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## Institutional Apologies and Socio-emotional Climate in the South American Context

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## Abstract

This study examined perceptions of institutional apologies related to past political violence and socio-emotional climate among victims and nonvictims in Argentina ( $n = 518$ ), Chile ( $n = 1278$ ), and Paraguay ( $n = 1172$ ) based on quasi-representative samples. The perceptions of apology as sincere and efficient in improving intergroup relations were associated with a positive socio-emotional climate across the three nations. Victims evaluated apologies more positively and perceived a more positive socio-emotional climate compared to nonvictims in Paraguay and Argentina, whereas the opposite was true in Chile where the government opposed the victims' leftist political orientation. The evaluations of apologies also mediated the effects of exposure to violence on the perception of socio-emotional climate but these effects were moderated by the context. Together, these findings suggest that apologies reinforce positive socio-political climate and that personal experience of victimization is an important factor determining these effects.

Keywords: apologies, victims, collective violence, socio-emotional climate, intergroup trust, intergroup empathy, sincerity, South America

## Institutional Apologies and Socio-emotional Climate in the South American Context

Collective traumas are inevitably responsible for the weakening of social cohesion in post-conflict contexts (Bar-Tal, Halperin & de Rivera, 2007; de Rivera & Páez, 2007; Lykes, Martin–Beristain, & Pérez-Armiñan, 2007; Martin–Beristain, Páez, Rimé, & Kayangara, 2010; Rimé, Kanyangara, Yzerbyt, & Páez, 2011; Rimé, Páez, Basabe, & Martinez, 2009). Both institutional apologies and such initiatives as truth and reconciliation commissions are expected to contribute to the avoidance of cycles of revenge and thus to prevent future collective violence (e.g., Sikkink & Booth-Walling, 2007). In recent decades, governments have frequently turned to apologies as means to repair collective harms (see Avruch, 2010; Hayner, 2001; Marrus, 2006).

However, institutional apologies have been usually studied in contexts of a *between-group* conflict, where both sides are clearly defined (e.g., Ferguson et al., 2007; Philpot & Hornsey, 2011; Wohl, Matheson, Branscombe, & Anisman, 2013). Apologies in the context of a *within-group* conflict are a less studied phenomenon. A key contribution of present research is its shift from the focus on evaluations and effectiveness of between-group apologies in the aftermath of a conflict between two groups to *within-group* apologies in the cases of state violence. We thus define between-group apologies as a reconciliatory message expressed by a perpetrator group towards a victim group (e.g., apologies from non-Indigenous Australians to Indigenous citizens of a country or from one nation to another nation), whereas within-group apologies are delivered by representatives of the ingroup to express remorse to all members of the ingroup (e.g., for acts of state violence committed during the dictatorship or for acts of terrorism). We study this particular case of apologies in

three South American post-transitional countries. Second, existing research has mostly studied apologies either among the victim or the perpetrator group, but without a more fine-grained distinction of victims and nonvictims. We examine perceptions of institutional apologies for past collective violence among both *victims* and *nonvictims* and the role of these perceptions in shaping socio-political climate. Finally, the effectiveness of institutional apologies has received mixed empirical support (for reviews see Blatz & Philpot, 2010; Blatz, Schumann, & Ross, 2009; Hornsey & Wohl, 2013) and studies that have examined these effects with large representative or at least geographically diverse samples are practically inexistent (but see Wohl et al., 2013). Thus, we analyze *real-life* apologies for severe transgressions based on random representative samples in three different countries in South America.

### **Within-group Apologies: an Understudied Case**

Research so far has studied *intergroup* apologies and its consequences for intergroup reconciliation. According to the needs-based model of reconciliation (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008; Shnabel, Nadler, Canetti-Nisim, & Ullrich, 2008; Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009), one of the determinants of the willingness to reconcile and thus accept intergroup apologies is different emotional needs of victims and perpetrators. Victims of the conflict experience a loss of status that undermines their identities as powerful actors in the community. In contrast, perpetrators experience a threat to their identity as moral actors. In consequence, perpetrators need to assimilate negative past misdeeds and thus restore their moral image, whereas victims need to reconstruct their collective esteem and become empowered. An intergroup apology has emerged as an adequate tool to provide the perpetrator group with the sense of moral rehabilitation through accepting responsibility for

the wrongdoing and expressing remorse, whereas the victim group with a sense of power, at least the power to accept or reject the apology (Bilali, 2012; Blatz, & Philpot, 2010; Čehajić, Brown & Castano, 2008; Hornsey, Wohl, & Philpot, 2015; Nadler, Malloy & Fisher, 2008). However, in the case of a *within-group* conflict, such as instances of state violence perpetuated by governmental, military, or political authorities against the citizens of a country, the line between the perpetrator and the victim group is blurred and the “sides” of the conflict are difficult to define. The needs-based model of reconciliation with a dichotomous differentiation between the victim and the perpetrator category does not easily fit such contexts. We thus call for differentiation in the study of institutional apologies between the victim and nonvictims category as a more adequate reflection of a within-group conflict reality.

In this study we examine apologies across three South American contexts. “Truth and Reconciliation Commissions” (TRCs) were created to document facts of collective violence during years of repression in Chile<sup>1</sup> (1973-1989), Paraguay<sup>2</sup> (1954-1989), and Argentina<sup>3</sup> (1976-1983), and the heads of states delivered institutional apologies for crimes committed during military dictatorships (Chile, 1991 and 2004; Argentina, 2004; Paraguay, 2008). In these cases, it was the state that perpetuated violence against its own citizens, whereas the left-wing opposition was responsible for only a small number of victims of political violence (less than 5% in Argentina and Chile, and even less in Paraguay). In the aftermath of political violence, the agents of the State carried out such initiatives as truth commissions and the representatives of the same system who perpetuated violence against its citizens in the past, in the present, became initiators of the restorative justice initiatives.

