Klar & Baram, 2016). However, the results support the assumptions that these implicit narrative strategies can even supersede the defensive interpretations of events, leading to an acceptance of the outgroup perspective.

The results verify that the perceived victim position of the two groups did change between the experimental conditions meaning that in the incongruent setting, the Hungarian victimhood was less prominent, and the Romanian victimhood was perceived higher as in the congruent setting [H1]. However, it also seems that the participants had a pre-existing attitude of the relationship of the two groups, perceiving the Hungarian victimhood higher regardless of the experimental settings. This supports the assumption that semantic roles can transmit a meaning that is distinct from the content of the event-descriptions: it is defined by to which actor or recipient an emotion, process of cognition, or evaluation is associated (Ehmann et al., 2013). Supporting the hypothesis, the hostile emotions attributed to the two groups did change between the two experimental conditions. While the manipulation did influence the depressive emotions attributed to the Romanian group, the intensity of depressive emotions attributed to the Hungarian group did not change, suggesting that while cognitively the interpretations changed, on an emotional level, the participants still empathized more with the Hungarian group. It can be considered as a defensive psychological mechanism (Demirdağ & Hasta, 2019), revoking empathy, while also accepting the outside perspective [H2]. The results of the conditional process analysis show that a significant direct effect of the experimental manipulation was present, suggesting that presenting an actor with lower agency, positive social evaluations and highlighting their psychological perspective (Fülöp et al., 2013; Vincze et al.,

2013) can lead to a more balanced understanding to moral roles in historical conflicts [H3]. A significant indirect effect is present, both through the perceived dangerous beliefs of the Romanian group, and the perceived aggressiveness of the Hungarian group [H4]. Although the Romanian group's role has its roots in Hungarian collective memory, the presented narratives seem to have been able to counteract this role to some extent. Moreover, the results point to the conclusion, that in an identity-threatening situation, the perception of victim and perpetrator roles are not only perceived through the attributed belief system of the groups involved, but through the perception of the ingroup as well, or specifically the ingroup's aggressivity in this case. Contrary to the assumptions, the direct effect was not moderated by the exclusive victimhood beliefs the participants hold [H5]. This may be accounted for several reasons. The inconsequent results draw attention the context dependency of the role exclusive victimhood consciousness plays in the perception of outgroups. Szabó (2020) also argues that without an ongoing conflict, exclusiveness may not be an adequate attitude towards other groups hardships, especially as Hungarian collective victimhood beliefs are more historical in nature.

Although the roles were not completely changed as in Study I., the presence of the Romanian perspective in the incongruent experimental setting both increased the perceived dangerous beliefs of the Romanian group, and increased the perceived aggressivity of the Hungarian group, which in turn led to a stronger perception of the Romanian group's victimized position. These results support the assumption, that *how* a story is told in terms of the narrative structural composition does have the potential to overturn the one-sided interpretations of widely shared historical representations.

V. GENERAL DISCUSSION

V.1. Summary of the results

The presented results verify that:

I. The structural narrative properties (László & Ehmann, 2013) of a conflict narrative transmit an effect on the perception of the actors' victim position, even when contradictory facts are provided; meaning that portraying a perpetrator group with lower agency with positive ingroup evaluation in conjunction with negative, empathy-triggering ingroup emotions, and inner thoughts with positive propositional content compared to the outgroup leads to a perception as if they were the victims of the encounter. It raises caution that these effects go together with a revoking of empathy triggering emotions attributed the victim group, without modifying objective facts, or actually perceiving the group as more

hostile. These results complement the existing literature (see László, 2013), and highlight that self-serving biases and enforcing the group's perspective in historical event representation (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012; Klar & Bilewicz, 2017) do not only come from the content of narratives, but the narrative forms as well (László & Ehmann, 2013).

II. This effect is in part the result of a general function of the narrative structural properties, which seems to be unrelated of the national context to some degree. The psychological meaning (László & Ehmann, 2013) that this narrative structural composition conveys relates to trauma, and an experience of victimization in a more universal human way. It is presumable that their meaning is universal to some extent, and what varies in a socio-cultural setting is not their meaning, but their general presence in the historical narrative templates (Wertsch, 2009) of that society. The narrative forms described by László (2013) all relate to the underlying psychological aspects of trauma (e.g. helplessness, vulnerability, distrustfulness, see Eidelson, & Eidelson, 2003). Historical traumas are by nature social traumas (Alexander, 2012). While national histories prescribe how a traumatic experience can be integrated in the collective memory of a society (Halbwachs, 1980; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2012), universal consequences of trauma are nonetheless present: the predictable social reality ceases to hold its function and the world becomes an unpredictable place until the meaning of the event can be integrated into the narratives of the group (Erős, 2007; László, 2013), in which the narrative tools described in this dissertation play a central role.

