Summary
The Effect of Social Comparisons on National Nostalgia

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The root of the "nostalgia" comes from the Greek words nostos (return home) and algia (longing/ suffering) (Smeekes, 2015). Today nostalgia defined as "a sentimental longing for one's past" (Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008).

What is Collective Nostalgia?

Based upon intergroup emotions theory, collective nostalgia can be defined as the nostalgic reverie that is depend on thinking oneself in terms of a particular social identity or as a member of a particular group (Wildschut, Bruder, Robertson, van Tilburg, & Sedikides, 2014). Studies showed that collective nostalgia is different from personal nostalgia, regulates attitudes and behaviours towards the ingroup, has stronger effects for those high in social identification, and is socially shared within a group (Smeekes, Verkuyten, & Martinovic, 2014). Although the effects of collective nostalgia have been studied, what triggers collective nostalgia still remains as a question.

Collective Nostalgia from a Social Identity Theory Perspective

From a social psychological perspective, it is very understandable that people are inclined to perceive their ingroup's past as glorious. According to Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), people are motivated to maintain a positively distinct social identity. As common history is an important part of one's social identity (e.g., Liu & Hilton, 2005), it is, therefore, understandable that people are inclined to perceive their ingroup's past superior to other groups. Such cases of "collective nostalgia" have been a topic of interest in recent social psychological research. Several studies pointed out that longing for the "good old days" of one's group strengthens ingroup cohesion but deteriorates intergroup relations as it makes one's social identity more salient (Smeekes, 2015; Smeekes & Verkuyten, 2015; Smeekes et al., 2014; Wildschut et al., 2014).

In this research, a SIT approach was adopted. So,

instead of focusing on within-group processes (i.e., continuity or discontinuity in collective identity) as in most of the past studies, the focus was on the possible effects of intergroup comparisons. According to SIT, people want to perceive their ingroup as positively distinct from others. If, however, it is not possible to make a favorable comparison, that is perceived as a threat to the value of one's social identity (see Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). In such cases, if it is not possible or desired to leave the group, people compensate for it through different means. One way to do so is making the comparison of alternative domains (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Past studies showed that, when they perceive their group as having a low status as compared to others, people who strongly identify with their group respond by identifying more strongly with the group and perceiving the ingroup as more cohesive (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993).

The Case of National Nostalgia

National nostalgia defined as a "sense of loss and longing for a fondly remembered national past" (Smeekes et al., 2014). As a type of collective nostalgia, the current research narrows down its focus onto national nostalgia. Because, first, nationality is one of the most salient social identities (Bond, 2006). Second, national past has frequently been treated as a malleable construct that can be used to make sense and justify the present, so it is an ideal candidate to study collective nostalgia (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1992; Lowenthal, 2015; Smith, 1986). It has been documented that some national "traditions" were recently invented (Hobsbawn & Ranger, 1992) and the understanding of the national past is almost always influenced by the current atmosphere (Lowenthal, 2015).

The case of Turkish nationalism is an important example of the phenomenon of longing for the national past: Belief in a past golden age is an integral part of Turkish nationalism (Yumul & Özkırımlı, 2000) and it is shared by both secular and conservative groups in Tur-

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key. "Turkish History Thesis" and "Sun Language Theory", for example, were proposed by the secular Turkish government in the early 20th century and they claimed that Turks were very influential in creating the most powerful civilizations in the distant past and the Turkish language was one of the earliest languages in the history of humankind (Cagaptay, 2004). Conservative Turks, on the other hand, have been more inclined to long for the "glory" experienced during the era of Ottoman Empire (Bora & Onaran, 2003). So, despite the differences in its definition, both secular and conservative Turks have been inclined to believe in a past golden age of the Turkish people.