Yet, the notion that there might be individuals unaffected by violence in situations of dictatorship is ethically complicated because the whole society is (at the group level) the victim of human rights violations. Thus, another challenge in the study of apologies is the necessity to examine underlying processes separately among people with direct experience of collective violence from those who do not report first-hand or second-hand experience of victimization, especially in the case of within-group conflict. Existing research has mostly studied apologies either among the victim or the perpetrator group, but without a distinction of victims and nonvictims among the receivers of an apology at the individual level. The study of apologies and reconciliation in such cases calls for expanding existing models based on perpetrator-victim dichotomy to alternative configurations of dynamics in a conflict. Yet, to our knowledge, only a handful of studies have examined such cases of apologies (Bobowik, Bilbao, & Momoitio, 2010; Bobowik, Páez, Basabe, & Slawuta, 2017; Valencia, Momoitio & Idoyaga, 2010), although did not differentiate between victims and nonvictims neither.

### **Exposure to Collective Violence and Perceptions of Apologies in the Aftermath of South American Dictatorships**

Whereas some studies have confirmed positive effects of apologies under specific circumstances (Blatz & Ross, 2012; Brown, Wohl, & Exeline, 2008; Leonard et al., 2011; Wohl et al., 2013), other have shown their limited impact (Ferguson et al., 2007; Nadler & Leviatan, 2006; Philpot, Balvin, Mellor, & Bretherton, 2013; Philpot & Hornsey, 2008, 2011; Steele & Blatz, 2014; Wohl, Hornsey, & Bennet, 2012), especially in the case of real-life apologies for serious transgressions involving political violence (e.g. IRA's apology or Spanish and Basque Government's apologies) (Bobowik et al., 2010; Ferguson et al., 2007;

Philpot et al., 2013; Valencia et al., 2010). The experience of collective violence is expected to be an important predictor of the responses towards institutional apologies.

Scarce research on real-life apologies for serious transgressions involving violence (e.g., IRA's apology) shows that public opinion and members of involved groups are usually skeptical of the motives for an apology and perceive them as cynical statements (Bobowik et al., 2010; Ferguson et al., 2007; Páez, 2010; Philpot et al., 2013; Valencia et al., 2010). Longitudinal research has shown that apologies resulted in a more critical perspective regarding possible change and lower willingness to forgive over time in victims (Wohl et al., 2013). Group apologies are frequently critically evaluated by involved citizens because of how and when they were delivered (i.e., too few, too late, too limited, not including assumptions of responsibility and partially justifying negative actions erode the efficacy of institutional apologies) (see Blatz et al., 2009). Still, two large-scale survey studies provide evidence for overall positive response of victim group to institutional apologies. For instance, longitudinal research conducted in Canada showed that Chinese Canadians exhibited more positive attitudes towards European Canadians after the Canadian government apologized for an historical injustice (i.e., the Chinese Head Tax) (Blatz, Day, & Schreyer, 2014). Likewise, the awareness of the President Clinton's apology for the Tuskegee syphilis medical experiments (compared to the knowledge about the experiments but not apology) was related to more willingness to participate in biomedical research (Katz et al., 2008).

Yet, examining the alleviating effects of apologies requires a deeper understanding of the complexity of psychological processes underlying real-life apologies in their context (Blatz & Philpot, 2010). Importantly, the findings of previous studies suggest that group

apologies tend to be perceived as insincere when it comes to more severe group transgressions and/or the context of an intractable conflict (Shnabel, Halabi, & SimanTov-Nachlieli, 2015), whereas individuals may be more inclined to perceive an apology as relatively genuine when the transgression is not that severe (Wohl et al., 2012) or distant in time (Okimoto, Wenzel, & Hornsey, 2015; Wohl et al., 2013). Based on these findings, Hornsey and Wohl (2013) propose a trust-based model of responses to intergroup apologies, with a distinction between high- and low-trust contexts. Thus, in high-trust contexts the apology is more likely to be accepted and evaluated positively as a sincere gesture of reconciliation. In low-trust contexts, victims would be more likely to be skeptical of an apology and thus process it defensively. Based on this proposal, we can explain why in some of the above mentioned studies victims perceived apologies positively: In these cases transgressions were committed long time ago (Blatz et al., 2013) or were relatively less severe (Katz et al., 2008) and thus apologies took place in high-trust context. In turn, other studies examined the effectiveness of apologies for severe and relatively recent transgressions (Bobowik et al., 2010; Ferguson et al, 2007; Páez, 2010; Philpot et al., 2013; Valencia et al., 2010). In consequence, in these low-trust contexts apologies were less effective and rather negatively perceived by the victims.

Present research was conducted in contexts with diverse characteristics as well. Each of the apologies had different timing, was performed by different figures, was more or less dissociated from the system responsible for political repression, and was supported by more or less material (or other symbolic) reparations. All these factors may have affected the way these apologies were received by the public (including both victims and nonvictims) in the three countries. For instance, in Chile, apologies were given by the President of the Republic,



who played an important role in destabilizing the democratic regime previous to the military dictatorship but was not at all representative of the transgressors (Arnosó, Páez, Cárdenas, Zubieta, Espinosa, & Bilbao, 2015) and the apology was not accompanied by a successful transition to democracy. The level of punishment of transgressors in Chile was relatively low and a moderate left-wing and further right-wing governments in power after inefficient transition were reluctant to victims' claims (Winn, Stern, Lorenz, & Marchesi, 2014). We thus expect that victims in Chile (as compared to nonvictims) will not perceive this apology enthusiastically. In turn, in Argentina and Paraguay, the governments in power at the moment of transition to democracy (and also at the time of data collection) were deeply involved in human rights defense and providing the victims with necessary symbolic and material reparations. In Argentina, perpetrators were duly punished and at the institutional level and necessary changes were implemented during the transition (with a center-left government in the moment of data collection). Similarly, in Paraguay, the apologies were offered in a positive moment of transition, when the country was experiencing a "honeymoon" effect in the first period of a leftist government.

Thus, across these three contexts, the victims and nonvictims could have different subjective rating of apologies. Therefore, in a more favorable, high-trust context, the victims (compared to nonvictims) may be more willing to accept an apology that in less favorable, low-trust contexts. Thus, we expected that victims (as compared to nonvictims as a baseline reference group) will have a more negative evaluation of apologies in Chile, a low-trust context, whereas in Argentina and Paraguay, high-trust contexts, the effect would be the opposite.

