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Intersectionality of Ethno-cultural Identities and Construal of Distant Suffering Outgroups

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore how white Catholic men talk about the indirect dilemma of non-intervention for black ethnic outgroups. We illustrate how they mobilise global categorisation (all humanity) and use various forms of denial to deal with their non-involvement. Having analyzed representative fragments of their prejudice avoidance talk, we conclude with some observation about the strategic deployment of categories and denial forms as part of identity management talk. In contrast to quantitative research that oversimplifies the ingroup-outgroup distinction, we show how the status and outgroupness levels of the needy appear to be both flexible and intricate, which depends on the often-ignored intersecting cultural factors, like the respondents' and victims' ethnic, racial and religious identities.

Keywords

Cross-Cultural Relations, Identity, Prejudice Denial, Textual Thematic Analysis

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Intersectionality of Ethno-cultural Identities and Construal of Distant Suffering Outgroups

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In this paper, we explore how white Catholic men talk about the indirect dilemma of non-intervention for black ethnic outgroups. We illustrate how they mobilise global categorisation (all humanity) and use various forms of denial to deal with their non-involvement. Having analyzed representative fragments of their prejudice avoidance talk, we conclude with some observation about the strategic deployment of categories and denial forms as part of identity management talk. In contrast to quantitative research that oversimplifies the ingroup-outgroup distinction, we show how the status and outgroupness levels of the needy appear to be both flexible and intricate, which depends on the often-ignored intersecting cultural factors, like the respondents' and victims' ethnic, racial and religious identities. Key Words: Cross-Cultural Relations, Identity, Prejudice Denial, Textual Thematic Analysis.

There is already evidence that social groups build, uphold or call into question authority relations through inter-group helping (Nadler & Halabi, 2006). Such helping can also be used to improve one's own ingroup image in general (Hopkins, Reicher, Harrison, Cassidy, Bull, & Levine, 2007) or benefit the ingroup in the long run by improving or reaffirming its reputation (Van Leeuwen, 2007). What is more, in exploring outgroup helping one should acknowledge the role of group norms (e.g., it is Christian to feel compassion for others) that make up specific identity contents (Reicher, Cassidy, Hopkins, & Levine, 2006).

Despite such a growing body of data, the issue of how needy outgroups are actually construed in talk is under-researched. Building on self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) which implies that depending on the social context people can identify themselves in multiple ways and can even recategorize former outgroup members as ingroup members (Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005), we aim to address at least some of this research deficit. Recognizing that intersectionality of religious and racial identities shapes social categorisation and boundaries of belongingness (Fenn, 2003; Hamilton, 2001; McDonnell & De Lourenço, 2009; Winant, 2006), we explore how intersectionality can influence the construal of the outgroup that suffers a humanitarian disaster—a devastating phenomenon that is almost certain to become more common in the coming decades (Diamond, 2006).

In doing so, we acknowledge the overlooked impact of religion on people's lives, on important life domains, on cross-cultural dimensions, as well as on beliefs and practices (Tarakeshwar, Stanton, & Pargament, 2003). Intrigued by the unfairly ignored

question of how a mixed religious and ethnic identity context might potentially influence individuals to balance their negotiation between their respective sense of solidarity with the needy and a sense of their own migrant disadvantage, we include in our research people for whom religion matters and who engage in its active practice – white Polish Catholics at two catholic community centres in England. Since Catholicism and Polishness can be seen as quite intertwined (Hetnal, 1999; Zdankiewicz, 2001), we are hence able to continue the recent trend of research on interacting ethnic and religious identities (Gudrun Jensen, 2008). Addressing the gap of how audiences respond to communication about distant suffering and shedding light on the relationship between the self and a distant stranger (Boltanski, 1999), we also answer calls for studies on interwoven identities (Levine & Thompson, 2004) and on European attitudes toward the plight suffered by blacks (Grillo, 2008).

As Christianity teaches to help others, particularly strangers, which is exemplified by the proverbial Good Samaritan (Jackson, 2003; Martin, 2008), we probe the question of how our Catholic interviewees can construe African victims in terms of help deservingness. Drawing on previous research on outgroup helping (Levine & Thompson, 2004), we suspected that more verbal sympathy would be shown to Africans with similar religious affiliations (single outgroup – Group 1) than to Africans of an implied different religious orientation (double outgroup – Group 2). Although describing the victims as seeking sanctuary at the church or mosque cannot simply qualify them as Christians or Muslims, we nonetheless anticipated that it would be likely to create certain religious affiliations.

