

Collective psychological ownership and intergroup relations

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Introduction

I am not a poet, never aspired to be one. But back in 2002, while on a semester abroad at Deakin University, Australia, I entered a poem writing competition, the theme of which was ‘My country’. I was triggered by the title and felt I should rebel against its main premise, so this is how my poem started: “There is no such thing as ‘my’ country. The country where I come from cannot be owned or claimed”. Coming from Croatia, which had only about ten years earlier separated from the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and was then for another five years a battlefield, with Croats on one side and Serbs on the other fighting for and dying for the same territory, I really had an issue with anyone putting forward territorial claims of any kind. I thought we, as humanity, should abandon this idea altogether.

Whether it was a matter of clairvoyance and destiny or otherwise a matter of chance or even pure irony (we will never be able to tell), in 2011 Maykel Verkuyten offered me a postdoc position on a topic that resonated very much with the content of my poem but differed completely in valence. The idea was to examine how the belief in autochthony, or entitlements for country’s alleged first inhabitants, shapes people’s reactions toward groups that arrived later. So instead of denying it, we set off to prove that a sense of country ownership is very important and that it shapes relations between groups. After some encouraging evidence from this postdoctoral project, we embarked on a long and inspiring research journey along which we

discovered that a sense of collective ownership of a place (just as of an object or an idea) is omnipresent – not only among different ethnic groups living in different countries (our populations of interest) but also among various scholarly disciplines. During this journey we took a peek at Political Theory, stopped at Geography, dropped by Environmental Psychology, stayed for a while at Anthropology and Organizational Psychology, and overstayed our visit at Developmental Psychology (children can teach us incredibly much about psychological ownership). Armed with the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical knowledge from these disciplines and three excellent PhD students, we offered social psychologists, our home discipline, a new angle for understanding intergroup relations.

Our empirical evidence comes from different national contexts, ranging from European nation states (the Netherlands and the UK), to settler societies (Australia, New Zealand, Chile and South Africa) and conflict settings (Kosovo, Cyprus and Israel/Palestine). In this chapter I will provide an overview of our main findings across these contexts, but also draw on a few additional studies conducted by our colleagues in Finland (Brylka et al., 2015) and USA (Selvanathan et al., 2021; Wright, 2018). I will do so following Maykel's favorite set of research questions that, applied to any topic in fact, are incredibly helpful for structuring ideas, findings, and implications. I will write about the 'what', 'who', 'why', and 'so what' of collective psychological ownership.¹

What is collective psychological ownership?

In our modern capitalist world we agree that those who buy something (a house, a car, a jacket) own it. There is a contract or a receipt confirming the purchase and providing a legal testament of ownership. However, even in the absence of such formalized ownership, people tend to view objects, places, and ideas as belonging to them ('mine'). This state of mind is called *psychological ownership* (Pierce et al., 2001). We laugh when Sheldon Cooper, the awkward and hilarious character from the Big Bang Theory series, repeatedly claims a particular seat on the couch in a shared household for himself, or a particular time-frame in the morning for using the bathroom, but all of us do this regularly. If it is not a seat

¹ Another of Maykel's favorite questions is the 'when' question, that is, under what conditions or for whom does a particular process hold. We have done some research on ownership threat and shown that ownership feelings (in this case, autochthony beliefs, see the 'why' section) only translate to less positive attitudes toward immigrants for those ethnic majority participants who feel that the minorities are getting out of place and threatening the status quo of the majority (Martinovic & Verkuyten, 2013). And we have shown experimentally that ownership threat drives negative reactions toward the 'intruders' (Nijs et al., 2022a). As we have not examined more extensively the 'when' of ownership, I will not devote a separate section to this question here.

on the couch or the bathroom schedule, then it is the side of the bed we sleep on, the desk at the office that we regularly use, or a spot on the beach where we prefer to swim. In my home town, Rijeka, beaches nowadays get crowded before dawn because people are getting up increasingly early to reserve their favorite spot. And I know this because my dad's hobby is fishing (from the coast, in the early morning hours), and he has been complaining lately that the 'annoying bathers' arrive earlier and earlier, which interferes with him peacefully fishing from 'his' spot. According to evolutionary theories, such a sense of ownership is inherent to people (Ellis, 1985), while developmental theorists see it as socially learned (Furby, 1978). Whatever the origin, two-year old children already reason about ownership of objects (Rossano et al., 2011), making a distinction between 'mine' and 'yours'.