The current research aims to build a bridge between SIT, collective nostalgia literature, and the phenomenon of national nostalgia in Turkey. It is proposed that national nostalgia might have a tactical use of compensating for current unfavorable social comparisons between the ingroup and the outgroups. Accordingly, when people receive negative feedback about the status of their nation, if they are highly identified, they will get defensive and glorify their national past in order to compensate for its current lack. They would do so to satiate the negative experience caused by current negative social comparisons. For low identifiers, on the other hand, a different trend would be observed. That is, as they would not be defensive regarding the feedbacks they receive when they are primed with an unfavorable social comparison, they will also perceive their nation's past in more negative light and vice versa for favorable social comparisons. As priming someone with a stimulus influences that person's perception and judgment in the subsequent task, low identifiers would respond in accordance with what they were primed with (see Bargh, 2007). However, high identifiers would not be comfortable with a negative view of their ingroup, and thus try to compensate for it by enhancing their beliefs in a past golden age.

Overview of the Current Research

The current research focused on Turkish nationalism as previous studies proposed that it includes strong beliefs in a golden age (e.g., Yumul & Özkırımlı, 2000). As a type of collective nostalgia, belief in a past golden age of the nation was used as the dependent measure. Two hypotheses were proposed: (1) When primed with unfavorable social comparisons, as compared to favorable ones, strong identifiers would become defensive and thus glorify the Turks' past and claim that they had a golden age in the history; (2) For low identifiers, as they would not be defensive, unfavorable social comparison would result in negative perception of the past. The opposite trend would be observed for favorable social comparisons.

Two different domains of intergroup comparison were selected: military power and the quality of education system. Because, first, it is well established that military is quite popular in Turkish society and Turkish nationalists tend to be proud of their army (see Sarigil, 2009). Second, Turkish education system has been a matter of public debate lately as PISA education test recently revealed that Turkey was falling behind other OECD nations ("Turkey's Education Problems", 2016).

Two experimental studies were conducted: In Study 1, favorable/unfavorable comparison with regard to military power was manipulated and its effects on the glorification of the national past were investigated. In Study 2, favorable/unfavorable comparison with regard to education system was manipulated and its effects on the belief in a past golden age were examined.

Study 1

Participants and Procedure

The sample included 80 non-psychology students from a large university in Ankara, Turkey. The participation was in exchange for bonus course credit. Of the participants, 53 were female and 27 were male. Mean age was 21.05 ($SD = 2.05$). The participants were directed to an online questionnaire where they completed the research materials in the enlisted order.

Materials

Favorable/unfavorable comparison manipulation. First, the participants were randomly divided into two groups. The first group was primed with a favorable comparison of their nation with others. There were two questions: They were asked to write down (a) 3 nations that have weaker military forces than Turkey and (b) 3 different reasons why these nations have weaker military forces. The second group was primed with an unfavorable comparison of their nation with others. They were asked to think of 3 nations that have stronger military forces than Turkey and 3 different reasons behind such difference.

Glorification of the past. Next, all participants were asked to think of the military golden age of the Turkish nation where Turks experienced the strongest times of their entire history. Participants compared the strength of the military force in that golden age with the current state of the Turkish military force. Then they stated how many times Turkish military force in the golden age was stronger than the Turkish military force today on a scale from 1 to 100. For example, a score of 3 meant that military force in the golden age was 3 times stronger than the current military force. The reason be-

hind using a scale with a wide range was to allow space for exaggeration.

Identification. The participants reported their level of identification with being Turkish by stating how much they agree with the following two statements: "How important is being Turkish to your identity?" (1 = *not important at all*, 7 = *very important*) and "How much do you feel as a Turk?" (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very strongly*). The two items were highly correlated with each other (r = .76, p < .001). So a mean score for identification was calculated.

Results

A moderated regression analysis was conducted. The manipulation variable was dummy coded (0 = *comparison with better countries*, 1 = *comparison with worse countries*). Then all predictor variables were centered. In the first step, positive/negative distinction manipulation and identification were entered into the regression. In the second step, the interaction term representing the interaction between the centered versions of manipulation and identification were entered (see Table 1). The interaction was statistically significant (β = -.23, p = .039).

