Collective victimhood among Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks through the focus of historical memory

The results from the last census in Bulgaria (2011) shows that the ethnic distribution of population is as follows: 84,8% ethnic Bulgarians, 8,8 % Bulgarian Turks and 4.9% of Roma.

Bulgaria is still one of the poorest countries not only in the EU but in the Balkans as a whole, with corruption in political life, absence of thrust in politics, politicians and justice system, violence, criminality and individualism in the streets.

Two events have left significant traces in the history of Bulgaria regarding the topic of my research. The first one is the Ottoman Domination in Bulgaria, the historical period from the conquest by the Ottoman Empire in 1396 until the Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878. The second one the Process of Rebirth between 1984 and 1989. In this assimilation campaign, the Bulgarian government forced Bulgarian Turks for example to change their names or to move. These events are not totally clear for the society. Still there are discussions for the name of the events – Ottoman Domination, Ottoman Rule or Ottoman slavery. Now ethnic Bulgarians (the national majority) and Bulgarian Turks live together but what are their attitudes towards each other? The problem about victimhood is still unexamined in Bulgaria. My PhD research aims to examine this question.

The Early Roots

Although writings about the victim appeared in many early works by such criminologists as Beccaria (1764), Lombroso (1876), Ferri (1892), Garyfalo (1885), Sutherland (1924), Hentig (1948), Nagel (1949), Ellenberger (1955), Wolfgang (1958) and Schafer (1968), the concept of a science to study victims and the word "victimology" had its origin with the early writings of Benjamin Mendelsohn (1937; 1940), these leading to his seminal work where he actually proposed the term "victimology" in his article "A New Branch of Bio-Psycho-Social Science, Victimology" (1956). It was in this article that he suggested the establishment of an international society of victimology which has come to fruition with the creation of the World Society of Victimology, the establishment of a number of victimological institutes (including the creation in Japan of the Tokiwa International Victimology Institute); and, the establishment of international journals which are now also a part of this institute. Mendelsohn provided us with his victimology vision and blueprint; and, as his disciples we have followed his guidance. We now refer to Mendelsohn as "The Father of Victimology".

Definitions

Montville (1990) defines victimhood as a state of individual and collective ethnic mind that occurs when the traditional structures that provide an individual sense of security and self-worth through membership in a group are shattered by aggressive, violent political outsiders. Victimhood can be characterized by either an extreme or persistent sense of mortal vulnerability.

Aquino and Byron (2002) refer to 'the individual's self-perception of having been the target, either momentarily or over time, to harmful actions emanating from one or more other persons. In the most general sense, a victim is anyone who experiences injury, loss, or misfortune as a result of some event or series of events'.

According to Bar-Tal (2009), victimhood describes some lasting psychological state of mind that involves beliefs, attitudes, emotions and behavioral tendencies. This results on the one hand from direct or indirect experience of victimization, and on the other hand from its maintenance in the personal repertoire. In other words, it is a state where the experienced harm and the long-standing consequences 'become elements in the victim's personality'.

Other scholars have emphasized elements in victims' psychology that emerges as a result of the harmful event. They point to the observed feeling of helplessness and self-pity, self-inefficacy, low self-esteem, hopelessness, guilt, loss of trust, meaning and privacy, an absent sense of accountability, a tendency to blame, and a stable external locus of control (in this case, the belief is that the incident was beyond a person's control and choice, and is consistent with 'out-of-control' feelings). Finally, of special interest is the finding indicating that repeated experiences of victimization can trigger a pattern of requital behaviors of retribution and cycles of violence.

In addition to the different specific definitions, diverse elaborations of the analysis of victimization have also appeared. For example, it has been proposed that the idea of victimization assumes that certain individual or collective rights were violated: either concrete rights such as the right to shelter and food, or more abstract rights such as the right to happiness, living space, self-determination and free expression of identity.

Further analyses shows that victimization is not only an objective occurrence, but is also based on a subjective experience, as some people can define themselves as 'victims' in circumstances that many others would regard as part of their everyday life.

Conditions for victimhood

Bar-Tal (2009) suggests that individuals define themselves as a victim if they believe that:

1. they were harmed;
2. they were not responsible for the occurrence of the harmful act;
3. they could not prevent the harm;
4. they are morally right and suffering from injustice done to them;
5. they deserve sympathy.

The latter condition adds crucial aspects to the definition. It points out that mere experience of the harmful event is not enough for the emergence of the sense of being a victim. In order to have this sense there is the need to perceive the harm as undeserved, unjust and immoral, an act that could not be prevented by the victim. The need to get empathy then emerges.