However, ownership can also be experienced on a group level. We often see ourselves as group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and what we think we own as a group ('ours') becomes important to us. Think of our coffee-bar, our company, our department, our park, our neighborhood, our country. Comparatively less is known about such group-based ownership beliefs. Organizational scientists have coined the term collective psychological ownership (CPO, Pierce & Jussila, 2010) to refer to a sense that something is 'ours', and they have shown, for instance, that people can have a sense of ownership over the work they are performing within a team (Pierce et al, 2020).

In our research, Maykel and I have argued (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2017) and empirically shown that collective psychological ownership is particularly relevant with respect to territories – such as neighborhoods (Torunczyk-Ruiz & Martinovic, 2020, Nijs et al., 2022b) and countries (e.g., Nijs et al., 2021; Nooitgedagt et al., 2022a; Storz et al., 2020) – and in the context of ethnic relations. Importantly, not only do people vary in their ingroup ownership beliefs, but they can also recognize an outgroup as owning the territory in question to a lesser or greater degree. Developmental researchers have shown that even young children are already able to recognize that someone else is the owner of an object (Kanngiesser et al., 2020). Whereas in some studies we focused on ingroup ownership only, in others we compared ingroup and outgroup ownership perceptions.

Table 1 summarizes the mean scores for ingroup and outgroup ownership beliefs across contexts and groups. Our findings in conflict contexts did not surprise us. Both among Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, Jews and Palestinian citizens of Israel, and among Greek Cypriots, we found rather high levels of ingroup ownership beliefs (Storz et al., 2020, 2022a; Warnke et al., 2022). We can conclude that in such contexts ingroup ownership is the default and few people would say that the land does not belong to their ingroup. Also in rather peaceful West European nation-states such as Finland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, where territories

are not much contested, members of ethnic majorities hold strong, even though comparatively lower, beliefs that the country belongs to them, namely to ethnic Finns, Dutch and Brits (Brylka et al., 2015; Nijs et al., 2021). But interestingly, even in settler societies where Europeans have colonized the lands already inhabited by Indigenous Peoples, descendants of settlers still on average endorse the belief that the territory belongs to their ingroup. We find moderate levels of ownership among European-origin inhabitants of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. We can conclude that collective psychological ownership of territories is widespread and the belief that ‘this land is ours’ is a rule rather than an exception.

When it comes to recognizing outgroup ownership, the pattern of findings differs clearly between recent (or current) conflict settings and settler societies. In conflict settings people are rather reluctant to recognize the rival outgroup as (also) being entitled to and owning the land. Table 1 shows that the average levels of endorsement of outgroup ownership beliefs are in all the studied samples below the midpoint of the scale. When using a scale directly measuring shared ownership among Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo (e.g., ‘I feel that Kosovo belongs to both Albanians and Serbs’; Storz et al, 2022a), we find somewhat higher scores but still the average endorsement of shared ownership is low, around three on a seven-point scale.

In settler societies, however, descendants of European colonizers tend to see the Indigenous Peoples as also being entitled to the territory in question at least to the similar extent as their own ingroup (i.e. in Australia and South Africa; Nooitgedagt et al., 2022a), and in New Zealand people of European origin even perceive the country to belong more to the Indigenous Peoples (Mori) than to their own ingroup (Nooitgedagt et al., 2022b). These findings in settler societies make sense given the violent ways in which the land was taken away from the indigenous groups in the past, and we have shown in another study in Australia that collective guilt and shame are important correlates of ownership beliefs (Nooitgedagt et al., 2021a). Interestingly, the correlations between ingroup and outgroup ownership are negative in conflict settings, whereas the two are either unrelated (Australia) or even positively related (moderately so in New Zealand and very strongly in South Africa). This shows that ownership beliefs are a zero-sum game in contexts of very recent or ongoing conflicts (i.e., only one group can own the land), whereas in settler societies it is possible and rather common to perceive both groups as being entitled to the land.