It is important that our research, in which we present interviewees with a short vignette, resembling a fragment from a daily morning paper and describing a natural disaster scenario, was purposefully designed to be structurally similar to the studies in which helping has been traditionally explored.

Such exploration has been notoriously difficult because of problems ranging from experimental manipulation, realistic setting, and measurement of intervention, let alone the issues of ethics or declared vs. “real” helping. We could have chosen to create a more realistic or visually vivid material, for instance by showing our interviewees a video clip with a bank account number to which they could donate money by making a phone call or asking them to put money in an offertory bag.

We were concerned, however, that doing so might potentially distract them from engaging in the verbal construal of the victims and that it might raise the sensitive issue of ethical problems. We did not want them to feel uncomfortable or distressed by dealing with a more dramatic and graphic presentation that might have made them focus more on the actual decision of whether or not to help and how much to offer. Such decision making processes were not the primary subject of our examination. Instead, we aimed to avoid imposing any actual obligation on our interviewees to see how, if at all, they could create such an obligation themselves and how they might discursively negotiate the implicit suggestion that they might be insensitive if they remained indifferent to the presented tragedy. Furthermore, we suppose that if the realistic character of our study had been a problem for them, they would have probably referred to it, at least implicitly.

Bearing this in mind, we decided to analyze the produced narratives from a theoretical angle of three denial forms that were already proven to be illuminative in research on humanitarian disasters (Cohen, 2001). Such forms include literal, implicatory

and interpretative denial. Literal denial entails a virtual rejection of a particular state of affairs. Facts are refused to be acknowledged for whatever reason – ignorance, deliberate lies or unconscious defense mechanisms. Implicatory denial implies the minimization of moral and political consequences through the emphasis of the lack of personal influence, so that the reality is not simply refused to be recognised, but its significance and implications are put under a question mark. Interpretative denial gives a new meaning to the given situation by indirectly invalidating the very sense of organizing help due to its alleged inefficiency and uselessness. This can happen through the change of words, euphemisms or technical jargon. Although the differences between the three states of denial may not always be clear, we were all in agreement on which of their elements were dominant in the quoted narratives.

Method

The problem with quantitative research is that in order to create a world of variables that can be manipulated, concepts have to be fixed. Hence quantitative methods are not the best at looking at the flexibility and context of categorisation. In contrast, qualitative research has shown how categories (like identities or group memberships) can be used in different ways at different times (Meinhof & Galasinski, 2005), particularly in domains that can be said to be dilemmatic (Condor & Gibson, 2007). Although experimental research on outgroup helping is growing, there is a notable deficit in research on how varying levels of victim outgroupness are reflected in multicultural discourse. Therefore, rather than running experiments, we conducted interviews to explore the kinds of identity categories and arguments that people could deploy themselves when dealing with a natural disaster description.

Aiming to focus primarily on the responses to that description, from a number of qualitative methods we chose the method of textual thematic analysis, which, like any research method, also has its drawbacks, like lesser capacity for tracking conversational flow and contradictory elements within particular accounts than discourse analysis. Nonetheless, we found it most relevant to our study due to its effectiveness of encapsulating the main threads of meaning in a large body of data and potential for capturing analogies and contrasts across the whole data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Interviewees

Forty Polish interviewees, who were informally approached at two Polish Catholic community centres on four separate Sundays, were randomly assigned to two equal nominal groups. They reported that Catholicism is important to them and said to have stayed in the UK for two to four years. They all claimed to have at least graduated from the American equivalent of high school and to be currently employed in England. Since the 10-15 minute interviews were done one to one, only 20-35 year old men, who comprised the most dominant and available group of unaccompanied individuals, were included. We chose to focus on men as most present women were accompanied by their friends and families who tended to join in the conversation in our earlier pilot study.