## **Exposure to Collective Violence, Apologies and Socio-emotional Climate in the Aftermath of South American Dictatorships**

In the aftermath of collective violence, institutional apologies are expected to satisfy the needs of victims and perpetrators (Shnabel et al., 2008), but also offer hope to restore social harmony and peaceful coexistence (Tavuchis, 1991). This social harmony may be reflected in positive perceptions of socio-emotional climate. Socio-emotional climate refers to predominant and relatively stable collective emotions based on patterns of interactions and perceived as shared by members of social groups such as national communities (Bar-Tal et al., 2007; de Rivera & Páez, 2007; Páez, Espinosa, & Bobowik, 2013). For instance, such a general emotional orientation (Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006) can be expressed as perceptions of collective and interpersonal feelings of *fear* as opposed to the feeling of *security* that basic needs are fulfilled; or feelings of *hope* essential to the formation of social capital, as opposed to *despair*, aroused by pervasive negative conditions of life corruption (de Rivera, 1992; de Rivera & Páez, 2007).

Positive changes in socio-emotional climate, like a decrease in fear, hopelessness, and anger, and an increase in trust, security, and hope, are partially in line with the needs-based model of reconciliation proposing that being a victim is associated with a threat to one's status and power, whereas being a perpetrator threatens one's image as moral and socially acceptable (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). That is, reconciliation implies not only the satisfaction of emotional moral and power needs at the individual level, but also requires instrumental concrete reparations that may have impact on the perception of satisfying intergroup relations at the societal level. Existing research indeed confirms that taking into account social consequences of restorative initiatives is relevant. Victims in more favorable social-

political contexts (Hornsey & Wohl, 2013), where necessary reparatory activities took place, experience higher personal and social well-being (Lykes et al., 2007; Martín–Beristain et al., 2010; Rimé et al., 2009; 2011). In this vein, compared to nonvictims, the victims of collective violence in Chile report a more negative view of current socio-emotional climate (Cárdenas, Páez, Arnosó & Rimé, 2013; Cárdenas, Páez, Rimé, Bilbao, & Asun, 2014; Páez, Basabe, & González, 1997), in line with research conducted in Ireland, South Africa and Rwanda (Ferguson et al, 2007; Gibson, 2004; Rimé et al., 2011). In contrast, in Argentina, victims perceive more positive socio-emotional climate (Arnosó et al., 2015), while in Peru victimization and perception of socio-emotional climate were not significantly associated (Espinosa et al., 2016). These results show that sociopolitical changes can neutralize the negative effects of collective violence (like in Peru) or even reinforce a positive view of society – as in the Argentinean case. Only when accompanied by effective transitional justice activities, apologies will be effective in overcoming the effects of past collective violence for victims (Hornsey & Wohl, 2013).

Favorable view of an apology is necessary for its effectiveness. An apology needs to be perceived as sincere in order to work. Empirical research has confirmed the importance of perceived sincerity for the effectiveness of group apologies in promoting intergroup forgiveness and reconciliation (Okimoto et al., 2015; Philpot & Hornsey, 2011; Shnabel et al., 2015; Staub, 2005; Wohl et al., 2012; 2013; 2015). Through reframing past collective violence as a misdeed that should be repaired, an apology should increase *intergroup trust* (Blatz & Philpot, 2010; Blatz & Ross, 2012; Gibney, Howard-Hassman, Coicaud, & Steiner, 2008; Hornsey & Wohl, 2013; Páez & Liu, 2012) and *intergroup empathy* (Čehajić, 2012), important facilitators of reconciliation. On the one hand, the expression of remorse,

commitment to reject aggressive behavior, concrete reparations, and potential positive exchange (i.e., acceptance of excuses and regrets) can change intergroup relations, reinforcing intergroup trust, positively related to forgiveness and reconciliation (Halabi, Nadler, & Dovidio, 2012; Noor, Brown, González, Manzi, & Lewis, 2008; Páez, Valencia, Etxebarria, Bilbao, & Zubieta, 2011). On the other hand, transitional rituals for overcoming past collective violence such as apologies and truth commissions are expected to promote intergroup empathy, through overcoming collective dwelling, and thus to create an integrated historical narrative which highlights mutual misdeeds and suffering (Gibson, 2004; Páez & Liu, 2012; Páez et al., 2011). In Berndsen, Hornsey, and Wohl's (2015) study, perceived empathy was directly and indirectly associated – through perceived intergroup trust – with intergroup forgiveness.

Together, empirical evidence concerning perceived socio-emotional climate and response to transitional justice procedures in the post-conflict contexts among victims and nonvictims is limited and shows different patterns of responses between these two categories (but see, for instance, Arnoso, Bobowik, & Beristain, 2015; Cárdenas et al., 2014; Espinosa et al., 2016). We examine the view of socio-emotional climate among victims and nonvictims across different socio-political contexts where victims' claims have been addressed differently. We expect that in Chile victims will perceive less positive socio-emotional climate compared to nonvictims. In contrast, in Argentina and Paraguay victims will perceive better socio-emotional climate compared to nonvictims. Further, we examine how different perceptions between victims and nonvictims of institutional apologies that took place in the aftermath of conflict of socio-political context may explain these differences. More precisely, we explore how perceptions of institutional apologies as sincere and efficient

in promoting intergroup trust and empathy are linked to perceptions of socio-emotional climate among victims and nonvictims. We propose that institutional apologies after collective trauma contribute to shifting the society towards a collective positive perception of socio-emotional climate (Bar-Tal et al., 2007; Cárdenas, Páez & Rimé, 2013; Gibson, 2004).

## Method

### Participants

**Argentina.** The sample consisted of 518 participants (59.7% female), with ages ranging from 18 to 83 years ( $M = 35.58$  years and  $SD = 13.62$ ). Data was collected between 2009 and 2010 in different urban areas: Buenos Aires (14%), Mar del Plata (29.8%), semirural cities of Junín (14.4%) and Trenque Lauquen (41%) during 2011-2012. Most participants were set in the center of the ideological spectrum (48.6%), followed by 31.2% identified as left-wing and 20.2% as right-wing. As regards their occupation, participants were unqualified blue collars (40.9%), qualified blue collars, white collars (31.9%), executives or self-employed (6.6%), retired (2.6%), housewives (3.5%), students (12.7%), or other (1.8%).