We delved into this issue further by examining ownership profiles in New Zealand and in Israel using a person-centered approach (Osborne & Sibley, 2017), with the aim of getting a more nuanced understanding of how people combine ingroup and outgroup ownership beliefs. For Jewish Israelis we found

Table 1: Average ingroup and outgroup ownership scores and correlations across national contexts

	Ingroup ownership beliefs	Outgroup ownership beliefs	Corr. between the two	Source
Conflict settings				
Kosovo Albanians	6.62 (0.89)	1.96 (1.11)	-.21*	Storz et al., 2022a
Kosovo Serbs	6.60 (0.79)	2.15 (1.10)	-.46***	Storz et al., 2022a
Israeli Jews	6.42 (1.01)	2.33 (1.45)	-.46***	Warnke et al., 2022
Palestinian citizens of Israel	4.90 (1.83)	3.74 (1.63)	-.19**	Warnke et al., 2022
Greek Cypriots	5.07 (1.69)	-	-	Storz et al., 2020
Settler societies				
Anglo-Celtic Australians	4.49 (1.43)	5.28 (1.27)	.12	Nooitgedagt et al., 2022a
White South Africans	4.35 (1.58)	4.42 (1.56)	.90***	Nooitgedagt et al., 2022a
New Zealand Europeans	4.36 (1.55)	4.37 (1.65)	.50***	Nooitgedagt et al., 2022b
North/West Europe				
Dutch	4.78 (1.65)	-	-	Nijs et al., 2021
Brits	5.05 (1.58)	-	-	Nijs et al., 2021
Finns	4.40 (0.82)	-	-	Brylka et al., 2015
Russian immigrants in Finland	3.62 (0.88)	-	-	Brylka et al., 2015

Note. Ownership beliefs were measured on a 7-point scale with a higher score standing for stronger ownership beliefs; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

that participants could be grouped into two profiles only, with a large majority (87%) perceiving exclusive ingroup ownership of the contested land and a minority of 13% perceiving shared Jewish and Palestinian ownership (Warnke et al., 2022). In New Zealand, the picture was much more complex. Most New Zealand Europeans (75.9%) perceived shared ingroup and Mori ownership and only 8.2% perceived exclusive ingroup ownership (Nooitgedagt et al., 2022b). Furthermore, we detected a profile with exclusive outgroup (Mori) ownership (6.4%) and a group of participants who believed the land does not belong to any of the two groups (i.e., the ‘no ownership’ profile, 9.4%). These findings confirm

that the understandings of ingroup and outgroup ownership can differ across groups and settings.

In West European nation-states we did not yet examine perceptions of outgroup ownership, namely, whether the Dutch or Brits see ethnic minority groups such as Turks and Moroccans or, respectively, Indians and Pakistanis, as also being entitled to the country. This is a missing piece in the puzzle and one that we aim to learn about in our future research. However, we know from a study by Brylka and colleagues (2015) that the Russian-speaking immigrant minority in Finland does not have a pronounced sense that Finland is ‘their’ country (see Table 1). It would also be interesting to examine whether established immigrant-origin minorities tend to believe that the country they live in belongs more to them than to recent immigrants.

Who are the ‘owners’?

Next, we set out to identify individuals who are more likely to have a stronger sense of collective ownership of a country. To start with, to be able to experience something as ‘ours’ there needs to be a sense of ‘us’ (Pierce & Jussila, 2010). Collective psychological ownership can only be experienced by virtue of group membership. The main social identity approaches in social psychology, namely self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) distinguish between identification ‘as’ and identification ‘with’. Category membership, or identification ‘as’ is a prerequisite for ingroup ownership beliefs as it provides a lens for seeing the world from the perspective of that group. If I do not see myself as belonging to the Japanese people, I also cannot have a sense that the disputed island of Senkaku (or in Korean Diaoyu, see Igarashi, 2018) belongs to ‘us Japanese’ and not to South Koreans. For this reason, in our research we always examine collective psychological ownership among participants who self-categorize as members of the group that inhabits or has vested interests in the territory under study.

