English Summary

Separatism is a social phenomenon that emerges in many countries across the world (Beary, 2011; Hewitt & Cheetham, 2000), which oftentimes results in a violent (Marshall & Gurr, 2003; Walter, 2009) and intractable (Walter, 2009) collective conflict. Separatist conflicts frequently become headline news, as demonstrated by the social crises in today’s East Ukraine (Boyd-Barrett, 2017) and Catalonia, Spain (Preston, 2017). Given the intractability and violence characteristic of separatist conflicts and the widespread media attention they receive, promoting reconciliation in separatist conflicts is sorely needed. Yet the processes and conditions that promote reconciliation, despite its importance, remain understudied in the body of social-psychological research. The main goal of the current dissertation was to address this void, investigating the social-psychological factors and intervention programs that can effectively foster reconciliation.

Founded upon existing social psychological literature, the present dissertation proposes an interactive model of reconciliation in separatist conflicts. The central assumption of this model is that separatist conflicts involve primarily the majority and the separatist group. Through this model, this dissertation aims at investigating the perspectives of the majority and those of the separatist group in responding to separatist conflicts. Achieving this goal is pivotal for several reasons. First, by taking into account both the perspectives of the majority and those of the separatists, this dissertation may offer a novel, integrative approach to understanding separatist conflicts. Second, the integrative approach may benefit the current dissertation through providing a better understanding of the factors that either facilitate or hinder both the majority and separatist groups in de-escalation and in their support for reconciliation. Finally, by identifying the potential facilitating factors as well as the pitfalls in the promotion of reconciliation, this dissertation may provide policy makers with practical insights into effective social-psychological interventions with this goal in mind.

In Chapter 2, I focused on the perspectives of the majority and conceptualized this particular group as the perpetrator of violent acts against the separatist group. The needs-based model of reconciliation (NBMR; Shnabel, Nadler, Canetti-Nisim, & Ullrich, 2008; Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009) posits that the perpetrating group typically experiences morality threat that originates from its transgressions against the victim group. A corollary to morality threat is an increased motivation of the perpetrating group in meeting the compensatory needs for social acceptance and the restoration of moral image in its relations with the victim group. These compensatory needs are then linked to the perpetrating group’s greater support for making reconciliation with the victim group. Verifying these basic tenets of NBMR, in Chapter 2 I showed that the majority reported high levels of morality threat. As expected, morality threat was a positive predictor of the needs for social acceptance and the restoration of moral image, and the stronger these compensatory needs were the more the majority expressed reconciliatory attitudes and emotions towards the separatist groups. Additional findings demonstrated that morality threat was positively predicted by the majority’s national identification, in line with the group identity lens model (Verkuyten, 2009), as well as perceived dominance, corroborating the integrated threat theory of prejudice (ITT; Stephan, Ybarra, & Rios, 2016).

Finally, confirming predictions based upon the theory of planned behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) and its extended version (Moons & De Pelsmacker, 2015), reconciliatory attitudes and emotions uniquely predicted reconciliatory behaviours. The findings in Chapter 2 underlined the beneficial role of morality threat in persuading the majority to reconcile its conflict with the separatist group.
Chapter 3 focused on how the separatist group construes its secessionist dispute with the majority. In particular, I examined how the separatist group’s reconciliatory stances with the majority are hindered by two distinct motives: identity motives and power motives. Identity motives build upon the model of group schism (Sani, 2008; Sani & Todman, 2002). This model describes that secessionist demand is ignited by identity subversion, denoting the extent to which the separatist group perceives the continuity of its norms and values to be at stake, undermined by those of the majority. Identity subversion, according to the model of group schism, hinders reconciliation due to its role in augmenting the separatist group members’ perception that the majority has treated their group unjustly. Power motives hinge upon the NBMR (Shnabel et al., 2008, 2009), postulating that resistance to reconciliation is rooted in power threat denoting the separatist group’s perception that its sense of exerting control, influence, and autonomy is undermined by the majority. Power threat is also thought to deter reconciliation because of its role in giving rise to the separatist group’s need for subgroup empowerment in its oppositional relations with the majority. Supporting these arguments, Chapter 2 showed that the separatist group’s perceived identity subversion and power threat were high, and each threat, as hypothesised, was related to the separatist group’s decreased reconciliatory attitudes via a distinct route. Identity subversion poses a hindrance to reconciliatory attitudes because of its positive association with the separatist group’s perceived injustice. Power threat was likewise found to attenuate reconciliatory attitudes, given its role in eliciting an enhanced need for subgroup empowerment among members of the separatist group. Chapter 3 also revealed, as expected, that the separatist group’s ethnic identification and perceived subordination were positive predictors of identity subversion and power threat. Moreover, consistent with the empirical results from Chapter 2, I found that reconciliatory intentions mediated the relationship between reconciliatory attitudes and behaviours. Overall, these findings suggest the importance of fulfilling the separatist group’s needs to articulate its own identity and to preserve its sense of power, which can arguably deescalate conflict and promote reconciliation among members of this particular group.