**Chile.** The sample included 1278 participants (50.8% female), with ages ranging from 18 to 90 years ( $M = 39.66$  years and  $SD = 17.36$ ). Data was collected between 2010 and 2011 in the country's most populous urban areas: Santiago (26.1%), Valparaíso (30.8%), Concepción (14.4%) and Antofagasta (28.7%). The 49.2% of the interviewed population were left-wing oriented, 34.5% identified with the center in ideology, and a minority identified as right-wing (16.3%). Participants were unqualified blue collars (8.1%), qualified blue collars, white collars (14.9%), executives or self-employed (22.7%), retired (4.3%), housewife (7.8%), students (24.6%), or other (17.6%).

**Paraguay.** The sample consisted of 1182 participants (52.3% female), with ages ranging from 18 to 90 years ( $M = 38.43$  years and  $SD = 15.17$ ). Data was collected 2009 and 2010 in the country's most populous urban area Asunción (66.6%) and a semirural area Misiones and Caagazú (33.4%) during 2012-2013. The majority were defined in the center of the ideological spectrum (40.4%), followed by 38.4% who were left-wing oriented and 21.2% right-wing oriented. Participants were unqualified blue collars (33.6%), qualified blue collars, white collars (25%), executives or self-employed (6.9%), retired (1.4%), housewife (11.1%), students (17.6%), or other (4.4%).

### **Procedure**

A random-route and stratified sample was used to establish appropriate population ratios for sex and different age groups in each country. Participants were selected and interviewed individually by a team of volunteer university students who were trained in data collection and worked with a sampling guideline. To be included, participants had to sign an "informed consent" explaining the study objectives and guaranteeing response anonymity and confidentiality. Once they agreed to participate in the study, respondents were asked to read a text informing them about the apologies and TRCs and then filled in a paper-and-pencil questionnaire.

### **Measures**

The data used in this study form part of a larger survey on the perceptions of TRCs in South America (see Páez, Espinosa, & Beristain, 2015). For the purpose of this study, we used the following measures.

**Exposure to collective violence.** The exposure to collective violence was operationalized with the following two questions: "Do you consider yourself a victim of the

violence perpetrated by the state during the last dictatorship)?” (Yes/No) and “Are there any victims of state violence or its agents during the last dictatorship among your family members or close friends?” (Yes/No). Participants who responded affirmatively to the first question, the second question, or both, were categorized as victims whereas those who responded negatively to both questions were categorized as nonvictims.

**The knowledge of the work done by the TRC.** The knowledge of the TRC was measured with a single item: “Are you aware of the work done by the TRC?” with “yes/no” response format.

**Perceptions of apologies.** Three questions assessed respondents' views on (1) the sincerity of the State's apology (“Do you consider the President's apology and message about NCTR as sincere?”), (2) its effectiveness for improving empathy (“Do you consider that the President's apology [and message about TRC] strengthen intergroup empathy, helping to understand other's suffering?”), (3) its effectiveness for promoting intergroup trust (“Do you think that the President's apology [and message about TRC] reinforce trust between groups?”). The response options ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a lot*). In order to test a more parsimonious model, in main analyses we used a latent factor composed of these three items. This aggregated measure obtained a satisfactory reliability within each of the countries (Chile:  $\alpha = .82$ , Paraguay:  $\alpha = .87$ , Argentina:  $\alpha = .77$ ).

**Positive socio-emotional climate.** Respondents' perception of the socio-political climate of their country was assessed using two items from the *Emotional Climate Dimension Scale CD 24* (de Rivera, 1992). Respondents were asked how far they agreed with the following statements: “People in the country feel secured that there is enough food, water, medicine, and shelter for themselves and their families, and that they will continue

having these goods”; and “People have hope because things in this country are improving”. These items tap the perception of structural conditions affording collective emotions of security and hope. A Likert-type response scale was used, ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). Correlations between these two items indicated a satisfactory level of internal consistency. This aggregated measure obtained a satisfactory reliability within each of the countries (Chile:  $r = .59$ , Paraguay:  $r = .43$ , Argentina:  $r = .54$ ).

**Socio-demographic characteristics.** Respondents also provided their socio-demographic details such as age, gender, ideology (on a scale from 1= *extreme left* to 7= *extreme right*), city of residence, and occupation.

### **Analytical Strategy**

In order to respond to the main objective of present research, i.e., examine the relationship between exposure to collective violence, perceptions of apologies and socio-emotional climate and involved mediating and moderating effects, we estimated a multi-group mediation model in Mplus 7.4 with exposure to collective violence being the main predictor, perceptions of apologies the mediator, and socio-emotional climate the outcome. We estimated this model simultaneously for the three countries allowing the paths to differ across the countries (i.e., we introduced country as a moderator in this model). We also estimated an alternative model where socio-emotional climate was the mediator and the perceptions of apologies the outcome. In both models, we specified two latent factors: perceptions of apologies were measured with three observed indicators, whereas to specify socio-emotional climate in the model we used two items. We controlled for age, sex, and political orientation in relation to the mediator and the outcome variable.



An array of indices was used to assess model fit: a) the chi-square value of statistical fitting of the empirical model, which is expected to take low values (be non-significant); b) the comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) as indicators of goodness of fit, with values of over .90 considered acceptable, and values greater than .95 representing good fit.; and c) the root mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA), a value of under .05 being recommended as indicating good fit, and reasonable fit at values between .05 and .08 (Bentler, 1990; Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Hu & Bentler, 1998). Given the  $\chi^2$  test's sensitivity to sample size and our relatively large sample, it may not be appropriate to interpret the  $\chi^2$  statistic, and thus we paid more attention to incremental fit measures such as CFI (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003). More precisely, to compare nested models, we focused on a change in CFI value. A value of CFI smaller than or equal to 0.01 indicates that the null hypothesis of invariance should not be rejected (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). Correlational analyses were applied to test the discriminant and concurrent validity. Finally, we estimated indirect effect based on estimates, standard errors (SEs), and the confidence intervals (CIs) derived from the bootstrap distribution with 10000 bootstrap estimates. Bootstrapped confidence intervals are superior to the standard forms of estimating standard errors of indirect effects (Hayes, 2013). An indirect effect is significant if the CI does not include the 0 value.