However, the strength of identification with the group in question (identification ‘with’) is theoretically more interesting because it can tell us which group members will more strongly claim a territory for their ingroup. We have focused primarily on ethnic groups, and across national contexts that we studied we have repeatedly found that higher ethnic identifiers had a stronger belief that the country belongs to their ingroup (Kuipers et al., 2022; Nijs et al., 2021; Storz et al., 2020; Storz et al., 2022c; Straver et al., 2022). Other researchers have found similar evidence in the context of Finland (Brylka et al., 2015) and the United States (Wright, 2018). Importantly, ethnic identification was not

only related to ingroup ownership beliefs for members of ethnic majorities but also for indigenous minorities. In Chile, Mapuche's attachment to their group identity was related to stronger beliefs that the territory belongs to their ingroup (Nooitgedagt et al., 2021b).

In the studies mentioned above, identification was measured in terms of *attachment* to one's ethnic group. However, identification can take different forms (Ashmore et al., 2004), and we argued that ingroup *superiority* – the feeling that one's group is better than other groups (Roccas et al., 2006) – would be particularly relevant for outgroup ownership beliefs. Indeed, we found, in the context of Israel and among Jewish participants, that those who felt that Jews were superior to other groups showed lower levels of recognition of Palestinian ownership of the disputed territory (Storz et al., 2022c). Net of the effect of superiority, pure ingroup attachment was not related to outgroup ownership beliefs. On the bright side, people who identify more strongly with the overarching national category (for instance, with the national New Zealander identity instead of with one of the White ethnic groups that live in New Zealand) are the ones who show higher outgroup (Mori) ownership beliefs (Kuipers et al., 2022). Similarly, those who identify more strongly with humanity as a whole, also tend to claim the territory less for their ethnic ingroup (Hasbún López et al., 2019).

Apart from group identification, we have shown that men and women differ in ingroup ownership beliefs. In a study where we compared the Netherlands, the UK and Australia we consistently found that men tend to have a stronger sense of collective psychological ownership than women (Straver et al., 2022). This might have to do with men's focus on dominance and their stronger endorsement of policies promoting group-based hierarchies, compared to women (Pratto et al., 1997). Our findings also resonate with the finding from organizational science that men, compared to women, express higher levels of organizational ownership (Ozler et al., 2008). Furthermore, in all three contexts, people oriented more toward the political right also report stronger beliefs that the country belongs to their ethnic compatriots (Straver et al., 2022). Similarly, Jewish Israelis with a more right-wing orientation believed more strongly that the disputed territory from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean Sea belonged their ingroup, and they showed weaker recognition of Palestinian ownership (Storz et al., 2022c). This could be due to the fact that right-wing oriented people are more conservative – a characteristic that goes along with a stronger need for control (Aichholzer & Zandonella, 2016), and a sense of ownership can fulfil this need (Pierce & Jussila, 2010). Finally, there is some evidence from the UK (Straver et al., 2022) and Israel (Storz et al., 2022c) that lower educated individuals tend to claim the territory more for their ethnic ingroup. Since lower educated are less

likely to be employed in autonomous and well-paid jobs that give people a sense of control over the work process and their finances (Ross & Reskin, 1992), they might experience feelings of powerlessness. Claims of country ownership may be a way for them to fulfil the need for efficacy. Altogether, we can conclude that people who believe that the land belongs to their ethnic ingroup tend to be higher ethnic identifiers and weaker global identifiers, men, individuals with right-wing political ideology, and lower educated individuals.

Why do people claim collective psychological ownership of a territory?

In our research we further considered the arguments that people use to claim a territory for their ingroup and to get their claims validated by other groups. This is the ‘why’ question of collective psychological ownership. Why or on what grounds can ‘we’ argue that the land belongs to ‘us’? And what claims of other groups would convince us that the land (also) belongs to them? Territorial ownership claims are usually inferred from and legitimized by general principles that guide ownership inferences not only of places but also of objects and ideas, and that people endorse to differing degrees. For instance, just as *individual* ownership of objects is inferred from prior possession (Friedman & Ross, 2011) and past investments (Beggan & Brown, 1994), we argue that group members often resort to historical arguments to claim ownership of a territory for their ingroup. The most common ones include first arrival (so-called *autochthony*; Geschiere, 2009), past investment, and formation (Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2017). Additionally, in religion-centered conflicts we also considered the ‘God-given’ principle. We measured these principles as general beliefs, using statements such as ‘any land belongs primarily to its first inhabitants’, or ‘people who have invested most in a territory are most entitled to it’. We then examined how these context-free, general beliefs about the bases for ownership, relate to ownership inferences in specific intergroup settings.