Chapter 4 was devised to test the effectiveness of a reminder of ingroup wrongdoings (e.g., Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 2006; Zebel, Zimmermann, Viki, & Doosje, 2008) in promoting reconciliation among the majority. My theoretical rational was based on the NBMR, assuming that the perpetrators group feels threatened in its moral standing because of its sense of being a perpetrator of harm against the victim group. However, the relevant literature (e.g., Doosje et al., 2006; Zebel et al., 2008) establishes that a sense of perpetratorhood, which signifies an acknowledgement of collective transgressions, could be effectively activated only in combination with a reminder of wrongdoings as communicated by the ingroup. Taking into account these arguments, in Chapter 4 | compared a reminder of ingroup wrongdoings with a reminder of ingroup rightdoings (e.g., Bilewicz & Jaworska, 2013), both of which were communicated by the representative of the ingroup, and tested their effectiveness in promoting the majority’s reconciliatory attitudes. As hypothesised I found that a reminder of ingroup wrongdoings resulted in a greater sense of perpetratorhood in majority members compared to reminders of ingroup rightdoings. Perpetratorhood in turn positively predicted reconciliatory attitudes, but this direct effect passed via morality threat and the compensatory needs for social acceptance and the restoration of moral image. I also showed that perceived separation legitimacy and integration legitimacy moderated the extent to which perpetratorhood was positively related to reconciliatory attitudes. The relationship between perpetratorhood was positive and significant only among members of the majority that perceived separation as highly legitimate and those perceiving integration of the separatist group within the parent nation as less legitimate. Taken together, these
findings provide a useful insight into the merits of exposing the majority to the harmful instead of the beneficial impacts of its actions towards the separatist group, in an attempt to enhance their acceptance of ingroup wrongdoings and, in turn, their support for reconciliation.

Chapter 5 aimed at extending studies in Chapter 4. I framed ingroup wrongdoings either as violations of moral ideals (i.e., personal actions and decisions to achieve the ideals of promoting peace and reconciliation) or violations of moral obligations (i.e., personal actions and decisions to meet the obligations of promoting peace and reconciliation), and compared their effectiveness in promoting the majority’s reconciliatory attitudes. I drew upon the theoretical rational of morality framing offered by Does and colleagues (Does, Derks, & Ellemers, 2011; Does, Derks, Ellemers, & Scheepers, 2012). They found that moral ideals framing triggers support for reconciliation more than moral obligations framing, the reason being that moral ideals framing, in contrast with moral obligations framing, is experienced as less aversive and more instrumental in highlighting the moral image of the ingroup. I observed that moral ideals framing heightened the majority’s reconciliatory attitudes and emotions more so than moral obligations framing, but this effect was obtained only among the majority members high in national identification. In contrast, among the less-identifying majority, moral obligations framing was effective more so than moral ideals framing in inducing reconciliatory attitudes and emotions. These findings signify the group-based nature of morality framing, implying that the effectiveness of moral ideals framing compared with moral obligations framing is dependent upon the level of national identification. Moreover, Chapter 5 aimed to refine research in Chapter 4 in which I devised a documentary as a reminder of ingroup wrongdoings and compared its effectiveness in promoting the majority’s reconciliation with a neutral control condition. In replication of the empirical findings in Chapter 4, the reminder of ingroup wrongdoings appeared again as promising in the promotion of reconciliatory attitudes and emotions compared to the control condition. What can be derived from these observations is that the reminder of ingroup wrongdoings holds the potential as a social-psychological intervention for conflict reconciliation among the majority.

This dissertation outlines possible follow-up studies and theoretical avenues for the existing social psychological literature regarding reconciliation in separatist conflict. The focus of this dissertation is on the social-psychological perspectives of the majority, whereas the separatist group, as well as the impact of their reconciliatory attitudes, emotions, and behaviours remains relatively unexplored. A more integrative approach may illuminate the complex mechanisms that underlie support and opposition for reconciliation in separatist conflicts, which were outside the scope of previous studies. The practical implications of this dissertation also include contribution to the widening of our knowledge regarding social-psychological interventions that can be effective in the promotion of reconciliation among the majority.