## Results

### **Preliminary Analyses: Exposure to Violence and Awareness of Commissions and Apologies**

Concerning the exposure to violence in each of the countries, 30.3% of the Argentinean sample considered themselves victims of human rights violations perpetrated in

Argentina between 1976 and 1983 whereas 69.7% were nonvictims. In Chile, 57.3% considered themselves victims of state violence between 1973 and 1989 and 42.7% were not affected by political violence. In Paraguay 54.9% of participants identified themselves as victims of human rights violations committed between 1954 and 2003, and 45.1% were nonvictims. It is important to remark that victim category included direct and indirect victims (e.g., having a relative being a victim of police or state violence, but also victims of social repression such as being fired or exiled).

Regarding the knowledge of the work done by truth and reconciliation commissions including apologies, in Argentina a large majority (90.1%) was aware of the TRC's work, whereas in Chile it was 48.9% and in Paraguay 45.4%. Chi-square test indicated that the differences between the three countries in the awareness of the TRC were statistically significant ( $\chi^2_{(2)} = 320.40$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Awareness of the commissions' work was also associated with the closeness to violent events, victims (66.7%) reporting greater awareness of the TRC work than nonvictims (41.8%,  $\chi^2_{(2)} = 185.95$ ;  $p < .001$ ).

Descriptive statistics by country and exposure to collective violence are presented in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

### **Measurement Invariance across Nations**

Given that our aim was to test the mediation hypothesis across three different countries, the next step was to examine whether the items used in our analysis measured the same latent constructs in Chile, Argentina, and Paraguay. The same factor structure was

found and the factor loadings were positive and high for all the items (configural measurement invariance fit:  $\chi^2 (12) = 90.50, p < .001, CFI = .98, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .08$ ). The metric invariance model fit was similar to that of the unconstrained model,  $\chi^2 (18) = 136.60, p < .001, CFI = .98, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .08, \Delta CFI = 0$ ). Thus, the latent constructs of socio-emotional climate and the perceptions of apologies were invariant across the three contexts. Therefore, we could proceed with estimating structural relations using data from these three countries.

### **Multigroup Structural Equation Modeling: Comparing Alternative Models**

Further, in order to test our mediation hypotheses, we estimated with Mplus the multigroup structural equations a mediation model using country as a moderating variable (Figure 1). We controlled the analyses for demographic characteristics (age, sex, and ideology), in relation to both the perceptions of the apologies and the socio-emotional climate. Correlations between latent constructs included in the model per each country are presented in Table 2.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

First, we tested two alternative models: Model 1, where perception of apologies mediated the relationship between victimization and perceived socio-emotional climate, and Model 2, where perceived socio-emotional climate mediated the relationship between victimization and perceptions of apologies. Given that the unconstrained models had exactly the same number of parameters, we could not compare their model fits because they were

identical ( $\chi^2 (58) = 404.36, p < .001, CFI = .94, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .079$ ). In order to choose a more adequate model, we compared completely constrained models. In this case, we found that Model 1 showed a better fit ( $\chi^2 (64) = 525.80, p < .001, CFI = .92, TLI = .89, RMSEA = .087$ ) compared to Model 2 ( $\chi^2 (66) = 618.71, p < .001, CFI = .90, TLI = .87, RMSEA = .094, \Delta CFI = .02$ ). Thus, we accepted Model 1, where the perceptions of apologies mediated the relationship between victimization and perceived socio-emotional climate as a better model.

### **Final Model**

To test whether the coefficients for the paths depicted in Figure 1 differ significantly across the three contexts, we compared the fit of a fully constrained Model 1 to the fit of the models in which specific paths were allowed to vary between groups. If a model with an unconstrained path has a better fit, this is evidence for a moderated relationship. Indeed, we found that unconstrained model ( $\chi^2 (58) = 404.36, p < .001, CFI = .94, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .079$ ) showed a better fit than the constrained model ( $\chi^2 (64) = 525.80, p < .001, CFI = .92, TLI = .89, RMSEA = .087, \Delta \chi^2 = 121.44, \Delta CFI = .02$ ). Further, after inspection of coefficients in an unconstrained model, we next proceeded with relaxing coefficients in the constrained model so that we can find the most parsimonious model. First, we allowed the coefficients for the relation between exposure to collective violence and perceptions of apologies to differ in Chile. This model had a significantly better fit than the constrained model,  $\chi^2 (63) = 445.52, p < .001, CFI = .93, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .080, \Delta CFI = .01$ . Releasing this association for all the three countries did not further improve the model fit ( $\chi^2 (62) = 441.05, p < .001, CFI = .93, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .080, \Delta CFI = 0$ ). Second, we released for Chile the coefficient for the relationship between victimization and perceived

socio-emotional climate ( $\chi^2(62) = 434.31, p < .001, CFI = .94, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .079$ ) and reached a model fit similar to that of completely unconstrained model ( $\Delta CFI = 0$ ). This model was accepted as the final and the best fitting model<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, the association between the perceptions of apologies and socio-emotional climate could be treated as identical in all countries. This relationship was always positive and significant (see Figure 1), indicating that the more positive perception of apologies, the more positively is perceived socio-emotional climate in their country. Further, the association between being victimized (as compared to non victims) and the perception of apologies was negative and significant in Chile, meaning that nonvictims expressed more positive perception of apologies compared to victims. In turn, in Paraguay and Argentina this association was significantly positive and invariant across the two countries: victims perceived the apology as more effective and sincere compared to nonvictims. Also, the relationship between victimization and perceived socio-emotional climate was negative and significant in Chile, whereas positive but not significant (and again invariant) in Paraguay and Argentina.