First, according to the autochthony principle, a place is seen as belonging to its original inhabitants who are, by virtue of ‘being there first’, considered to be entitled to decide about the place. Anthropologists have shown that autochthony is a very powerful argument, used in different intergroup settings, ranging from Africa to Western Europe to Asia (see also ‘sons of the soil’ conflicts; Fearon & Laitin, 2011), and that this argument is often presented as self-evident and even natural (Ceuppens & Geschiere, 2004; Geschiere, 2005). It is in fact so powerful that people usually do not question the validity of the autochthony principle as such (Gans, 2001), but they tend to disagree about which group was ‘here first’ and hence which group can be seen as the owner of the territory. The argument

of first possession is also discussed in political theory (Murphy, 1990), and in international law the concept of 'terra nullius' (no man's land) has been used (but also misused) to argue that the land inhabited by a particular group had not been previously occupied by another group.

Experimental research among children has shown that, when no additional information about an object is presented, children assume that the first person seen to hold the object is its owner (Friedman et al., 2013). Similarly, with a set of experimental studies, we have shown that children (Verkuyten et al., 2015) and adults (Martinovic et al., 2020) infer territorial ownership from first arrival. Furthermore, in Australia and South Africa, autochthony belief was among Anglo-Celtic Australians and White South Africans related to stronger outgroup ownership beliefs (Aboriginal and Black South African, respectively) and in Australia it was also related to weaker ingroup ownership beliefs (Nooitgedagt et al., 2022a). Importantly, our correlational study in Chile revealed that a stronger agreement with the autochthony principle was related to the belief that the land belonged more to Mapuche than to non-indigenous Chileans, and this was found both among the descendants of settlers and among members of the indigenous Mapuche communities (Nooitgedagt et al., 2021b).

Second, according to the *investment principle*, investing one's resources and effort into creating or changing and developing an object is a valid argument for claiming ownership over that object (Beggan & Brown, 1994). Analogously, those who have been cultivating and developing a piece of land can be considered its rightful owners. This is based on the idea by the political theorist Locke (see Day, 1966) that everyone owns the labor of one's body, and therefore has the moral right to also own the products of this labor. Importantly, there is evidence that investment can trump first possession. Experimental research has found that children perceive their own investment into an object as a legitimate reason for transferring ownership from the first possessor to themselves (Kanngiesser et al., 2010). Similarly, in settler societies the argument of investment has been used as a powerful counter-argument to autochthony. Both in Australia and South Africa, for instance, settlers argued that ownership of the land originated from the cultivation of the land, and because the colonizers claimed that Indigenous Peoples – even though they were there first – did not cultivate the land, they argued that they also did not own it (Boisen, 2016; Short, 2016).

In our studies we found consistent evidence that the descendants of settlers who endorse more strongly the investment principle tend have a stronger belief that the country belongs to their ingroup and simultaneously see the indigenous outgroup as owning the country less. We have confirmed this association among Anglo-Celtic Australians and White South Africans (Nooitgedagt et al.,

2022a). Furthermore, using a person-centered approach and studying ownership profiles in New Zealand, we found that New Zealand Europeans in the 'ingroup ownership' profile were characterized by a stronger endorsement of the investment principles compared to those in the 'outgroup ownership', 'shared ownership', and 'no ownership' profiles (Nooitgedagt et al., 2022b). Similar results were found for Jewish Israelis: those in the 'ingroup ownership' profile were characterized by stronger endorsement of the investment principle compared to those in the 'shared ownership' profile (Warnke et al., 2022). For Palestinian citizens of Israel we found the opposite, with those in the ingroup ownership profile endorsing the investment principle less than those in the shared ownership profile. This finding makes sense to the extent that Jews are seen as a more resourceful group and one that that 'made' the country of Israel into what it is today. Interestingly, the indigenous Mapuche members in Chile reasoned differently about administrative investment and development investment. Whereas agreement with the idea that those who have managed and organized a territory can be seen as its owners was related to relatively *weaker* indigenous ownership beliefs, agreement with the idea that owners are the ones who have developed the land was related to relatively *stronger* indigenous ownership beliefs (Nooitgedagt et al., 2021b). This shows that indigenous minorities might have a different understanding of what development entails. For instance, taking care of the land (guardianship, Kawharu, 2000) can also be seen as an aspect of investment.

