

Summary

Definitions of National Identity Boundaries and Attitudes Toward Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Nagihan Taşdemir

Anadolu University

In social psychology, attitudes toward immigrants or refugees have often been associated with definitions of national identity boundaries (Meeus, Duriez, Vanbeselaere & Boen, 2010; Pehrson, Vignoles & Brown, 2009; Verkuyten & Martinović, 2015). In studies conducted mostly in Western countries, definitions of national identity boundaries have generally been represented by civic, cultural, and/or ethnic definitions (see Reijerse, Van Acker, Vanbeselaere, Phalet & Duriez, 2013). These studies showed that civic definitions predict more positive attitudes toward immigrants compared to cultural and/or ethnic definitions. In a study in Turkey, researchers explored the definitions of Turkish identity boundaries in an open ended fashion (Taşdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016b) and conceptualized these definitions as national participation and national essentialism (Taşdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016a). The former involved the criteria related to being a citizen, living in a country, adopting Turkish culture, speaking Turkish, admiring Atatürk's doctrines, and feeling responsibility toward the country; higher scores on national participation predicted more negative inter-group attitudes. The latter involved the criteria related to having a Turkish mother and father, being a Muslim, and feeling nationality (reverse coded) and did not predict inter-group attitudes (Taşdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016a).

The present study aims to investigate how the definitions of Turkish identity boundaries predict the attitudes toward the Syrian refugees, which are considered in terms of perception of threat, in-group favoritism, and social distance. The role of perception of threat as a mediator is also examined. The study also aims to re-test the factor structure of the definitions of Turkish identity boundaries in a new sample.

Social Identity and Inter-group Attitudes

According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), in order to have a positive social identity,

people tend to evaluate their in-groups more positively compared to out-groups, which is called the in-group favoritism. Researchers expected and showed that in-group identification predicts more negative inter-group attitudes (Meeus, Duriez, Vanbeselaere & Boen, 2010). However, studies based on the common in-group identity model showed that (more inclusive) national superordinate group identification, instead of (more exclusive) ethnic subordinate group identification might predict more positive inter-group attitudes (Andrighetto, Mari, Volpato & Behluli, 2012). Thus, the relations between in-group identification and inter-group attitudes are likely to change depending on what kind of in-group is considered, which is also likely to affect the definitions of in-group boundaries (Dovidio, Gaertner, Hodson, Houlette & Johnson, 2005). There seem also cross-cultural differences in the relations between in-group identification and inter-group attitudes given the cross-cultural differences in the definitions of national identity boundaries (Pehrson, Vignoles & Brown, 2009).

Definitions of National Identity Boundaries and Inter-group Attitudes

The definitions of national identity boundaries represent the criteria used to describe who are "we" and who are "they" (Wright, 2011). In recent years, social psychology researchers have emphasized the definitions of national identity boundaries to understand attitudes toward immigrants (Ha & Jang, 2015; Heath & Tilley, 2005; Jones & Smith, 2001; Meeus et al., 2010; Pehrson et al., 2009; Pehrson & Green, 2010; Verkuyten & Martinović, 2015; Wakefield et al., 2011). According to the civic definition, people who respect the nation's political institutions and laws should be in-group members. According to the cultural definition, people who share the same culture should be in-group members. According to the ethnic definition, people who share the same ancestry should be in-group members. Thus, for the civ-

ic definition, it is more voluntary-based to belong to the national in-group, whereas for the cultural and/or ethnic definition, it is relatively unachievable for immigrants to become a member of the national in-group (Reijerse et al., 2013). In a cross-cultural study, researchers found that people endorsing higher levels of civic definition express less negative attitudes toward the immigrants. On the other hand, cultural and ethnic definitions, being closely related to each other, predicted more negative attitudes (Reijerse et al., 2013).

Indeed, many studies utilized the definitions of national identity boundaries as two dimensions, one representing the civic definition, the other representing the cultural/ethnic definition (Duriez, Reijerse, Luyckx, Vanbeselaere & Meeus, 2013; Ha & Jang, 2015; Pehrson, Brown & Zagefka, 2009; Pehrson & Green, 2010). In general, the civic definition involved the criteria of “respecting the nation’s institutions and laws” and “feeling the nationality”. The cultural/ethnic definition involved the criteria of “to be born in a country”, “living most of one’s life in a country”, “being a follower of the country’s religion”, “speaking the country’s language”, and “having citizenship” (Jones & Smith, 2001). Researchers consistently found civic definitions related to more positive attitudes, whereas cultural/ethnic definitions related to more negative attitudes toward the immigrants (e.g., Löden, 2008; Pehrson, Brown & Zagefka, 2009; Reijerse et al., 2013; Verkuyten & Martinović, 2015). In an experimental study, for example, participants expressed more willingness to help a Chinese immigrant who were reminded of the civic definition (“if you feel Scottish, you are Scottish”) than participants who were reminded of the ethnic definition (“if your ancestry is Scottish, you are Scottish”) (Wakefield et al., 2011). However, it is notable that the definitions of national identity boundaries and the relations between them are likely to change across time, region, and/or socio-political context (e.g., Arslan-Akfirat & Öner-Özkan, 2010).

Perception of Inter-group Threat

In the prediction of attitudes toward the immigrants, the role of the perception of threat is crucial (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014; Wright, 2011). Home country members tend to perceive realistic (Sherif 1966) and/or cultural threat (Sears, 1988) from immigrants (Pehrson & Green, 2010). The former refers to the economic, physical or political competition between groups (Esses, Jackson & Armstrong, 1998). The latter refers to the culture and worldview differences between the immigrant and native group (Riek, Mania & Gaertner, 2006). The home country members, who perceive the realistic and/or cultural threat from immigrants, are likely to express more negative attitudes toward them (Verkuyten, 2009). Individuals’ perception of threat may vary de-

pending on their definitions of in-group boundaries. Research has shown that, compared to the more inclusive definitions, the more restrictive and exclusive definitions of in-group boundaries increase with the perception of threat from immigrants (Ha & Jang, 2015; Pehrson & Green, 2010; Wright, 2011).