Finally, we hypothesized that the key characteristics of apologies would mediate the effect of exposure to collective violence on positive socio-emotional climate and that these effects would be moderated by the context. To test this assumption, we estimated indirect effects for each group. The indirect effect of exposure to collective violence on perceived socio-emotional climate through the perceptions of apologies was negative and significant in Chile ( $B = -0.045, SE = 0.021, 97.5\% CI: -0.086 \text{ to } -0.005$ ) but positive, significant and invariant in Paraguay and Argentina ( $B = 0.232, SE = 0.030, 99.5\% CI: 0.155 \text{ to } 0.309$ ). That is, in Chile the negative effect of exposure to collective violence on positive socio-emotional

climate was attenuated by the perceived sincerity and efficacy of intergroup apologies. In turn, being exposed to collective violence in Argentina and Paraguay was associated with a more positive perception of apologies compared to nonvictims, and therefore led to a more positive perception of socio-emotional climate.

INSERT FIGURE 1

### **Discussion**

In the present research, we examined perceptions of institutional apologies among victims and nonvictims in three post-transitional contexts in South America, and how perceived sincerity and efficacy of these apologies shape socio-political climate in a country that suffered oppression. The results suggest that the effects of collective violence in the three transitional contexts in South America (i.e., Argentina, Chile, and Paraguay) have been partially overcome, although there is still a long and difficult road ahead for reconciliation to be achieved. The positive effects can be attributed to a thorough process of transitional justice that was applied in each of the described contexts, including institutional apologies delivered by the heads of state of each of the countries (Sikkink & Booth–Walling, 2007).

At the descriptive level, the apologies were overall evaluated as relatively sincere across the three contexts, but with the most negative perception in Chile, probably due to the fact that President Aylwin and his political party initially supported the military putsch. Also, a majority in Paraguay and a substantial minority of around one third of respondents in Argentina agreed that the apology helped to understand other's suffering and to increase intergroup empathy. These results are in line with previous research showing that there is

also a general attitude of agreement with the work of the TRCs in these contexts (Arnosó et al., 2015; Cárdenas, Ascorra, San Martín, Rodríguez, & Páez, 2013; Cárdenas, Zubieta, Páez, Arnoso, & Espinosa, 2016).

One of the most important contributions of our research is that it provides empirical evidence that the perceptions of institutional apologies and perceived socio-emotional climate are positively related and invariant across the three South American contexts. Our findings lend further support to the literature suggesting that such features of intergroup apologies as their sincerity (Okimoto et al., 2015; Philpot & Hornsey, 2011; Shnabel et al., 2015; Wohl et al., 2012; 2013; 2015), and efficacy to increase intergroup empathy (Berndsen et al., 2015; Noor et al., 2008) and trust (Halabi et al., 2012; Hornsey & Wohl, 2013; Noor et al., 2008; Páez et al., 2011) are crucial for reconciliation in the aftermath of collective violence. By testing two alternative models, we showed that the model where the perceptions of institutional apologies predicted perceived socio-emotional climate fitted the data better compared to a model with the position of the two variables switched. That is, institutional apologies were shown to be effective in fostering a positive perception of socio-emotional climate among the participants of the study. However, an alternative explanation that the perceptions of socio-political climate lead to a more positive view of apologies is also plausible and future longitudinal research should confirm the causality of this relationship. Still, our findings converge with previous experimental and longitudinal research demonstrating effectiveness of intergroup apologies for such outcomes as intergroup forgiveness and support for reconciliation (Blatz & Ross, 2012; Brown et al., 2008; Leonard et al., 2011; Wohl et al., 2013).

Yet, our study expands previous research by demonstrating effectiveness of an institutional apology in terms of societal consequences, such as positive socio-emotional levels of collective security and hope, relevant facets of socio-emotional climate. Socio-emotional climate or collective emotion orientation (de Rivera, 1992; de Rivera & Páez, 2007) is conceived off as predominance of certain repeated emotions in a group or society, embedded in shared perceptions and beliefs that permeate social interactions. Thus, beyond individual's feelings of sadness, security, or hope, socio-emotional climate reflects dominant emotions as they are perceived in others. These perceptions are supposed to have effects on collective behavior (see Salmela & von Scheve, 2014). For instance, a positive perception of emotional climate including security and hope was associated in previous research with rejection of violence as a legitimate political form of conflict (Cárdenas et al., 2016; Espinosa et al., 2016).

Our results also bring to the forefront the role of the context in the study of intergroup apologies. The effects of exposure to collective violence on the perceptions of apologies depended on the context. In Chile victims attributed less sincerity and efficacy to apologies compared to nonvictims, whereas the opposite pattern was found in Paraguay and Argentina. In the same vein, the effects of exposure to collective violence on the perceptions of socio-emotional climate in the country were also context-dependent. Results also provided solid empirical support for indirect effects of exposure to violence on positive socio-emotional climate through the perceptions of institutional apologies. These findings show the relevance of the context's response to the victims' needs and claims (for instance, the impact of TRCs and transitional justice activities in Argentina compared to their limited consequences in Chile) (see Hornsey & Wohl, 2013). Hence, the evaluations of apologies play an important



role in explaining differences between victims and nonvictims in their perceptions of post-transitional socio-political climate and thus (implicitly) their satisfaction with transitional justice initiatives. We found that especially in the case of more successful and relatively high-trust contexts such as Paraguay and Argentina, differences between victims and nonvictims in their perceptions of socio-political climate are fully explained by favorable perceptions of institutional apologies delivered as a part of this restorative justice process.

These findings together reflect socio-political context in each of the countries under study. In Argentina transitional justice had a high impact on the nation. The fact that the representatives of institutions directly related to the perpetrators of transgressions committed during the dictatorship publicly acknowledged their responsibility explains positive evaluation of apologies among the victims in this country. In turn, in Paraguay the survey was performed in an optimistic phase of Lugo's Government (he was expelled from the presidency one year later), who was not involved in the dictatorship. It is also important to highlight that active governments in Argentina and Paraguay during the data collection with a left-center political orientation were deeply involved in human rights defense in the aftermath of dictatorship and collective violence. In this sense, we can speculate that exposure to collective violence was associated with a more favorable perception of socio-political situation in these contexts because Argentinean and Paraguayan governments addressed the victims' needs more efficiently. Such results also support existing empirical evidence showing that victims more involved in positive sociopolitical contexts report higher wellbeing (Lykes et al., 2007; Martin-Beristain et al., 2010; Rimé et al., 2009, 2011).