Third, the *formation principle* refers to the meaning of a territory for the collective identity of the residing groups, and political theorists have argued that this represents another historical basis for claiming rights to the land (Gans, 2001; Murphy, 1990). In contrast to autochthony, the formation principle is not about the primacy of the group on the territory but about the primacy of the territory in constituting or forming the identity of one's group throughout its history. For instance, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, early experiences of Jews on the contested land can be considered formative in their collective identity as these shaped and made them who they are today. But the territory is also central to the Palestinians' collective identity, that is strongly tied to their 'homeland' (Pinson, 2008). Whereas autochthony and investment principles (that is, investment understood in terms of land use and development), tend to play a contrasting role in informing ownership beliefs, with the former being related to perceptions of indigenous and the latter of settler ownership, we argued that the formation principle might be particularly inclusive. This is because it might be easier to recognize that the identity of various groups has been shaped by the territory they have historically inhabited, even if they were not there first and if they have not cultivated the land.

We have examined the formation principle in the context of Australia, South Africa and Israel. For the descendants of settlers in Australia and South Africa, we found that a stronger endorsement of the formation principle was related to both stronger ingroup and stronger indigenous ownership beliefs (Nooitgedagt et al., 2022a). In line with this, the latent profile analysis among Jewish Israelis showed that participants who endorsed the formation principle were more likely to fall in the ‘shared ownership’ profile than in the ‘ingroup ownership’ profile. However, for Palestinian citizens of Israel formation principle was not a correlate of profile membership (Warnke et al., 2022). We can conclude that the formation principle mostly has an inclusive function, and in some cases it does not inform ownership inferences. Both of these findings, however, suggest that the formation principle does not result in polarized ownership beliefs.

Lastly, the *God-given principle* represents the belief that the land belongs to the group to which it was divinely promised, and therefore this group can be seen as entitled to occupy the land. This is, for instance, a central claim for the legitimacy of Israel – the contested land is understood as the ‘promised land’ for Jews (Rouhana, 2004). However, the land is also of religious importance for Palestinians, as it is home to holy sites of their denominations. The God-given principle has not received much scholarly attention, but it might be an important one for inferring and claiming ownership in religion-based territorial conflicts. As religion represents a bright boundary between groups and implies the ultimate truth, we expected the endorsement of the God-given principle to go hand in hand with ingroup ownership of the land. We have only examined this in the context of Israel and found, as expected, that Jewish Israelis who fall in the ‘ingroup ownership’ as opposed to ‘shared ownership’ profile tend to endorse more strongly the God-given principle. Interestingly, for Palestinians, the God-given principle had the function of inclusivity: those in the ‘shared ownership’ profile were subscribed to this principle more than those in the ‘ingroup ownership’ profile (Warnke et al., 2022).

So what? The consequences of group-based territorial ownership beliefs

Having shown that ingroup ownership beliefs are widespread and that people resort to historical principles to infer territorial ownership, the remaining question is: what are the societal implications of territorial ownership beliefs? Why should we bother to study this concept? As most of the wars are being fought over contested territory (Toft, 2014), studying territorial ownership beliefs can help us understand intergroup conflicts and ultimately also improve relations between ethnic groups. Ownership of territory is an inherently social phenomenon that determines not only how people relate to a territory but also how groups of people

relate to each other with regards to the territory (Blumenthal, 2010; Meagher, 2020). We know from earlier research in organizational science that feelings of personal ownership can have a bright and a dark side: psychological ownership improves individuals' self-esteem and involvement, but it can also impede sharing and cooperation, thereby damaging interpersonal relationships (Pierce et al., 2001). Similarly, feelings of group-based ownership can motivate civic involvement and strengthen solidarity within ethnic groups, while representing a barrier to favourable intergroup relations. That is, ownership can have both positive *intragroup* outcomes and negative *intergroup* outcomes. We argued that these two contrasting outcomes are guided by perceived group responsibility on the one hand and exclusive determination right on the other hand.

First, people might feel a moral obligation to take care of what is theirs. For instance, employees who have a sense of ownership over their work report more personal responsibility for work outcomes (Pierce & Jussila, 2011). Moreover, what we own can define who we are, and taking care of what is 'ours' is then a way to maintain or enhance the self (Pierce & Jussila, 2011; Verkuyten & Martinovic, 2017). And just as individuals can feel responsible for what they personally own, they can also feel that their group is responsible for what it collectively owns. There is already some evidence that collective psychological ownership of products and jobs is associated with higher personal responsibility (e.g., Kamleitner & Rabinovich, 2010) but little is known about the link between collective psychological ownership and perceived *group* responsibility. Furthermore, a sense of group responsibility can motivate people to engage in stewardship behavior, that is, act in the best interest of the collectively owned target (Hernandez, 2012; Pierce et al., 2017). Organizational psychologists have demonstrated that employees who have a sense of personal ownership of their work are more likely to commit to extra-role behavior (e.g., Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004). Similarly, environmental psychologists have shown that a sense of ownership of public natural areas increases the willingness to personally clean the area (Peck et al., 2021) and oppose exploitation (Preston & Gelman, 2020).

We examined the bright side of collective psychological ownership for the ingroup in the context of Western Europe, specifically among the native majority populations in the Netherlands and Great Britain. We conducted a series of studies across different territorial targets of collective ownership (local park, neighborhood, and country), and we used cross-sectional as well as experimental designs. Our findings show that a sense that a park, neighborhood, or country belongs to 'us' was related to a higher sense of group responsibility. That is, Dutch people who felt that this was their group's territory also thought that they and their ingroup members should take care of it. Collective psychological ownership was further indirectly,

via group responsibility, related to higher intentions to engage in stewardship behavior, such as supporting a local charity by volunteering or donating money (Nijs et al., 2022b). In another study, we showed among native Brits that collective psychological ownership of a neighborhood was related to higher civic involvement, such as organizing local gatherings or joining a neighborhood association (Toruczyk-Ruiz & Martinovic, 2020). And there is evidence from the United States (Wright, 2018) that a sense of ownership is related to a stronger support for ingroup symbols (the flag) and to preference for buying national products over comparable international ones, even when the former are more expensive than the latter. These findings altogether attest to the important role that a sense of collective ownership of a country plays in strengthening *intragroup* cohesion.

Second, according to philosophers and legal scholars, ownership is accompanied by specific rights. These include the right to use one's property, transfer it to others, and exclude others from using it (Snare, 1972). Merrill (1998) and Katz (2008) argued that the latter is the central defining feature of ownership: owners are entitled to determine who uses the object and how it is being used. Studies on personal ownership have shown that young children understand that the person who controls the use of a toy is its owner (Neary et al., 2009). The perception that 'we' have an exclusive determination right can in turn lead to the behavioral tendency to exclude outsiders. Such exclusionary behavior is a form of anticipatory defense response to prevent infringement of a group's ownership (Brown et al., 2005). By this logic, established inhabitants might perceive themselves to be the rightful owners of a territory and therefore entitled to exclude outsiders, such as international migrants or people who are not local to a neighborhood.

With our studies in the Netherlands and Great Britain we have shown that collective psychological ownership of the country or neighborhood is related to more negative attitudes towards outsiders (Nijs et al., 2021; Toruczyk-Ruiz & Martinovic, 2020), and the same has been confirmed in Finland (Brylka et al., 2015). In Great Britain, collective psychological ownership of the country was also related to a higher likelihood to have voted 'leave' in the Brexit referendum (Nijs et al., 2021). Furthermore, Dutch natives who believed the country was 'theirs' tended to see their ingroup as having the exclusive right to determine matters that concern their country, and this was indirectly related to more negative attitudes toward immigrants but also stronger Euroscepticism (Nijs et al., 2021). In four studies on collective ownership of a local park, neighborhood, and country (Nijs et al., 2022b) we found that collective psychological ownership leads to perceived determination right, and indirectly to the exclusion of outsiders.

We also examined intergroup relations (but not stewardship behavior) in settler societies and conflict contexts. In Australia and South Africa ingroup ownership

was related to less and outgroup ownership to more willingness to territorially compensate the Indigenous Peoples (Nooitgedagt et al., 2022a). Using a relative scale of settler-indigenous ownership, in Chile we found that the more participants thought the land belonged to the indigenous groups, the more they were willing to return the land and grant autonomy to Mapuche (Nooitgedagt et al., 2021b). For the Mapuche participants, we found that higher relative indigenous ownership was related to stronger demands for territorial restitution. Our latent profile analyses in New Zealand revealed that New Zealand Europeans in the ‘outgroup (Mori) ownership’ profile were most willing to territorially compensate the Mori, followed by those in ‘shared ownership’ and ‘no ownership’ profiles, whereas people in the ‘ingroup ownership’ profile were least supportive of compensation (Nooitgedagt et al., 2022b). In this study we also found that perceived Mori determination rights were highest and perceived NZ European rights the lowest among individuals in the ‘outgroup (Mori) ownership’ profile. Finally, there is evidence that ownership beliefs motivate collective action in settler societies. Selvanathan and colleagues (2021) have found that ownership beliefs predict support for reactionary counter movements, such as Australia Day celebrations by White Australians as a response to Invasion Day protests held by and on behalf of Aborigines. Settlers and indigenous inhabitants tend to disagree about how to refer to the day when settlers arrived by boats to Australia.

Moving on to conflict contexts, ingroup territorial ownership beliefs were related to less willingness to forgive the rival ethnic outgroup or to promote good relations with outgroup members in Kosovo, Israel/Palestine and Cyprus (Storz et al., 2020). In Israel, we also examined political solutions to the conflict. We found less support for negotiations among individuals higher on collective psychological ownership (Storz et al., 2022c), and our analysis of ownership profiles (Warnke et al., 2022) showed that Jews in the ‘ingroup ownership’ profile were less supportive of land division compared to those in the ‘shared ownership’ profile. This includes both opposition to the creation of an independent Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel and to the creation of a binational state with equal rights for both groups. Similarly, Palestinian citizens of Israel in the ‘ingroup ownership’ condition opposed the Israeli annexation of the occupied territories more strongly than those in the ‘shared ownership’ condition.

In sum, our findings across different national contexts show that country ownership beliefs – even though important for strengthening *ingroup* cohesion – can represent a barrier to favourable *intergroup* relations, and this includes resistance to newcomers, unwillingness to offer territorial compensation to the first (indigenous) inhabitants, and reluctance to engage in reconciliation in ongoing conflicts. On a bright note, our correlational studies from Kosovo and

Israel show that a sense of shared ownership ('this land belongs both to Albanians and Serbs') is related to a stronger support for joint political decision making (Storz et al., 2022b) and we have experimental evidence from Kosovo that shared ownership increases reconciliation intentions (Storz et al., 2022a). Emphasizing shared ownership (instead of ingroup ownership only or no ownership) might be the way forward to help retain the positive outcomes of involvement and at the same time improve intergroup relations.

Closing thoughts

With our work on collective psychological ownership, Maykel and I have, in collaboration with colleagues from different parts of the world, developed a scientifically innovative and societally relevant line of research. We have only discovered the tip of the iceberg and my hope is that our research will inspire many intergroup relations scholars, including but certainly not limited to social psychologists, to advance this line of research further.

Rewind 20 years back to year 2002 and my idealistic self in Australia. To my great surprise, I won the 'My country' poem writing competition and my poem was published in the Deakin University newspaper. The jury bought into my denial of country ownership. With the findings from our research on country ownership beliefs across national contexts, I am now quite sure that I would not have won the competition had I been on student exchange in Israel, Kosovo, or Cyprus. And chances are high I would have won it in New Zealand, for instance. Australia and New Zealand are countries where outgroup (indigenous) ownership perceptions are present, where a large proportion of the settler population perceives 'shared ownership', but where we also found a small but not negligible group of people who subscribe to the 'no ownership' rhetoric. Most importantly, though, the research that Maykel and I have conducted in the past decade has taught me how widespread and how important country ownership feelings are across the globe, and that such feelings can also be beneficial for community engagement. Importantly, a sense of shared ownership can even improve intergroup relations. With this knowledge in mind, I would not even dare to write a poem again that denies the existence of 'my' (or 'our') country.

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