Sara Rosenberg (2003) defines the main components of "victimhood":

1. A history of violent traumatic aggression and loss.

2. A belief that the aggression and violence suffered at the hands of the enemy is not justifiable by any standard.
3. A constant fear that the aggressor could strike again at any time.
4. A perception that the world is indifferent to the victim group's plight.

The conditions described from Bar Tal cover those from Sara Rosenberg and are more complete so we will use them for our study.

Types of victimhood

Direct and indirect - it should be noted that individuals may experience the harm either directly or indirectly. That is, they can suffer psychological or physical harm by themselves, or be related to other victimized individuals and therefore feel indirect victimization. Accordingly, there is an assumption that the most practical approach to understanding the sense of being a victim is to focus on the individual's perception of his/her unpleasant experience. It can be said that victimhood is a psychological state of an individual who perceives himself/herself as a victim and feels like a victim, or is holding 'victim beliefs'.

Collective and self-perceived victimhood - the question that should be raised is whether the sense of victimhood is based on self-perception only. A number of scholars add another perspective to the analysis: the view of the social milieu. There is a 'social construction' of the sense of victimhood that defines the characteristics of 'victim', assigns them to the victims and their social environment and legitimizes the label. Once this legitimization takes place, individuals often make efforts to maintain that sense over time.

Competitive victimhood – groups involved in prolonged, violent conflicts compete over various tangible and psychological resources, including their victim status (Kelman, 2008). Specifically, adversarial groups often engage in competitive victimhood, that is, they are strongly motivated to establish that their ingroup has been subjected to more injustice and suffering at the hands of the outgroup than the other way round (Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler,2012).

Theoretical framework

Victimhood can be explained by Social Identity Theory and Social Categorization Theory. People categorize others in order to render the social world a meaningful and predictable place in which we can act efficaciously. This suggests that the reduction of subjective uncertainty may be a core motivation for social categorization, and that therefore the more uncertain we are (generally, or in specific contexts) the more likely we are to categorize people (e.g., Hogg, in press b; Hogg & Mullin, 1999). Another motivation is self-enhancement or self-esteem (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Turner, 1982). Social categorization almost always involves placing oneself in one of the categories, and thus acquiring the evaluative attributes of that category. It follows, then, that in particular contexts we might categorize people, or categorize people in particular ways, because by so doing there are favorable self-evaluative consequences. Although categories can be represented in terms of a limited set of necessary attributes, research suggests that this may be restricted to formal scientific taxonomies. In real life, and particularly for social categories, we tend to

represent categories as fuzzy sets of attributes where members have a "family resemblance" (e.g., Cantor & Mischel, 1979; Mervis & Rosch, 1981). The fuzzy properties of such a category are embodied by the category prototype, which, because it is an abstraction of properties, no real member may embody – rather, category members vary in the degree to which they match the prototype. Categories can also be represented in terms of specific instances one has encountered – exemplars (Smith & Zárate, 1992). The precise relationship between prototype and exemplar representations of social categories remains to be fully explored (e.g., Fiske & Neuberg, 1990).

Although the category prototype may effectively represent the average group member, this does not necessarily have to be the case (Chaplin, John, & Goldberg, 1988). Prototypes can sometimes be extreme. Indeed, the representation of social categories is influenced not only by properties of the category itself, but also by the wider social comparative context within which the category exists, as well as by people's motivational and strategic goals.

The other theory which will be useful is Theory of Social representations. In order for people in groups to talk with one another, they need a system of common understanding, in particular of concepts and ideas that are outside of 'common' understanding or which have particular meaning for that group. Words thus become imbued with special meaning within particular social groups.

Moscovici described social representation as:

"systems of values, ideas and practices with a two-fold function; first, to establish an order which will enable individuals to orientate themselves in their material and social world and to master it; secondly, to enable communication to take place amongst members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history" (Moscovici, 1973)

Social representations thus enable the achievement of a shared social reality; they are ways of world-making (Moscovici, 1998). On the one hand, they are created to conventionalize objects, persons and events by placing them in a familiar context. On the other hand, once established, they serve to influence social behavior and the negotiation of social identities, imposing themselves in social interaction and limiting socio-cognitive activities.

What is particularly significant about this is that meaning is created through a system of social negotiation rather than being a fixed and defined thing, and that its interpretation may well require an understanding of additional aspects of that social environment.

Through anchoring and objectification we take on particular 'presentations' of socially significant objects and re-interpret them to fit with what we know 'already'. That is, we take on 'presentations' and re-present them. In this process the social representation may be reinforced or perhaps re-articulated or re-enacted in various ways. These processes are dynamic – existing only in the relational encounter, in thein between space re-created in dialogue and social encounters. Representations are not simply templates that relate to cognitive schemas. As Jodelet (1991) argues, are presentation can be "used for acting in the

world and on others", as well as for re-acting, rejecting or re-forming a presentation of the world that conflicts with one's stake, position and identity.