Syrian Refugees in Turkey

Starting in 2011, the civil war in Syria has forced a large number of Syrian people out of the country, with many of them crossing into Turkey. They have been accepted as “guests” in Turkey. Each passing day, Turkish people perceive their stay as permanent or longer term (Ünal, 2014). Meanwhile, homeless and unemployed refugees participate in the labor market at very low wages, which has sparked a reaction among the host population (Tunç, 2015). The cultural, lifestyle and language differences with the Syrian refugees have also become an issue among the host population (Oytun & Gündoğar, 2015).

Aim of the Study

In a previous study, researchers conceptualized the definitions of Turkish identity boundaries as national participation and national essentialism (Taşdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016a). The former defined the boundaries in terms of citizenship, living in a country, adopting Turkish culture, speaking Turkish, admiring Atatürk’s doctrines, and having responsibility for the country. The latter defined the boundaries in terms of having a Turkish mother and father, being a Muslim, and feeling nationality (reverse coded) (Taşdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016a). Researchers showed that national participation, including relatively inclusive criteria, was related to more negative inter-group attitudes, whereas national essentialism, including relatively exclusive criteria, was not significantly associated with inter-group attitudes (Taşdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016a).

Previous studies, which have been conducted mostly in Western countries, showed that the civic definitions, with relatively achievable criteria, predict less negative attitudes, and cultural/ethnic definitions, with relatively unachievable criteria, predict more negative attitudes toward immigrants (e.g., Löden, 2008; Pehrson, Brown & Zagefka, 2009; Reijerse et al., 2013; Verkuyten & Martinović, 2015; Wakefield et al., 2011). This difference may be explained referring to the construction of national identity in Turkey and Western countries. That is, Turkey has historically been a multicultural society, and Turkish identity is perceived to represent the different ethnic groups following the Independence War. However, in Western countries, the definitions of national identity have mostly been questioned with the arrival of immigrants (Ercins & Görüşük, 2016).

In the relevant context of Turkey, shared culture, shared language, shared homeland, shared citizenship, etc., have been emphasized to define national identity boundaries, which seem to represent national participation. The present study aims to investigate how the definitions of Turkish identity boundaries predict attitudes toward Syrian refugees, which are considered in terms of perception of threat, in-group favoritism, and social distance. The role of perception of threat as a mediator is also investigated. The study also aims to re-test the factor structure of the definitions of Turkish identity boundaries in a new sample.

Method

157 university students (109 women; 47 men) in Eskişehir participated in the study. Ages ranged between 18-27 ($M = 20.99$, $SD = 1.66$).

Participants completed the measures of definitions of Turkish identity boundaries (12), social distance (7), perception of threat (8), in-and out-group evaluations (2) and in-group identification (2).

Results

According to the factor analyses on the definitions of Turkish identity boundaries, the items related to having a Turkish mother and father, coming from a Turkish family, having Turkish ancestry, and feeling nationalist (reverse coded) constituted the first factor (national essentialism) whereas the items related to having a citizenship, living in a country, admiring to Atatürk's doctrines, being responsible for the country, protecting the Turkish culture, speaking Turkish, and being a Muslim constituted the second factor (national participation).

Hierarchical regression analyses showed that, controlling for the effect of in-group identification, national participation predicted all of the dependent variables and national essentialism predicted only social distance. Perception of threat emerged as a significant mediating factor in the relationship between national participation and in-group favoritism and between national participation and social distance.

Discussion

In the present study, the item about being a Muslim changed a dimension and loaded with the items representing national participation instead of with the items representing national essentialism. This may be explained referring to the characteristics of samples of the studies. The previous study (Taşdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016a) was conducted in the capital city of Ankara among university students at METU, who have a

relatively liberal political orientation. Participants of the present study were university students in Eskişehir, a relatively small city in Turkey. These results seem to confirm that the definitions of national identity boundaries may change across time, place, and/or socio-political context (e.g., Arslan-Akfiat & Öner-Özkan, 2010).

However, consistent with the previous study (Taşdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016a), the results showed that national participation predicted more negative inter-group attitudes compared to national essentialism. That is, a relatively inclusive definition of Turkish identity boundaries was positively associated with in-group favoritism, social distance, and perception of threat, which also mediated the relevant relationships. Results suggested that participants emphasizing national participation in the definition of Turkish identity boundaries were more likely to perceive the Syrian refugees as posing realistic and/or cultural threat. In turn, participants who perceived more threat were more likely to evaluate the Turkish group positively compared to the Syrian group and to express more social distance toward them. The results seem to suggest that for the Syrian refugees, who are new in the country and partly stay in camps, it is relatively difficult to meet the criteria involved in national participation. It may also be suggested that participants were likely to perceive the Syrian refugees as posing a threat to their in-group definition (and belonging), as represented in national participation.

Different from the previous study (Taşdemir & Öner-Özkan, 2016a), in the present study, national essentialism also predicted the inter-group attitudes and was moderately associated with social distance. Researchers argued that the emphasis in shared ethnic origin might go with the emphasis in the shared homeland (Verkuyten & Martinović, 2015). Accordingly, results may suggest that participants emphasizing the ethnic origin tend to express more social distance toward the Syrian refugees, who do not share the same ethnic origin and came to the country later.