Procedure

At both centers there were two nominal groups - one and two, each of which included 10 individuals. Having obtained the clearance from the Departmental Ethical Board and included signed informed consent, all the interviews were done by the first author and were preceded by a short five-minute ice-breaker in the form of a quick chat about how the interviewees were doing, how long in England they had been for and what region of Poland they hailed from. Subsequently, they were asked if they might possibly get acquainted with a short report describing a natural disaster and answer just a few questions about it. Upon their consent, they were also asked if they minded their answers being recorded, so that no information would be lost. Nobody did. On rare occasions, when they asked who the researcher was, they were answered that he was a student exploring how people respond to those affected by natural disasters. All interviewees were presented with the following report:

Destructive drought

The people of the African country of Malawi have been recently struck with an unprecedented force by severe drought repercussions. The maize crop failure brought about by a drastic drop in rainfall began to take its toll. The area where starvation is rampant is growing faster than previously thought. This unusually devastating natural disaster has led to the death of thousands and the displacement of many more.

Gathering at a church (Gr I) / mosque (Gr II)

The desperate local population is gathering at a church/mosque. They need food, medical supplies, blankets and other basic necessities.

Individual members of Group one were shown a report in which the local African population was described as gathering at a church (CS). Trying to avoid imposing social categories, we gave participants an opportunity to construct the victims as outgroup (African) or ingroup members (Christian). Members of Group two were presented with a similar report featuring the victims gathering at a mosque (MS), which created the possibility that they could be seen as a double outgroup. Although our interviewees were given the option of speaking in English, they chose to speak in Polish and later the transcripts were translated into English. Since the discussion of the tragedy could be disturbing for at least some of them, they were all advised that if they felt uncomfortable, they could terminate the interview at any point without any consequences. None of them did. It is worth emphasizing that in hindsight we now think that the ingroup and outgroup terminology may have presented White Christians in more favorable light than African Muslims, however, it was not our intention to suggest that they are morally better.

All the interviews were structured around five main questions that were used to maximize the capture of the interviewees' experiences, so that the themes emerging from their discourses could be teased out and analysed:

1. What was going through your mind when you were reading the report?
2. What in the text attracted your attention?

These first two questions were meant to provide insight if the distinction between the implied Christian and Muslim victims would be mentioned spontaneously. The two questions were also to check if our interviewees would use recategorization, casting the church gatherers as more of an ingroup, or if they would construe both church and mosque victims in terms of a superordinate category of humanity, making the suggested religious affiliations irrelevant.

3. In what ways could they be helped?
4. Who is responsible for the humanitarian disorder?

These two further questions were aimed at eliciting responses about practical action, which might potentially alleviate the victims' ordeal, and at teasing out its attributions. On the one hand, the interviewees could talk about the situation as beyond hope and construe both victim groups in terms of similar help-deservingness, attributing their plight to factors beyond their control. On the other hand, if they identified themselves more with the church victims than the mosque victims, then the latter might be more likely to be blamed for their predicament and offered less sympathy.

5. The people I was talking to before mentioned that what attracted their attention was the fact that they gathered at a church (Christian salience group)/mosque (Muslim salience group). What could you possibly say about it?

This final question was meant to serve three purposes. It was to provoke the interviewees to comment upon the victims' religious affiliations if they had done so yet, or to encourage further elaboration upon such affiliations. It was also to give them an extra chance to flesh out their previous answers.

Analysis

We transcribed the recorded talk by using recommendations for textual thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006)¹. Hence to make them readable, we did not indicate pronunciation, overlaps or intonation, but we pointed out pauses without which the meaning of what is said might be significantly altered. Although there are variations in the produced narratives, we could still discern consistent threads of meaning. Before we analyzed each interview, we had to divide the transcribed data into coherent numbered units. We examined the discerned units, which were identified by change of subject in the interview, for consistent patterns of meaning that could then be

¹ (...) means edited text, (1) denotes a pause < 1 second; (2) means a pause < 2 seconds; (3) represents a pause < 3 seconds

grouped into themes (Nishimuta, 2008; Roulston, 2001). Subsequently, we reduced the themes to a smaller number of gradually more concise and comprehensive themes that were continually referred back to the transcript and cross-checked between and within the interviews.

Relying on quoting not more than one chosen account by individual interviewees, we strove to select only those reflecting the main strands of the whole without going over the same elements or editing them. Such selection, however, was not arbitrary, but was based on the requirement that any germane narrative properties would be represented consistently in other similar cases. When acknowledging the coded reliability of the themes, we must also clarify the term *agreement* defined by allocating an item to the same thematic category.