Next, two separate regression analyses were conducted for low (1 standard deviation below the mean) and high identification (1 standard deviation above the mean) levels (see Aiken & West, 1991). When identification level was low, the effect of the positive/negative distinction manipulation was significant (β = .33, p = .041). When identification level was high, the effect of the manipulation was not significant (β = -.14, p = .360). Accordingly, for participants who had weak national identification, comparison with weaker countries significantly increased the glorification of the national past. However, for participants who had strong national identification, comparison with stronger or weaker countries did not have any significant effect, although comparison with stronger countries resulted in relatively more glorification, as compared to comparison with weaker countries, which reflected the trend that was expected (see Figure 1).

Thus, Hypothesis 2 was supported as favorable comparisons (i.e., comparison with worse countries) increased glorification of the national past for low identifiers. Hypothesis 1, however, did not receive significant support although the observed trend was as expected since, for high identifiers, unfavorable comparisons (i.e., comparison with better countries) seem to have resulted in relatively more glorification (see Figure 1).

The first study had several limitations. First, Hypothesis 1 did not receive statistically significant support, so it was needed to conduct an additional study to further test it. Second, taking pride in the national military power is very widespread in Turkey (Sarigil, 2009), so the next study could investigate national nostalgia on a different domain to test the hypotheses. Third, the participants were asked to compare the golden age with the current state, so it could be argued that the question suggested the existence of a golden age, and thus biased the responses. So, the next study should directly measure the belief in the existence of a golden age without suggesting its existence or nonexistence.

Study 2

In the second study, two changes were made. First, the belief in a golden age of education system, not military force, was examined in order to demonstrate that the effect observed in the first study was not domain-specific. Second, a more conventional 7-point Likert scale was used to measure the belief in the existence of a past golden age of the nation.

Participants and Procedure

The sample included 84 first-year psychology students from a large university in Ankara, Turkey. The participation was in exchange for bonus course credit. Of the participants, 66 were female and 18 were male. Mean age was 21.94 (SD = 2.07). The participants were directed to an online questionnaire where they completed the research materials in the enlisted order.

Materials

Favorable/unfavorable comparison manipulation. The manipulation technique that was used in Study 1 was replicated with one exception: This time the participants were asked about the quality of education system, not the military power.

Belief in a past golden age. Participants were asked to state how much they agree with the following two statements: "There was a time in history when Turks had an education system that was better than all other nations" and "Turks experienced a time in the past when they had the most advanced education system". The response was on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The two items were highly correlated with each other (r = .66, p < .001). Thus, a mean score for the belief in a past golden age was computed.

Identification. The same items as in Study 1 were used. The two items were highly correlated with each other (r = .71, p < .001). So a mean score for identification was calculated.

Results

The procedure described in Study 1 was replicated (see Table 2). The interaction was statistically significant (β = -.38, p = .014).

When identification level was low (1 standard deviation below the mean), the effect of the positive/negative distinction manipulation was not significant (β = .23, p = .127). When identification level was high (1 standard deviation above the mean), the effect of the manipulation was significant (β = -.30, p = .047). Accordingly, for participants who had weak national identification, comparing their home country with stronger or weaker countries did not have any significant effect on the belief in a past golden age, although comparison with weaker countries resulted in relatively higher belief in the golden age, as expected. However, for participants who had strong national identification, comparison with stronger countries significantly increased belief in a past golden age (see Figure 2).

Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported as favorable comparisons (i.e., comparison with worse countries) increased glorification of the national past for low identifiers. Hypothesis 2, however, did not receive significant support although the observed trend was as expected since favorable comparisons (i.e., comparison with worse countries) seem to have resulted in relatively more glorification for high identifiers (see Figure 1).