III. An outgroup's victim position is perceived through their "dangerous" worldviews. These beliefs contain the idea that the ingroup is vulnerable, distrustful, and helpless (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003; Schori-Eyal et al., 2014). This belief system governs a society to a world, that is perceived uncertain, and dangerous, which gives base to the biased and polarized perception of intergroup conflicts (Bar-Tal et al., 2009; Mészáros et al., 2017). According to the results, these beliefs act as a mediator, through which the narrative structural composition exerts its effect on the perception of the perpetrator group's victimized position. These results again relate to the universal experience of trauma, where the continuity of the group's identity is disrupted and new coping mechanisms need to be constructed (Alexander, 2012).

Dangerous beliefs of a group convey the psychological meaning of trauma, and victimization (Eidelson, 2009), that seems to be – at least – partly presented by the narrative forms described here.

IV.   In the first study, the strength of these effects is dependent on the global exclusive victim consciousness that is conveyed by the national historical templates of the participants. Comparative victim beliefs may target former or current intergroup conflicts, but they can also convey a general feeling of distinctiveness and uniqueness of the sufferings that might result in devaluation of hardships of unrelated groups. The results suggest that competition for the victim status can also occur between groups that are not responsible for the group's past or present suffering (see Bilewicz & Stefaniak, 2013; De Guissmé & Licata, 2017).

V.   The effects which are present in Study I. were also present when perceiving identity-relevant groups, leading to an increased acceptance of outgroup perspective. The subtle manipulation of the narrative structural composition did not reverse the victim and perpetrator roles, although the representational level of the perceived victimhood of the two national groups were evened. The result point to the direction of a more balanced perception of intergroup conflicts, which is also supported by the emotional patterns attributed to the target groups. The perceived aggressivity of the Hungarian ingroup acted as a mediating variable suggesting that in identity-challenging situations, not only the outgroup's perceived belief system but the ingroup's moral image plays an important psychological role as well. This effect was present even when controlling for the centrality of victimhood consciousness, which is far less taken into account in the available literature than comparative victim beliefs (Vollhardt et al., 2021). Contrary to the findings in the first study, in the second study, the effect of exclusive victimhood disappears, which might question the relevance of comparative victimhood beliefs in some present intergroup contexts, which is in line with recent findings (e.g. Szabó, 2020; Vollhardt et al. 2021). Further research could answer the question whether in this exact research context, the comparative victim beliefs play a role, or other underlying phenomena guides the attitudes of participants. The results support the notion that comparative victimhood beliefs play a less important role in the Hungarian context (Szabó, 2020; Vollhardt et al. 2021), while also stress that presenting a challenging

intergroup conflict with an implicit presentation of the outgroup's mental states, agency, and evaluation might lead to more balanced attitudes towards past conflicts.

V.2. Principles of history education

Past experiences of victimhood as parts of the cultural memory impair the interpretation of present events, by adjusting them to the narrative templates of the group. The previously described narrative strategies provide a basis for maintaining these group-favored explanations. These narrative frames also shape how group members think about their past, thus taking part in the construction of historical representations. The way in which a society talks about its history – whether in terms of political discourse or the teaching of history – plays a role in this process (László, 2013; Lerner, 2020). In this context, history education provides a crucial social stage. The inclusion of sometimes contradictory interpretations of events from multiple perspectives into the social discourse can have a positive impact on unravelling the distorted and biased interpretations that are present in the collective memory of the group (Nasie et al., 2014), which may lead to an increased emphatical capacity towards other victim groups (Adelman et al., 2016). This is especially important in the case of living historical memories (Choi et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021) which can provide symbolic resources for challenging the existing national canon (A. Assmann, 2008; Liu et al., 2021).