In turn, the more critical response among victims as compared to nonvictims in Chile reflects the fact that transitional justice initiatives (i.e., TRC and related institutional

apologies) in this country were limited (the political transition in Chile was actually negotiated with the former dictator). For instance, the evaluations of apologies were less optimistic in the case of Chile because they were delivered by the President of the Republic who played an important role in destabilizing the democratic regime previous to the military dictatorship. Also, the data were collected in Chile during the ruling of a conservative government. Therefore, conceivably, transitional justice process in Chile was less satisfactory for those directly affected by transgressions. This pattern of results is in line with previous research on the impact of collective violence among Chilean victims (Cárdenas et al., 2013; 2014). Together, the victims' response to reparatory activities was moderated by the extent to which the context facilitates their empowerment (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008).

This study is not devoid of limitations. The most important drawback is the retrospective character of the survey that impedes to infer about the causal relationship between the evaluation of apologies and the positive view of socio-emotional climate. In addition, the measure of socio-emotional climate was an abbreviated instrument and did not enable exploring differential effects of perception of apologies on different aspects of socio-emotional climate. We used a short two-item measure of socio-emotional climate to ensure structural equivalence. However, similar differences between victims and nonvictims in the perceptions of socio-emotional climate and the association between a more positive climate and effective transitional justice rituals and reparatory activities were also found in studies that used expanded measures of socio-emotional climate and that included explicit emotional labels (Cárdenas et al., 2016).

The responses collected in the present research raise provocative questions and challenges that future research will have to address. Above all, research on perceptions and

effectiveness of institutional apologies is in need of a more fine-grained distinction of nonvictims. In our study, we were not able to differentiate participants who could be considered as a perpetrator group. Such a differentiation could possibly yield quite different results as concerns the perceptions of apologies and socio-emotional climate in the country. Also, the differences between the primary and secondary victims should be examined in future research. Inclusive victim perceptions or shared values may be another important factor explaining differential effects we found across the three contexts. That is, the understanding that despite the asymmetric nature of the conflict both political camps have suffered from it (Shnabel, Halabi, & Noor, 2013; Vollhardt, 2015) or the victims' sense of shared values (Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather & Platow, 2008), are one of the important concerns in restorative justice procedures and therefore may be explanatory mechanisms of the effects found in the present study that future investigation should take into account.

### **Conclusions**

To our knowledge, this is the first empirical attempt to test the effectiveness of institutional apologies in the framework of within-group state violence across three distinct contexts simultaneously, using quasi-representative data including both victimized and nonvictimized participants and applying multigroup models that allow testing whether the effects are variant across groups. Importantly, the study reached real-life victims respondents, a population hardly targeted so far in social psychology generally, and more specifically in research on intergroup apologies. We demonstrated that positive evaluations of institutional apologies are associated with a more positive view of socio-emotional climate, revealing the same pattern across three different transitional South American contexts, even controlling for important explanatory factors such as the exposure to

collective violence and political orientation. Further, the effects of exposure to collective violence on the perceptions of apologies and socio-emotional climate in the country were moderated by the context. This is a positive conclusion: being a victim of collective violence did not imply a generalized and stable negative perception of predominating collective emotions in a society. When the political context is favorable, victims appear as survivor citizens that share a positive view of the social milieu based on security and hope.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The aim of the National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR, 1991) in Chile was to collect information on “missing prisoners” and extralegal political executions. In turn, the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture (NCPPT, 2004) was created to identify people who were imprisoned and tortured by state agents for political reasons and to propose compensation measures. The NCTR (known as Rettig Report) and NCPPT (known as Valech Report) jointly established that more than 3.000 deaths (detained-disappeared or executed without trial) had occurred for political reasons in Chile, almost all by the hands of the armed forces or the police. In addition, the NCPPT reported more than 27.000 cases of political imprisonment and/or torture. Material and symbolic reparatory actions followed as results of these commissions and reports published by the head of state, including institutional apologies expressed successively by two Presidents of Chile, Patricio Aylwin (1990–1995) and Ricardo Lagos (2000–2005). Being the first democratic elected president after Pinochet’s dictatorship, in 1991, Aylwin insisted in a televised broadcast from the presidential palace in Santiago that the Chilean state should be responsible for the crimes of the past: “The agents of the state caused so much suffering and the responsible bodies of the state could not or did not know how to preclude or punish it, while the society failed to react properly. The state and society as a whole are responsible for action or omission (...). This is why I dare, in my position as the President of the Republic, to assume the representation of the nation and, in its name, to beg forgiveness from the relatives of the victims” (Aylwin, 1992, p. 132). In turn, addressing the findings of the national commission on political detention and torture in Valech Report, President Ricardo Lagos said: “I felt very closely the magnitude of suffering, the injustice of extreme cruelty,

and the immensity of the pain. I publicly express my solidarity, affection, appreciation, and caring for all the victims and their families” (Lagos, 2004, November 28). The president also acknowledged that the armed forces had been the instrument of state-sponsored repression and called on Chileans to unite in rejection of torture and oppression in order to “never again live it, to never again deny it”. While the president said that the principal act of “moral reparation” was the publication of the report itself, he accepted the commission's recommendations of a life pension for every victim of torture. “The state must pay compensation, however austere, as a way of recognizing its responsibility” he said (Lagos, 2004, November 28).

<sup>2</sup> Created in 2004 with the purpose of documenting cases of human rights violations, Paraguayan Truth and Justice Commission (2008) established that almost 4.000 persons were murdered, 337 detained-disappeared, 19.862 imprisoned by political reasons, 18.772 tortured, and 3.470 exiled (Truth and Justice Commission, 2008). During the presentation of the commission’s report, the former President Fernando Lugo made a public apology to the victims of General Stroessner’s military government. He said: “Forgiveness, forgiveness for every inch of lacerated body pain, physical, psychic and spiritual territory of the fighters from our new home, while other states slept insensitive nap living with a shameful dictatorship. I apologize in the name of the nation that I represent.” (Truth and Justice Commission, 2008, p.15).