Discussion

The current research illustrated that national nostalgia and a belief in a past golden age might be the result of current unfavorable social comparisons. As proposed by SIT, in cases where it is not possible to maintain a positive social identity, one compensates for it by making the comparison on some alternative domains (Branscombe et al., 1999; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and past research illustrated that groups use that strategy to maintain their perceived positive distinctiveness (e.g., Cadinu & Cerchioni, 2001). Similarly, the current research demonstrated that people use group history to compensate for the ingroup's current weakness.

As suggested by past research, strength of identification is very important in social identity processes (e.g., Branscombe et al., 1999; Brown, 2000). Consistently, the current research revealed different results for low and high identifiers. People who weakly identified with Turkish nation were not particularly motivated to maintain a positive national identity. Thus, their understanding of the Turks' past was in line with what they were primed with. For example, in Study 1, when they were asked to think of nations currently having weaker military forces than Turkey, their glorification of Turks' military power in the past also increased. However, there was a different story for high identifiers. In Study 2, when they were asked to think of nations currently having better education systems, high identifiers responded defensively and became more likely to claim that Turks had a golden age in the past when they had the best education system in the world.

It should be noted that the current findings do not contradict with the past research suggesting that discontinuity in collective identity leads to collective nostalgia (Smeekes, 2015; Smeekes et al., 2014). In fact, when people perceive their past as more glorious than today, it means that there is a sense of discontinuity which would lead to a longing for the past. However, the current research also makes the contribution that the sense of discontinuity in collective identity might be produced by social comparisons. In other words, when people understand that, in reality, there are other groups which are currently outperforming their ingroup, this contradicts with their previously held sense of positive social identity which eventually leads to a longing for the past. The future research should test whether a sense of identity discontinuity mediates the relationship between social comparisons and collective nostalgia.

Further research is also needed to identify social incidents causing unfavorable social comparisons and eventually collective nostalgia. Past research suggested that nostalgia occurs during times of social change (Milligan, 2003; Smeekes et al., 2014). Although whether the participants perceived a social change was not directly measured in the current study, the results suggested that it is not an essential prerequisite to long for the collective past. Thus, just perceiving other groups outperforming the ingroup might result in a unfavorable social identity which would lead to collective nostalgia.

Furthermore, the current research provided a glimpse into the effect of social psychological processes on golden age beliefs. Griffin (1991) illustrated that a 'palingenesis' (rebirth) myth is one of the common factors that can be found in all types of fascism. According to this myth, there was a golden age in the history of the nation, and the nation must now reborn and return to that golden age. Hence, extreme cases of golden age beliefs might have very detrimental effects on intergroup processes and future social psychological research is needed to understand the complete nature of such beliefs.

In short, the current research had important contributions to the literature. First, it illustrated that social comparisons influence collective nostalgia. Second, level of identification was found to moderate such relationship. Accordingly, favorable social comparisons increase collective nostalgia for low identifiers, however unfavor-

able social comparisons increase it for high identifiers. Third, it paved the way for future research looking into the effect of current social comparisons on how people understand the ingroup's history.

There were also some potential limitations of the current research. First, the observed effect sizes were rather small and hypotheses were partially supported as Study 1 only supported Hypothesis 2 and Study 2 only supported Hypothesis 1. This may be due to the fact that national nostalgia is measured in different domains (military power and the quality of education system). However, significant results were obtained in two separate studies and the observed trend of results was very similar in both studies (see Figure 1 and 2). Further studies are needed to investigate whether similar findings would be acquired by using different manipulation techniques and dependent measures. Second, the experimental procedures described should also be replicated in different samples as the current study focused only on Turkish nationalism. Third, the samples in the current study were largely consistent of young adults; however, the past literature suggested that older people might be more prone to nostalgia (Sedikides et al., 2008). Thus, further studies are needed to observe the effect on collective nostalgia for different age groups. Lastly, future research should investigate potential effects of political attitudes as the past literature suggested that liberals and conservatives might have different understandings of national nostalgia (e.g., Cagaptay, 2004).