The Social Categorization Theory and Theory of Social representations will be implemented through the conditions of victimhood of Bar Tal. The results will be explained through these theories.

The most important scales in the questionnaire are: historical memory - competitive victimhood, collective victimhood, forgiveness, intergroup guilt and shame, identification; RWA, SDO, intergroup contact; general attitudes, social distances and social demographic characteristics.

Below is the outline of the main research questions:

1. To what extent Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks experience collective victimhood through the view of the historical memory?
2. Does perceived victimhood decrease in region where there is an extended and positive contact between Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks? Does the social distances between groups decrease and does the general attitude is positive in these regions?
3. Is there a relation between the level of collective victimhood and the readiness to forgiveness and the level of perceived guilt and shame?
4. Do national and ethnic identification influence the experience of victimhood? To what extent does the majority express authoritarianism among? What is the relation between the level of the authoritarianism and experienced victimhood among the majority?
5. What predicts perceived victimhood (educational status, area of living, age, status perception, identification, religion)?

These questions are based on a literature review examining recent methods and theories used to study victimhood. The authors who are working in the area of victimhood are Andrighetto, Bar-Tal, Cehajic, Halperin, Mazziotta, Noor and etc. They observed victimhood during the intractable conflicts (in different parts of the world) and the consequences people have to live with a long time after the conflict has ended, which are the necessary conditions for receiving the status of victim, reconciliation process (extended and positive contact), willingness for admitting the intergroup responsibility and guilt, socio-psychological barriers to peace making and etc.

The above mentioned research questions lead to the main hypotheses of the research.

Hypotheses

1. We assume that Bulgarians experienced high level of collective victimhood based on collective memory than Bulgarian Turks, due to the long period of experience (500 years Ottoman Domination vs 3-4 years Process of Rebirth).
2. We expect that the higher level of collective victimhood leads to decreased level of readiness to forgiveness and decreased level of perceived guilt and shame
3. We suppose that victimhood reduces in the area where there is an extended and positive contact between Bulgarians and Bulgarian Turks. (Andrighetto 2012) His

findings revealed that frequent and high-quality extended contact with outgroup members reduced competitive victimhood. We suppose that the social distances between groups decrease and the general attitude is positive in these regions.

4. We expect that national and ethnic identification influence the experience of victimhood. (Bar-Tal 2009) Identification is a predictor of victimhood. We suppose that there is a relation between SDO, RWA and collective victimhood. (Liu 2013) SDO and RWA are correlated with historical events.

5. We presume that some of the demographic characteristics like education, sex and religion determine the extent of experienced victimhood.

My research employs quantitative (survey among Bulgarian Turks and ethnic Bulgarians N≈1000) and qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews among 10 Bulgarian Turks and 20 ethnic Bulgarians). The survey and the interviews took place in two cities Stara Zagora and Kardzhali. The city of Kardzhali and its surroundings are with one of the highest proportion of the Turkish minority (66% compared to 8.8% nation-wide), while the city of Stara Zagora is representative with its distribution of majority-minority perspective for Bulgaria as a whole.

Results

1. Results show that Bulgarians have a higher level of victimhood than Bulgarian Turks (Means – 9,48 vs 8,26). This result confirms our first hypothesis.

2. The comparison between the results of the level of victimhood in the three regions (the whole project covers three regions) shows that in Kardzhali region the level of victimhood is the lowest. The social distances are lowest and the general attitude is significantly more positive in Kardzhali. Hypothesis № 3 is confirmed.

3. The higher level of collective victimhood leads to decreased level of forgiveness, shame and guilt among Bulgarian sample. Among Bulgarian Turks only guilt is a factor.

4. Identification is a significant predictor for victimhood. The higher level of identification leads to higher level of victimhood. In the Bulgarian Turks sample there is no connection and dependence between ethnic identification and victimhood, but there is between national identification and collective victimhood. Higher level of RWA increases collective victimhood in the two groups, but more among Bulgarian Turks. Higher levels of SDO decreases the level of victimhood in Bulgarian sample. There is no significant results in Bulgarian Turks sample

5. Bulgarian sample: ANOVA shows that there is no correlation and dependence between victimhood and sex, age and education, but it depends on religion. People who are not at all or not really religious have lower levels of victimhood than those who are quite and very religious. Bulgarian Turks sample: here the dependent variable for victimhood is education. People with higher education experience higher levels of victimhood.