A wide scale of literature is available regarding the role of history education in the process of identity formation and conflict resolution (for an overview see Psaltis, Carretero, et al., 2017), however the role of the narrative structural features of historical tales that may be presented in the classroom is an understudied aspect of the issue. A widely accepted goal in history education is to form complementary intergroup perspectives and multilayered narratives (McCully, 2012; Psaltis, Mccully, et al., 2017), which are important in developing historical consciousness and empathy (Bryant & Clark, 2006; Sakki & Pirttilä-Backman, 2019). This aim has an especially acute aspect in post-conflict societies, where social representations of history often conserve the polarized narratives of the experienced traumas and thus the conflict itself (Psaltis, Carretero, et al., 2017). The Recommendations for the History Teaching of Intergroup Conflicts (Psaltis, Mccully, et al., 2017) defines three main goals– based on social psychological studies – that can create a more conscious way of thinking about history.

> I. According to the author's reasoning, the education system's function is to present the complex relations between events, to highlight the changing frameworks for interpretation, and to view these in a certain social-historical-

political context. By contrast, master narratives – or historical templates – follow the principle of simplification, using schemas and pre-existing character types. They operate with heroes and villains, winners and losers, *victims*, and *perpetrators*, using analogies to present the events (László, 2013; Psaltis, Mccully, et al., 2017). In Study I. narrative strategies were presented which reinforce the victim/perpetrator dichotomy, however in Study II. these narrative forms led to a more balanced interpretation of historically relevant events. This shows that the context in which these linguistic forms are used, matters, and history teaching should be sensitive to these contexts.

II. They highlight the necessity of emphatical capacity in history education. They define the ability to make a distinction between the pupil's own perspective and the given social-historical-political perspective of the historical actors as a goal of development. "Whose perspective is present?" is a question that must be raised in the case of analyzing historical sources: how this perspective affects the interpretation of a given event and whether there are contradicting sources that operate with different perspectives. In these studies, using carefully modified event descriptions of the same events, could lead to different interpretations of national groups' roles in historical conflicts. The context in which they are interpreted differed in many ways: the social historical context, the historical relevance of the actors presented in them, and the texts themselves contained different implicit attitudes in the different versions as an experimental intervention. Using texts that are based on facts, however implicitly present the agency, psychological perspective and positive social evaluations of either one or the other group may lead to a heightened capacity to emphatical perspective taking and concern (Keen, 2006; Pólya et al., 2005). Comparing these texts in an educative setting and explicitly reflecting on the differences in the subtext might be a useful approach in facilitating mental capacity for intergroup empathy.

III. Last, but not least, they state that the use of master narratives leads to circulatory and fatalistic event explanations, which ignore the complexity of events. Master narratives use the same schemas or narrative templates for explaining events. These processes limit the construction of events, while also defining the future self-definition of the group. They advise to neglect approaches in education that promotes the schematic, and analogy-based thinking, and to present historical events as processes through various points of views (Psaltis, Mccully, et al.,

2017). The texts used here in an experimental context also use schematic event descriptions, building on the victim/perpetrator dichotomy. However, they also show – through different experimental contexts – that psychological complexity stems not only from the description itself, but the contextualized interpretation of the implicit content and form of the text. These arguments point to the conclusion that psychological meaning, and interpretation can be achieved by reflecting on the narrative forms which are present in the material used in history education (Ehmann et al., 2013; László et al., 2013).

My findings contribute to this issue in two ways. The results proved that narrative structural composition, that is, intergroup agency, emotions, cognitions, and evaluations are key factors in transmitting a dysfunctional, or at least self-serving understanding of historical events, which is known to be present in Hungarian history teaching materials (László, 2013). The results suggest that the narrative structural composition of national historical tales can support and transmit the persisting event interpretations coded in the schematic narrative templates (Wertsch, 2002) of a nation. These results also confirm the cross-cultural effect of victimhood narrative composition, although with different underlying psychological mechanisms.

However, the arguments made in the dissertation provide insight into the question of how it is possible to move along the lines of discourse and narrative framing towards less vulnerable modes of narrative meaning construction that support national identity. While it seems that these structural properties of historical narratives indeed have an effect on how an ethnocentric viewpoint is transmitted in a wider sense of social discourse, the results also open the possibility of overturning these biased event interpretations, with an emphasis on not only *what* events are taught in the national curricula, but also *how* they are narrated.

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VII.   LIST OF THE AUTHOR'S PUBLICATIONS

VII.1. Published papers

VII.1.1 First author

Jenei, D. F., Csertő, I., & Vincze, O. (2020). Elkövetőből áldozat – a csoportközi konfliktusok narratív konstrukciójának percepciója. *Magyar Pszichológiai Szemle*, 75(3), 407–424. MTMT. https://doi.org/10.1556/0016.2020.00024

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