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Collective identity factors and the attitude toward violence in defense of ethnicity or religion among Muslim youth of Turkish and Moroccan Descent

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ABSTRACT

Collective deprivation, connectedness to mainstream society (friendship and psychological closeness to majority individuals) and in-group identity factors (i.e. strength of in-group identity, and perceived in-group superiority) were investigated among Muslim Dutch youth of Turkish and Moroccan descent, in relation to their attitudes toward violence in defense of religion or ethnicity, and the willingness to use such violence. Data come from a sample of students ($N = 398$, age 14–18 years). Results show that perceptions of in-group superiority were predicted by higher connectedness to the in-group and lower connectedness to Dutch society in both ethnic groups and by collective relative deprivation among Moroccan-Dutch participants only. In both groups, attitudes toward violent in-group defense and violence willingness were predicted by perceptions of in-group superiority. Collective relative deprivation directly predicted more positive attitudes to violent in-group defense among Turkish-Dutch youth, as well as indirectly (via in-group superiority) among Moroccan-Dutch. Connectedness to the in-group directly predicted the willingness to use a violent in-group defense among the Turkish-Dutch participants and again indirectly (via in-group superiority) among Moroccan-Dutch participants. The results underline the relevance of collective identification processes to the attitudes of violent in-group defense among young Muslims of the second generation in a rather tensed socio-political climate. The study outcomes emphasize the importance of examining the dynamics between different Muslim groups, as their unique acculturation patterns yield particular pathways to the attitudes toward violent in-group defense and the willingness hereof.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Anti-Muslim sentiments in society and their impact on intergroup attitudes

As a result of immigration Western European societies have witnessed a growth in ethnic and religious diversity, confronting native populations with new challenges to their identity and to intergroup relations. Muslim immigrants in particular are being depicted as the 'negative other' in several Western European countries (Betz & Meret, 2009) and the perception of a "Failure of Multiculturalism" (Modood & Ahmad, 2007) has become rooted. In the Dutch case, for instance, 50% of native youth reported negative attitudes about Muslims (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002), and that Islamic traditions are 'incompatible with mainstream values and life style' (Velasco González, Verkuyten, Weesie, & Poppe, 2008). Furthermore, the Dutch native population has become more assimilative in their orientation toward migrants over the past 15 years (Dagevos & Huijnk, 2012). The Dutch national populist party PVV ("Freedom Party") which openly accuses Muslims of having a backward culture and religion, became the third largest party in the national elections in 2012.

According to some researchers, there seems to be a relationship between increasing anti-Islam sentiments in Western Europe and the emergence of (violent) radicalization in young European Muslims (Abbas, 2012; Moghaddam, 2005; Stroink, 2007). The Netherlands experienced a "homegrown" terrorist attack (e.g. the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh) and the formation of a "homegrown" terrorist network (the *Hofstadgroup*, see Vidino, 2007) by young second generation Dutch Muslims in 2004 and 2005. In addition, more recently the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice announced a considerable increase in Dutch Muslim youth traveling to Syria to fight for the cause of their Muslim brothers against the regime of Assad, alongside with Belgian, British, French and Swedish Muslim youth (NCTV, 2013). Although only a small number of individuals may eventually proceed to ethnic or religiously based action, there seems to be a fertile soil for intergroup antagonism, with the use of violence as a possible ultimate consequence (Veldhuis & Bakker, 2009).

The present research focuses on the important question of which factors can predict the attitudes toward violent in-group defense by others and the willingness of oneself to use such violence. As outlined in greater detail below, we expect collective relative deprivation of Muslims, the extent to which individuals feel connected to the society as a whole, a strong in-group identity and out-group friendship to be key factors. We expect that these factors influence the perception that the in-group is superior to other groups, a factor that has been found to be a key predictor of attitudes toward ideology-based violence in previous research (Doosje, Loseman, & Van den Bos, 2013). An additional aim of the present research is to investigate possible differences based on ethnic minority group membership regarding the attitudes toward ethnic and religious violence. As argued by Verkuyten and Zaremba (2005), much of the research focusing on intergroup attitudes tends to focus on dyadic in-group versus out-group relations, ignoring the dynamics of current multi-ethnic contexts in Western cities. As will be further outlined below, ethnic groups may differ in terms of risk and protective factors that influence their attitudes toward ethnic and religious violence. These factors include the societal status of ethnic groups and the social cohesion of ethnic communities. In the present research, we study two minority Dutch Muslim groups (i.e. Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch), which are expected to differ on factors predicting attitudes toward ideology-based violence and the willingness to use such violence.

1.2. Dutch Muslim youth of Turkish and Moroccan Descent: migration history, community structure and identity processes

Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch Muslims belong to the largest immigrant groups in the Netherlands (Huijnk & Dagevos, 2012), making up about 5% of the Dutch population. Turkish and Moroccan immigrants, coming from predominantly rural and socio-economically disadvantaged areas, arrived as guest laborers to perform low-skilled factory work from the 1970s onwards (Ersanilli & Koopmans, 2011). Initially, these male workers came on their own, expecting to eventually return to their home countries with their savings. From the 1970s onward, the number of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants increased through family reunification, family formation and marriage migration. The majority of those immigrants and their family members stayed in the Netherlands. The social and economic position of the Turkish and Moroccan-Dutch first and second generation immigrants is worse compared to that of majority individuals, as in several other Western European host societies (Ersanilli & Koopmans, 2011). This is reflected in higher drop-out of education, higher unemployment rates, and more health problems. The Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch ethnic groups share in common their religious background in that most are Sunni Muslims (85% and 90% respectively, Maliepaard & Gijsberts, 2012).

Research indicates that the overlap between ethnic and religious identification in these groups is very high. Turkish and Moroccan immigrants who identify strongly with their religious group also identify more strongly with their ethnic group, and this interconnection is more pronounced among the second generation (Maliepaard, Lubbers, & Gijsberts, 2010; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2014). The overlap in ethnic and religious identities seems to be more profound among members of minority groups who hold numerous underprivileged statuses, as is the case for the Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2014). They experience deprivation associated with their collective identity categories in close connection and simultaneously, which is associated with intergroup threat. Together, these processes enhance the inclination for simplified (that is, overlapping) social identity structures (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2014). However, differences across minority groups can be expected as well, as outlined in the next section.

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