<sup>3</sup> In Argentina, the so called National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP), created in 1983, developed a report called “Never Again” (The National Commission on the Disappeared, 2006). The report established that more than 9.000 deaths had occurred for political reasons in Argentina, as a result of detentions / disappearances or executions

without trial by the police, the army, and the navy. Two decades later, in March 2004, former President Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007) announced that the facilities of the School of Naval Mechanics of Buenos Aires (ran as a clandestine detention center where over 5.000 people were killed) would be converted into a “Space for Memory and for the Protection and Defense of Human Rights”. Later, in his speech, Kirchner apologized on behalf of the State for the crimes committed during the “dirty war” of the seventies: “As President of Argentina, I come here to apologize on behalf of the State for the shame of having kept silenced during the two decades of democratic ruling, for all the atrocities” (The Pink House, Presidency of the Nation of Argentina, 2004, March 3).

<sup>4</sup> The final model was also tested controlling for knowledge about the TRC. This model achieved a model fit similar to that of the final model ( $\chi^2 (62) = 434.31, p < .001, CFI = .935, TLI = .90, RMSEA = .076; \Delta CFI < .01$ ).

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Table 1

*Adjusted for sex, age, and political orientation means and standard errors: perceptions of apologies and socio-emotional climate by country and exposure to collective violence*

	Chile		Paraguay		Argentina	
	<i>M (SE)</i>		<i>M (SE)</i>		<i>M (SE)</i>	
	Nonvictims	Victims	Nonvictims	Victims	Nonvictims	Victims
Sincerity	2.24 (0.04)	1.94 (0.03)	2.36 (0.04)	2.86 (0.03)	2.39 (0.05)	2.69 (0.07)
Efficacy (Trust)	2.01 (0.04)	1.78 (0.03)	2.02 (0.04)	2.53 (0.03)	1.91 (0.04)	2.01 (0.07)
Efficacy (Empathy)	2.20 (0.04)	1.89 (0.03)	2.14 (0.04)	2.66 (0.03)	2.19 (0.05)	2.44 (0.07)
Socio-emotional climate	4.21 (0.06)	3.57 (0.05)	3.03 (0.06)	3.44 (0.05)	3.19 (0.07)	3.66 (0.11)

Table 2

*Correlations across three countries*

Chile ( <i>n</i> = 1254)	1	2.	3.	4.	5
1. Perceived socio-emotional climate	-				
2. Perceptions of apologies	.41***	-			
3. Experience of collective violence	-.25***	-.14***	-		
4. Sex (female)	-.09**	-.03	-.05	-	
5. Age	.20***	.16***	.01	-.01	-
6. Political orientation (right-wing)	.40***	.23***	-.39***	.01	0.12***
<hr/>					
Paraguay ( <i>n</i> = 1123)					
1. Perceived socio-emotional climate	-				
2. Perceptions of apologies	.64***	-			
3. Experience of collective violence	.23***	.33***	-		

4.	Sex (female)	-.07	-.04	-.03	-	
5.	Age	-.08*	.002	.18***	.002	-
6.	Political orientation (right-wing)	-.38***	-.50***	-.21***	.03	.07*

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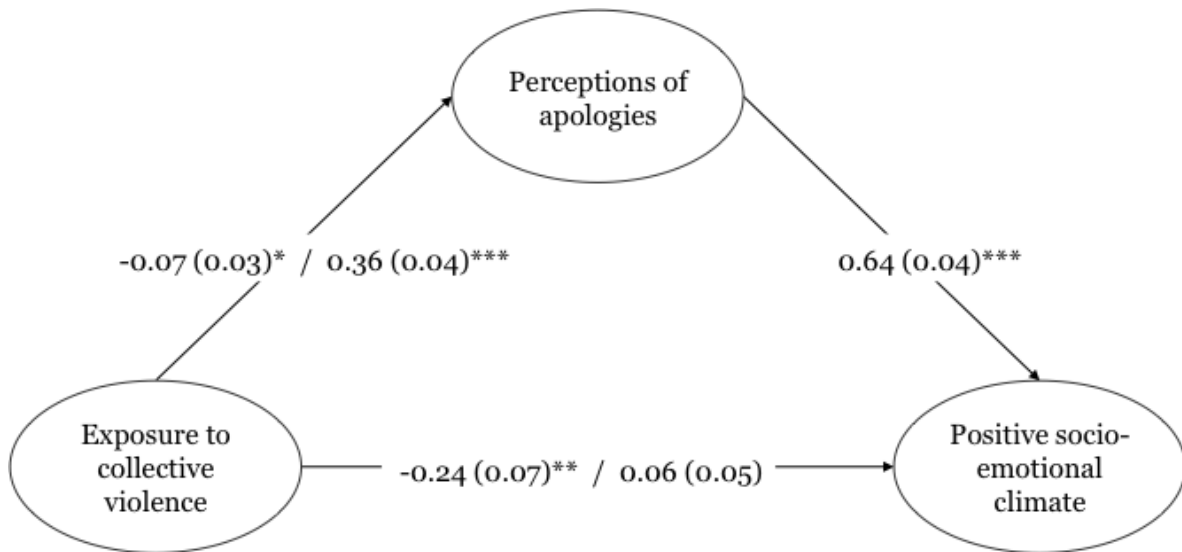
Argentina ( $n = 490$ )

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1.	Perceived socio-emotional climate	-				
2.	Perceptions of apologies	.51***	-			
3.	Experience of collective violence	.22***	.28***	-		
4.	Sex (female)	-.20***	-.11*	-.06	-	
5.	Age	-.09	-.12*	.03	-.12**	-
6.	Political orientation (right-wing)	-.38***	-.24***	-.26***	.04	.12**

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Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$



*Figure 1.* Structural multi-group model with country as a grouping variable. The effect of exposure to collective violence on positive socio-emotional climate as mediated through perceptions of apologies. Unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in the brackets released for Chile as compared to Paraguay and Argentina for the relationship between exposure to collective violence and positive socio-emotional climate and exposure to collective violence and perceptions of apologies, and invariant across the three countries for the relationship between the perceptions of apologies and positive socio-emotional climate. The model controls for age, sex, and political orientation in relation to the mediator and outcome variables \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .