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Secondary Transfer Effect and Natives' Acculturation Behaviours: The Role of Natives' Perceived Moral Distance and Multicultural Ideology

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ABSTRACT

The increase in migration and cultural diversity across various Western regions has highlighted the need to promote harmonious coexistence between those who migrate from other countries and the native populations. Promoting social harmony is the primary objective in both acculturation and intergroup contact research. Particularly relevant to this aim is the secondary transfer effect (STE), consisting in the spreading of the effects of contact with a primary outgroup to attitudes towards secondary outgroups uninvolved in the contact setting. This study aims to explore the STE of positive contact with African migrants (as the primary outgroup) on the acculturation behaviours of natives, and specifically, how these behaviours affect natives' prointegration actions towards refugees (as the secondary outgroup). To achieve this objective, we also investigated two potential underlying processes: natives' perceived moral distance, linked to the STE and contact literature, and natives' multicultural ideology, associated with natives' acculturation preferences. We hypothesised that positive interactions of Italian adults ($N=280$) with African migrants would be associated with natives' prorefugee behaviours through natives' perceived moral distance towards African migrants and their multicultural ideology. Logistic SEM analysis revealed indirect effects through the two hypothesised mediators, emphasising their role in driving natives' prorefugee behaviours.

1 | Introduction

Social harmony between different groups has been the primary focus of the acculturation and contact literature. In both approaches, harmony between groups is viewed as a positive outcome that results from positive intergroup interactions (Hässler et al. 2020; Sam and Berry 2006). The acculturation literature mainly explores the factors that promote physical, psychological and relational adaptation for both host populations and migrants (Sam and Berry 2006). It emphasises the clinical and affective outcomes resulting from interactions between cultural groups, particularly among

minorities (Greenland and Brown 2005). Conversely, contact literature primarily investigates outcomes—such as attitudes towards outgroups—that stem from contact between larger social groups, primarily among majorities (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). There have been various studies that have attempted to bring together the literature on contact and acculturation, through investigations that considered the role of intergroup contact in relation to migrants' adaptation to the new context (e.g., Doucerain et al. 2024) and investigations that examined the role of contact in shaping acculturation processes for both groups in contact, that is, natives and migrants (e.g., Bagci, Stathi, and Acar 2022).

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The phenomenon examined in contact research, known as the secondary transfer effect (hereafter, STE), aligns with the goals of both literature studies and can pave the way for understanding the broader role of contact on acculturation outcomes in a multicultural society. Specifically, the STE refers to how positive contact not only fosters positive outcomes towards the group with whom one has direct contact (primary outgroup) but also extends these outcomes to other groups with whom there has been no direct contact (secondary outgroups), thereby promoting wider intergroup harmony (Pettigrew 2009). We know that while many studies on the STE and acculturation literature have focused on outgroup attitudes as outcomes, fewer studies have addressed actual behaviours (Vezzali et al. 2021; Zagefka et al. 2023). Additionally, recognising that positive attitudes towards outgroups do not always translate into concrete actions or societal changes aimed at promoting social equality (Dixon, Durrheim, and Tredoux 2005), we used a measure of collective action behaviour as the dependent variable. This allows us to rigorously test our hypotheses regarding the STE in natives' acculturation behaviours, overcoming the limitations of simply measuring acculturation preferences and directly assessing the actions that natives take in response to migrants' acculturation.

Crucially, we examined moral distance (Pacilli et al. 2016) and multicultural ideology (Berry and Kalin 1995) as two potentially related constructs that may help explain the STE and add valuable insight to existing research. Regarding contact and STE research specifically, the prevailing explanation for the STE has been attitude generalisation, although the significance of this process has been questioned (Vezzali et al. 2021; Vezzali, Pagliaro, et al. 2023). Given the increased interest in morality within contact research (e.g., Brambilla, Hewstone, and Colucci 2013) and collective action (Prislei et al. 2024), we tested moral distance (Pacilli et al. 2016; see also Ballone et al. 2023) as a potential mediator. Moral distance has been applied to STE research (Vezzali, Pagliaro, et al. 2023), and we argue that it is likely associated with a relevant construct in acculturation research—multicultural ideology—which has rarely been explored in STE studies (see Henschel and Derksen 2023; Henschel and Kötting 2023).

1.1 | STE

Intergroup contact represents a pivotal strategy for reducing prejudice and discrimination (Allport 1954; Hodson and Hewstone 2013; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006). Its effects however can go beyond what is commonly thought, that is the improvement of relations with the outgroup encountered. Pettigrew (2009) indeed theorised and showed that contact outcomes led to a generalisation to other groups not directly involved in the contact.

While contact research has recently turned to investigate more closely collective action as a way to foster social equality (Hässler et al. 2021), the STE literature has generally neglected collective action processes. This is particularly surprising, given that the concept of STE is closely tied to that of the promotion of a more equal society (see Schulz and Taylor 2018;

Vezzali, Pagliaro, et al. 2023). Additionally, Ünver et al. (2022) and Boin et al. (2021) underlined the need for STE to investigate outcomes related to societal changes such as collective action.

To fill this gap and understand whether the STE can help in actually promoting social equality in the society at large, we focused on collective action behaviours as the outcome.

The STE literature also underlines the processes that affect this generalisation, identifying several mediators and moderators. In a recent review, Vezzali et al. (2021) categorised mediators into three groups: mediators involving changes in perceptions towards outgroups (e.g., attitudes; Pettigrew 2009; Zezelj et al. 2020), mediators involving changes in perceptions towards ingroups (e.g., ingroup identification; Pettigrew 1998) and mediators involving changes towards the self (e.g., Social Dominance Orientation; Dhont, Van Hiel, and Hewstone 2014).

The main mediators of STE were those involving changes in perceptions towards outgroups, with outgroup morality standing out as a particularly significant mediator (Vezzali et al. 2021). Among the different morality dimensions, we focused on one that may be particularly relevant to our aims related to the integration with acculturation constructs, that is, perceived moral distance.

1.2 | Perceived Moral Distance

Morality, defined as perceptions of right and wrong (Ellemers, Pagliaro, and van Nunspeet 2023), plays a pivotal role in shaping impressions of others (Brambilla, Biella, and Freeman 2018) and is associated with attitudes towards outgroups (Brambilla and Leach 2014). Brambilla et al. (2011, 2016) showed the main role that morality—compared with other dimensions such as sociability and competence—plays in forming impressions and regulating interpersonal and intergroup relations. Hence, people are more motivated to interact with a moral other (Brambilla, Hewstone, and Colucci 2013). Several studies have examined how positive contact enhances perceptions of outgroup morality, thereby reducing prejudice (e.g., Brambilla, Hewstone, and Colucci 2013; Vezzali et al. 2017). Outgroup morality is not only associated with positive outcomes towards the outgroup involved in contact but also with the same outcomes for the outgroup(s) not involved. This evidence suggests the mediation role of morality in STE (Vezzali et al. 2019).

In a recent review of the contact and collective action literature, Cocco et al. (2024) showed the significant role of perceptions of outgroup morality as a mediator also when considering collective action intentions, using different morality constructs (e.g., Brambilla, Hewstone, and Colucci 2013). When the outgroup was perceived as moral, the probability that the ingroup implemented collective actions was raised (Brambilla, Hewstone, and Colucci 2013; Vezzali et al. 2017; Vezzali, Pagliaro, et al. 2023). Research on contact and morality is, however, still at the beginning, and we therefore investigate such an association applied to the STE, concentrating on moral distance. Perceived moral distance is a moral dimension that emerges from social comparison, and

it represents a relevant construct in the regulation of intergroup processes (Tajfel and Turner 1979). It refers to the perception of differences between ingroup and outgroup across moral features (Pacilli et al. 2016; see also Ballone et al. 2023). When these differences are low, not only prejudice is reduced, but an increase in fostering collective action intentions also be observed (Vezzali, Pagliaro, et al. 2023). Moral distance, unlike morality based on the stereotype content model (e.g., outgroup morality; Fiske et al. 2002), is conceptualised in terms of social comparison (Pacilli et al. 2016). Social comparison plays a central role in regulating intergroup relations (Tajfel and Turner 1979); when the outgroup is perceived as morally similar to the ingroup, it facilitates what is known as moral inclusion (Crimston et al. 2016), granting the outgroup rights comparable to those of the ingroup. This conceptualisation of morality is particularly effective because it goes beyond the mere perception of the outgroup based on stereotypical traits. Instead, it allows for an assessment of the degree to which the outgroup is morally similar to the ingroup. According to the Belief Congruence Theory (Rokeach and Rothman 1965), the perception of similarity in moral terms represents the most relevant and effective social category (Heider 1958; Rokeach 1968; Schwartz and Struch 1989) in promoting positive intergroup outcomes (Konrath, Bushman, and Campbell 2006; Tajfel 1982). Indeed, this theory suggests that an isolated evaluation of an outgroup's morality (e.g., moral stereotypes) does not have the same impact as comparing the morality of one's ingroup with that of the outgroup.

This variable also proved to be pivotal within the STE paradigm. Vezzali, Pagliaro, et al. (2023) examined moral distance as the process allowing the generalisation of contact effects to collective action intentions, that is, intentions to engage in behaviours aimed at changing the status quo. Results revealed that moral distance towards the primary outgroup was linked to a similar perception towards the secondary outgroup, which in turn was associated with greater collective action intentions towards secondary outgroups. Diverging from larger literature, the generalisation of contact effects through attitudes towards the primary outgroup did not emerge as a mediator. These studies showed the relevance of perceived moral distance as a mediator in the STE paradigm. However, these studies suffer from at least one important limitation, common to larger contact literature as well as STE literature (but also collective action; Cocco et al. 2024) specifically: they used measures of intentions, rather than assessing actual behaviours.

Morality is a significant issue for acculturation literature too. Natives' acceptance of migrants' culture is partially affected by the morality of cultural practices, for example, religious practice (Smetana 2006; Turiel 2002). Religion is a useful example of the role of morality in acculturation preferences because is often divisive. Verkuyten (2007) explained the role of morality and religion in a multicultural society and underlined the impossibility of blind acceptance of migrants' culture without considering the role of morality.

In the acculturation literature, morality emerged as a significant variable related to natives' preference for migrants' cultural maintenance. López-Rodríguez and Zagefka (2015) and Ordóñez-Carrasco et al. (2020) showed how natives' perception

of migrants' morality was positively associated with natives' preferences for migrant cultural maintenance. However, there are only a few studies that investigated morality in these processes.

1.3 | Multicultural Ideology

Intergroup contact and morality play a pivotal role in acculturation processes too. Acculturation is defined as a process that begins with contact between two cultural groups and entails an assessment and potential adaptation of routines, values and social identities (Schwartz et al. 2010). Aligns with this definition, intergroup contact emerged as the foundation of acculturation processes. Specifically, when it is positive, it can favour the emergence of harmonious and peaceful coexistence between different cultural groups.

Then, intergroup contact is a relevant aspect which contributes to shape acculturation processes (Sam and Berry 2006). When people from different cultures, migrants and natives, positive interact, they can embrace integrative acculturative strategies (Berry et al. 2006) such as *multiculturalism for natives* (Mutual Acculturation Model; Berry 1974, 1980) and *biculturalism* (i.e., *integration*) for migrants (Bidimensional Model of Immigrant Acculturation; Berry 1980) and identify with more than one culture. Consequently, they can achieve harmonious intercultural relations and well-being (Berry et al. 2006). Integrative acculturation strategies by natives involve both supporting the maintenance of migrants' cultural identities and encouraging migrants' active participation within host societies (Berry 1991). The acculturation literature aims to explore the processes that lead to these strategies. Among these processes, multicultural ideology plays a crucial role (Verkuyten 2007; Berry and Ward 2016; Lefringhausen et al. 2022).

Multicultural ideology is an attitude that includes mutual respect for cultural differences and active support for equal opportunities between dominant and nondominant groups (e.g., Berry and Kalin 1995; Van de Vijver, Breugelmans, and Schalk-Soekar 2008). It is a positive global evaluation that encompasses positive attitudes towards migrants' cultural maintenance and acknowledges the need to embrace diversity more inclusively. Cultural diversity is not merely recognised as a demographic characteristic but is also evaluated as essential for the proper functioning of society by its citizens (Berry 1984; Berry and Kalin 1995). Verkuyten (2007) explained how this variable could be affected by contextual factors and individual experiences such as intergroup contact, social identity and morality perceptions (Lefringhausen et al. 2022; Guan et al. 2011; Verkuyten 2005). Moreover, ideologies refer to a relatively stable disposition that could be affected by contextual factors such as intergroup contact (Vezzali et al. 2021). Additionally, the literature showed that intergroup contact could also affect dispositional traits (Vezzali et al. 2018).

Multicultural ideology has been associated with contact with migrants (Lefringhausen et al. 2022; Parris et al. 2024), highlighting the significant role of positive and frequent intercultural contact on natives' multicultural ideology. Importantly for the present research, variables similar to multicultural ideology have also been used in two STE studies (Henschel

and Derksen 2023; Henschel and Kötting 2023). Henschel and Derksen 2023, considering similar group categories as in the present study (migrants for the primary outgroup, refugees as the secondary outgroup), found that acceptance of cultural diversity mediated the association of contact with the primary outgroup with attitudes towards the secondary outgroup. This variable, within the STE paradigm, emerges as an outcome of cognitive liberalisation, focused on openness towards cultural diversity. As we know, cognitive liberalisation outcomes are considered the outcome most closely linked to the achievement of social harmony (Mepham and Martinovic 2018), and we, therefore, expect it to be the most proximal in association with collective action behaviours.

Despite the few attempts to investigate the role of multicultural ideology in STE, we aim to extend this preliminary evidence in at least two ways. First, using a behavioural measure as the outcome, which allows greater confidence in the societal relevance of contact and the STE. Indeed, acculturation literature did not investigate collective action behaviours at all but mostly remains on an attitudinal investigation. According to the literature gaps mentioned above, our study tries to overcome these gaps by employing a behavioural measure related to natives' acculturation behaviours (e.g., Zagefka et al. 2023). A second and more important way, investigating the perceived moral distance as an antecedent of multicultural ideology. Indeed, we aim to answer the question of why individuals become more accepting of groups that are often devalued. We argue that being morality a primary dimension driving group evaluation (Brambilla and Leach 2014), broader acceptance of outgroups implies their moral acceptance, in our case in terms of greater similarity to the ingroup morality. Multicultural ideology is not blind openness towards other cultures, but it is guided by moral judgments (Verkuyten, Voci, and Pettigrew 2022; Verkuyten 2007; Henschel and Derksen 2023; Henschel and Kötting 2023). The literature on multiculturalism has always emphasised that attitudes in support of it are also influenced by the moral dimension (Smetana 2006; Turiel 2002). Specifically, perceiving migrants as immoral reduces support for multiculturalism in one's own country. We hypothesise that a reduction in moral distance allows broader acceptance in terms of adopting a multicultural ideology, which in turn can relate to a range of secondary outgroups (and in the present study, we test refugees as the secondary outgroup).

1.4 | Proimmigrant Behaviours

Okamoto and Ebert (2016) defined proimmigrant behaviours as efforts by the local population and organisations aimed at promoting the inclusion of migrants in the community and/or improving their lives (e.g., protests to counter restrictive migration policies). These behaviours are particularly relevant in migration processes (Okamoto and Ebert 2016).

Intergroup contact (Allport 1954) is one of the processes that can foster these behaviours (Okamoto and Ebert 2016), and this association can be investigated according to the collective action literature. Due to the lack of explanation of the complex relationship between intergroup contact and collective actions by traditional

collective action theories (such as SIMCA, Van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears 2008), recent reviews (Cocco et al. 2024; Hässler et al. 2021) attempt to overcome this gap.

Starting from the assumption that intergroup contact aims to foster social harmony between groups (Hässler et al. 2020), whereas collective actions often pursue social change, Hässler et al. (2021) proposed the Integrated Contact Collective Action Model (ICCAM). This model seeks to identify moderators that can encourage collective action following positive intergroup contact between advantaged and disadvantaged groups. In particular, when the majority engages in collective action on behalf of minority groups, this can contribute to social harmony by addressing and restoring social justice (Hässler et al. 2020).

Building upon this model, Cocco et al. (2024) added investigations on mediators.

These reviews showed that collective actions were positively associated with intergroup contact thanks to specific mediators and moderators. Although these reviews investigated these processes among both advantaged and disadvantaged groups, we report only evidence concerning advantaged groups, as they are the ones involved in our present study.

First, Cocco et al. (2024) showed the significant role of perceptions of outgroup morality as a mediator. When the outgroup was perceived as moral as the ingroup, the probability that the ingroup implemented collective actions was raised (Brambilla, Hewstone, and Colucci 2013; Vezzali, Pagliaro, et al. 2023). Other mediators that emerged from these reviews were ideologies (Hässler et al. 2021) and perceptions of group hierarchy (Cocco et al. 2024). Specifically, Meleady and Vermue (2019) studies showed the mediation role of Social Dominance Orientation (SDO; Sidanius et al. 2017) on collective action among advantaged groups. Based on this assumption, in our study, we also introduced two new potential mediators, that is, multicultural ideology and perceived moral distance. Both these variables emerged as potential mediators of collective action behaviours (Vezzali et al. 2021; Hässler et al. 2021). Specifically, multicultural ideology emerged as the most proximal variable linked to collective action behaviours when interpreted as a cognitive liberalisation variable (Mepham and Martinovic 2018), while moral distance was identified as a mediator in the STE model of collective action intentions. Building on this, we hypothesised that moral distance could also serve as a mediator in the context of actual collective behaviours.

2 | The Present Study

Given the role of intergroup contact as an antecedent of acculturation processes and the limited studies investigating acculturation within the STE paradigm, especially on natives' acculturation behaviours, this study strives to overcome this gap. This study aims to contribute new insights into the STE paradigm and acculturation literature by investigating the role of natives' perceived moral distance in promoting tangible

action supporting refugees and examining its relation with multicultural ideology. Additionally, we aim to expand the outcomes investigated in the STE paradigm and acculturation literature, thus far by employing behavioural measures as the outcome (Ünver et al. 2022; Zagefka et al. 2023).

To achieve this goal, we explored the relationships between positive contact with African migrants and natives' prorefugee acculturation behaviours using the STE paradigm. We hypothesised a direct positive association between positive contact with African migrants and natives' prorefugee acculturation behaviours (H_1).

We also hypothesised that this positive association would be explained by two pathways: first, a negative relationship between positive contact with African migrants and natives' perceived moral distance towards them, and second, a positive relationship between positive contact with African migrants and natives' multicultural ideology (H_2).

Finally, we investigated the serial indirect effect of natives' perceived moral distance towards African migrants and natives' multicultural ideology (H_3).

In Italy, African migrants are a discriminated group. International human rights bodies (2024) highlighted the pressure on civil society organisations aiding migrants, racism and discrimination targeting Roma and people of African descent, and rule of law concerns. Moreover, they represent the second-largest migrant group in Italy (Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration 2024). Considering this evidence, we decided to investigate this group as the primary outgroup.

Although we did not investigate the role of quantity of contact, Pettigrew (1997) and Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) emphasised that quality of contact is crucial for improving intergroup relations. This aspect is particularly relevant for majority group members and may thus be responsible for the typical stronger contact effects found among majorities than among minorities (Tropp and Pettigrew 2005). These assumptions are especially relevant in the Italian context (Vezzali, Trifiletti, et al. 2023), where contact quality emerged as the primary factor associated with migrant-related outcomes. Moreover, due to the large number of African migrants in Italy, we assumed that most of the participants have been in contact with this group (Department for Civil Liberties and Immigration 2024). The theoretical model is presented in Figure 1.

3 | Method

3.1 | Participants

Participants were recruited by students from a Northern Italian university using a snowball procedure. Before participating in the study, all participants signed informed consent forms, agreeing to participate and allowing for the processing of their data. This procedure adhered to the ethical standards of psychological research and was approved by the ethics committee. Participants then completed the survey on Qualtrics. The total sample included 292 participants, of whom 12 were excluded: 2 due to being born abroad and 10 because at least one parent was born abroad. The final sample consisted of 280 participants, all of whom were born in Italy to parents who were also born in Italy and held Italian nationality. One participant did not declare their nationality; however, based on their place of birth and that of their parents, we retained them in the sample. Among them, 72.3% identified as female and 27.7% as male, with an average age of 33.11 years ($SD = 16.3$).

3.2 | Measures¹

First, participants completed the sociodemographic information section. Following that, they responded to the following measures:

1. Quality of contact with African migrants: To assess the quality of contact with African migrants, we used a scale previously employed by Capozza et al. (2013). Participants rated their contact with African migrants using four bipolar items (e.g., hostile/friendly) on a response scale ranging from 1 = A lot (negative pole) to 5 = A lot (positive pole). The scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability ($\omega = 0.85$).
2. Natives' perceived moral distance towards African migrants. Natives' perceived moral distance towards African migrants was assessed using four items adapted from Pacilli et al. (2016). Participants indicated the extent of moral differences between African migrants and Italians across four moral dimensions (i.e., trustworthiness, loyalty, reliability and morality) on a 5-step Likert scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = very much. The scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability ($\omega = 0.89$).

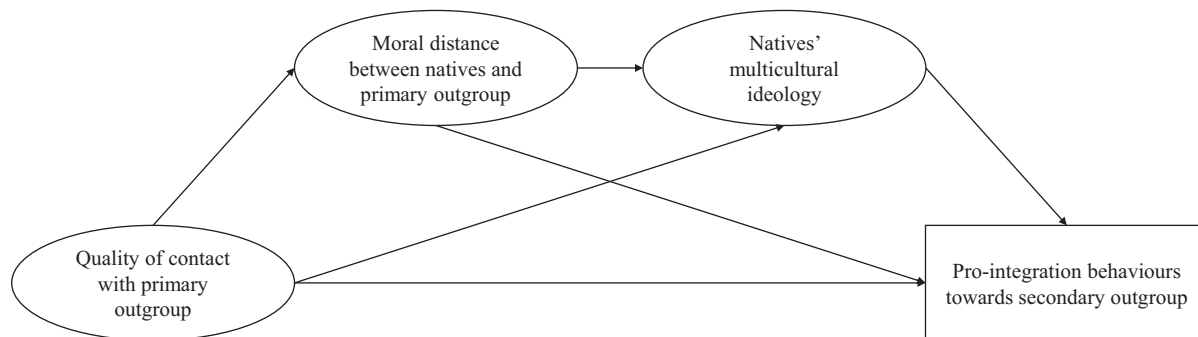


FIGURE 1 | Theoretical model.

3. Natives' multicultural ideology. Natives' multicultural ideology was assessed using a short adaptation of the Italian Adaptation of the Multicultural Ideology Scale-Revised (MCI-r) (Parisse et al. 2024). Participants indicated their level of agreement with eight items (e.g., 'It would be nice to see all ethnic groups present in Italy maintain their original cultures') on a 5-step Likert scale ranging from 1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree. The scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability ($\omega = 0.89$).
4. Prorefugee behaviours. Prorefugee behaviours were assessed by asking participants to sign (1) or not (0) a petition from Amnesty International about promoting the integration of refugees in Italy. The petition can be found at this link: <https://www.amnesty.it/appelli/noi-stiamo-con-i-rifugiati/>.

3.3 | Analysis

Descriptive statistics were conducted using R Studio (2021), indicating adequate kurtosis and skewness for all the scales (Tabachnick, Fidell, and Ullman 2013).

Subsequently, correlation analysis was performed using the same software. Correlations are summarised in Table 1.

Subsequently, we conducted a logistic structural equation model (SEM) analysis, due to the categorical nature of the dependent variable, to evaluate the measurement model and investigate the structural relationships between variables, while considering

age and gender as covariates based on their correlations. The SEM analysis used a diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS) estimator. Latent variable estimates included the quality of contact with African migrants, natives' perceived moral distance towards African migrants and natives' multicultural ideology. Prorefugee behaviours and the covariates were examined as observed variables.

Model fit was assessed using the following indices: incremental or comparative indices (TLI, CFI), approximation indices (RMSEA) and sample indexes of fit (SRMR). TLI greater than 0.90, CFI greater than 0.95, RMSEA less or equal to 0.06 and SRMR less or equal to 0.08 were considered indicators of model good fit (Hu and Bentler 1999).

3.4 | Results

The tested model exhibited good fit indices ($\chi^2(142) = 126.928$, $p < 0.001$; CFI = 1.00; TLI = 1.00; RMSEA = 0.00, 90% CI [0.0, 0.19], SRMR = 0.05). Subsequently, the structural relations (see Figure 2) tested with the covariates revealed that the quality of contact with African migrants was negatively associated with natives' perceived moral distance towards African migrants ($\beta = -0.45$, $p < 0.001$) and positively associated with natives' multicultural ideology ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < 0.001$). No associations were found between the quality of contact with African migrants and prorefugee behaviours ($\beta = 0.03$, $p = 0.769$). Additionally, natives' perceived moral distance towards African migrants was negatively associated with natives' multicultural ideology

TABLE 1 | Correlations analysis.

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Quality of contact with African migrants	3.89	0.78	—					
2. Natives' perceived moral distance towards African migrants	2.28	0.87	-0.39***	—				
3. Natives' multicultural ideology	3.84	0.81	0.55***	-0.48***	—			
4. Prorefugee behaviours	—	—	0.24***	-0.18***	0.38***	—		
5. Age	33.1	16.3	-0.10	0.10	-0.13*	0.01	—	
6. Gender	—	—	-0.10	0.00	-0.12*	0.06	0.07	—

Note: Prorefugee behaviours: 177 participants signed the petition and 103 did not. Gender: 202 females and 78 males.

*** $p < 0.001$.

* $p < 0.05$.

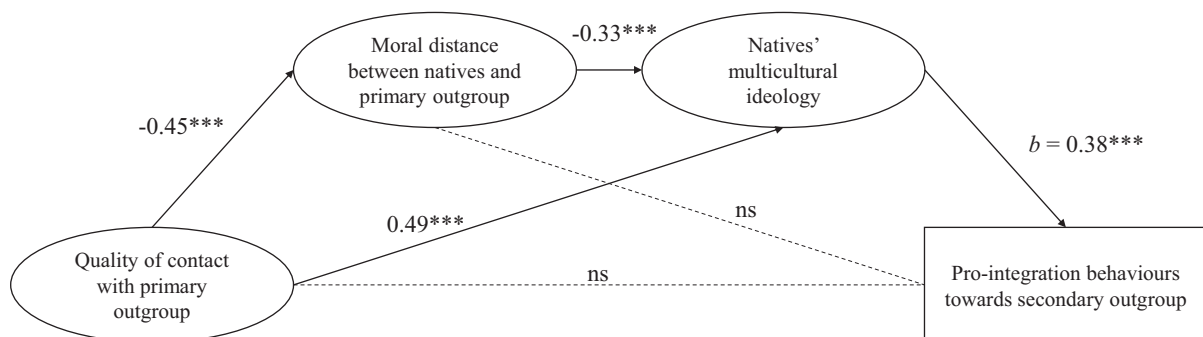


FIGURE 2 | Structural equation model. *** $p < 0.001$.

($\beta = -0.33$, $p < 0.001$), with no significant associations found between natives' perceived moral distance and prorefugee behaviours ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = 0.491$). Furthermore, natives' multicultural ideology was positively associated with prorefugee behaviours ($b = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$). By converting this coefficient b , obtained from a logistic SEM, into an odds ratio, we can state that: for every one-unit increase in the multicultural ideology variable, the odds that participants sign the petition increase by approximately 46%.

Following this, we tested the indirect effects using the Monte Carlo Confidence Interval for Indirect Effect with 50,000 repetitions (Preacher and Selig 2012). Results indicated a significant total effect ($\beta = 0.35$, Monte Carlo 95% CI: 0.25; 0.45). Moreover, consistent with our main prediction, a significant serial indirect effect of natives' perceived moral distance towards African migrants and natives' multicultural ideology on prorefugee behaviours was observed ($\beta = 0.08$, Monte Carlo 95% CI: 0.04; 0.12). Finally, a significant simple indirect effect of natives' multicultural ideology on prorefugee behaviours was found ($\beta = 0.26$, Monte Carlo 95% CI: 0.15; 0.38). However, no significant simple indirect effect of natives' perceived moral distance towards African migrants on prorefugee behaviours emerged ($\beta = -0.02$, Monte Carlo 95% CI: -0.10 ; 0.05). Finally, the R^2 values from our model explain 27.9% of the variance in prorefugee behaviours, 21.7% in the perceived moral distance towards natives and 51.9% in natives' multicultural ideology.

4 | Discussion

The present study stems from the belief that complex social processes such as migrations should be investigated involving a theoretical framework that could address this complexity. STE provides a valuable framework for examining these processes. The present study aims to test the STE of collective action, using a behavioural measure and examining moral distance and multicultural ideology as mediators.

Results showed that natives' positive contact with African migrants (primary outgroup) was positively associated with natives' prorefugee behaviours (with refugees representing the secondary outgroup) not directly but through the indirect effect of natives' perceived moral distance towards the primary outgroup and natives' multicultural ideology. These results align with evidence from STE literature that highlighted the indirect effect of contact on these generalisation processes.

Additionally, results also support previous research using morality as a mediator of the STE (Vezzali et al. 2021) and collective action intentions (Cocco et al. 2024), also with specific reference to moral distance (Vezzali, Pagliaro, et al. 2023).

Similarly, findings for multicultural ideology are consistent with the beneficial effects on multicultural attitudes (i.e., acceptance of diversity) found in the literature as well as with its role as a mediator in the STE (Henschel and Derksen 2023; Henschel and Kötting 2023). On the other side, they sensibly extend previous research. First, they show that moral distance and multicultural ideology are related constructs and that lowering perceptions of

moral distance between groups can represent a precondition to developing an ideology open to multiculturalism. Second, they are consistent with the relevance of these constructs and of contact not only for outgroup attitudes, but for actual action related to natives' acculturation, and an action aimed to mobilise individuals for social equality and consequently promote social harmony (which we argue represents an aim both for contact and acculturation research).

The result underscores the importance of involving a complex theoretical framework related to the generalisation of contact outcomes, to better understand processes related to acculturation, for example, natives' acculturation behaviours, in a multicultural society characterised by different cultural groups. Specifically, our study tries to investigate how the STE paradigm could be useful in investigating acculturation processes, for example, natives' acculturation behaviours. We mainly focus on this outcome, but we believe that this paradigm could also be fruitful when applied also on other acculturation processes. Our results showed the role of natives' perceived moral distance and natives' multicultural ideology in shaping natives' prointegration behaviour towards refugees.

However, the simple indirect effect that did not involve natives' perceived moral distance but only natives' multicultural ideology showed the main role of this variable on these behaviours. This result underscores how the role of morality within the STE paradigm varies depending on the outcomes and secondary mediators used, and it contributes to the literature on the proximal influence of multicultural ideology on collective action (Mephem and Martinovic 2018), emphasising the role of morality in shaping this relationship. Future studies could elucidate on which outcomes and mediators this variable appears to play a predominant role. Furthermore, this result highlights how multicultural ideology, although associated with morality, is primarily linked to contact.

The present study includes mediators pertaining to two categories identified by Vezzali et al.'s (2021) review, that is mediators referred to the outgroup (moral distance) and mediators referred to the self (multicultural ideology). The categorisation of multicultural ideology into the self did not assume that it should not be potentially affected by contextual factors and individual experiences such as intergroup contact. This way, it shows that the different processes can not only be parallel but can also influence each other. Specifically, it shows that changes in outgroup perceptions (morality) can lead to changes to the self, in this case favouring the adoption of a broader ideology for the acceptance of a variety of secondary outgroups. In other words, it contributes to providing a "real" answer to why the STE occurs: if persons adopt an ideology encompassing acceptance of multiple groups, it is clear why their attitudes towards groups uninvolved in contact improve.

Future studies could investigate the STE paradigm and the role of other variables emerging as relevant in acculturation literature. Moreover, future research could investigate the role of multicultural ideology on other disadvantaged groups, to understand how to promote social equality in the society at large and among different social groups.

However, our study revealed a few limits too. First, the cross-sectional design does not allow us to assume any causal associations between the variables considered. Future studies should involve experimental and/or longitudinal designs to reveal causal effects and stability during the time. Second, we did not assess participants' beliefs about the truth of the petition presented. However, the fact that we found variability in the measure, and a variability consistent with expectations, increases confidence in its reliability. Additionally, a petition, as a form of collective action, typically requires minimal engagement from participants. Finally, we did not control for participants' prior contact with secondary outgroup members. However, given research shows that results hold when also accounting for this variable (e.g., Tausch et al. 2010; Vezzali et al. 2021), we are confident that the effects would not change.

In conclusion, we showed that contact can significantly impact individuals' tendency to engage in action to promote integration also towards migrant outgroups not encountered, and a relevant role is played by moral distance and multicultural ideology.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Endnotes

¹This study originated as an experimental study. However, the experimental manipulation of imagined contact did not result in significant effects on any of the variables considered. Therefore, it was decided to conduct the study using quality of contact as the predictor and adopting a cross-sectional design. We reported one-way ANOVA results in Appendix A.

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Appendix A

We performed one-way ANOVA to test the effect of our manipulation on the quality of contact with the primary outgroup (Table A1). We hypothesised that manipulating imagined contact with the primary outgroup affects the perception of the quality of contact with that outgroup.

Due to the absence of a significant effect on our main variable, for using the data in a cross-sectional way, we performed other one-way ANOVA on the other variables involved in the study (Tables A2–A4).

TABLE A1 | One-way ANOVA on quality of contact with the primary outgroup.

	Df	Sum	Mean	F	p
Manipulation 0–1	1	0.60	0.60	0.995	0.319
Residual	278	168.6	0.61		

TABLE A2 | One-way ANOVA on moral distance towards the primary outgroup.

	Df	Sum	Mean	F	p
Manipulation 0–1	1	0.01	0.01	0.014	0.905
Residual	278	210.87	0.76		

TABLE A3 | One-way ANOVA on multicultural ideology.

	Df	Sum	Mean	F	p
Manipulation 0-1	1	0.26	0.26	0.394	0.531
Residual	278	182.20	0.66		

TABLE A4 | One-way ANOVA on prointegration behaviour.

	Df	Sum	Mean	F	p
Manipulation 0-1	1	0.43	0.43	1.857	0.174
Residual	278	64.68	0.23		

The results showed the absence of any significant effect of our manipulation of the variables considered in the present study. Then, we decided to use the main variable that should be affected by the manipulation as an independent variable, that is, quality of contact with the primary outgroup.