We did not want our exploration to be limited just to themes. We were also interested in how both direct and indirect references to religion (Christianity/Islam) or ethnicity (European/African) were construed in terms of their discursive locus, frames of reference and potential purposes they might serve. To this end, we extended our analysis to the issues of blame, self-presentation and possible remedial action. In other words, we paid attention to the possible functional implications of the produced narratives by cross-analyzing the two data sets so as to see how the presented victims were referred to linguistically, what characteristics they were assigned and how their plight was construed.

Emerging Narrative Themes

Theme one: Common humanity. Having been asked the first two questions, the Group 1 interviewees spontaneously took up ideas of common humanity by avoiding references to national, religious and ethnic categories, making the reliance on all-inclusive super-ordinate categorization clearly prevalent. Their engagement in commenting on the victims' unenviable situation could be easily spotted and there was no literal denial of its awfulness:

(1a – gr. I) “the people experiencing poverty (2) poor people (3) they’re suffering (...)”

Most importantly, in Group 1 there was no direct discourse that would imply that the church victims were regarded as less of an outgroup and sympathy for them was not always expressed consistently. Occasional instances of interpretative denial, for example in the form of normalizing the presented tragedy, could be discerned when remarks on its ordinariness were made:

(1b – gr. I) “Such disasters are far from uncommon (1) and these people cannot afford to be prepared for them (...)”

This suggests that the employment of the broad social category of people could allow for the expression of support for the church victims without attracting attention to their religious affiliations. Whether it was the church shelter that primed the interviewees

to refer to the victims as people, or if the interviewees viewed the role of that shelter as not being very relevant, was unclear at this stage.

The Group two interviewees did not speak of the mosque victims as more personally responsible for their predicament than the Group one interviewees did. This suggests that there was little overt discourse of prejudice that might cast the implied Muslims as deserving less help. Apparently, their predicament turned out to be more readily commented upon than how they were presented and there was again no literal denial of the described tragedy:

(1c – gr. II) “it is hard to say (.) just a catastrophe, the people have been badly affected, and... they must be in a difficult material situation (...)”

What is notable in Group two is that the victims’ tragedy was not construed as unfolding far away, but being of importance to humanity in general. The suffering was consistently described as experienced by people, a broad social category, rather than by blacks or Muslims:

(1d – gr. II) “pity and sorrow for the people (2) cos they were hit by such a tragedy (...)”

In contrast to Group one, the more direct undertones of empathy and literal denial of indifference were easier to discern, possibly hinting at mitigating a potential charge of Catholic unconcern or animosity towards the mosque victims. For the most part, the narratives in the two groups are characterized by helplessness and hopelessness. They also impart a sense of acceptance that the current situation seems to be irredeemable and likely to reoccur in the future. At the same time, the narratives are bereft of any specific action plan of how to bring about a change for a better tomorrow, the need for which was expressed with little ambiguity, thus protecting the interviewees from a potential image as emotionally unmoved and heartless:

(1e – gr. I) “it is one of the common problems of this world (2) and little is talked about it (2) more should be done to tackle that problem (...)”

In this example of implicatory denial, the interviewee openly admits the general indifference of the world community to such tragedies, himself stressing the need for action, rather than any debate, and yet not specifying any solution, which is somewhat contradictory. The emphasis he puts on the need for that action, however, seems to enable him to present himself as the advocate for a positive change whose goodwill is thwarted by others’ passiveness.

The apparent lack of narratives involving divisive social categories of nationality, ethnicity or race is particularly interesting and may perform a number of possible functions. Not only may it serve as a reverse racism inoculation strategy, but it may also portray the interviewees as sensitive and compassionate people who are concerned about the suffering of others regardless of their background, origin, or religious affiliations. This is particularly evident in Group two. Perhaps the influence of the specific interview place—Catholic community centres, increased the salience of the stereotype of the

Catholic ingroup as indifferent or unhelpful to the plight of other religious outgroups, inclining the interviewees to react against it. It must be acknowledged that in the Polish Catholicism there is no explicit onus to help members of other religious groups (Firlit, 1998; Zdankiewicz, 2001). It does not mean, though, that Polish Catholics do not help outgroups and that no relief efforts are organized for non-Catholics. Although Catholicism is a very large denomination and differences exist between its Latin American and Italian versions, in the Polish context being a good Catholic is formally and primarily defined by observing the official ceremony that is laid down by the Roman Catholic Church (Hetnal, 1999).

Theme two: Fellow victimhood. Having been asked the third question about the ways in which the victims could be helped, the interviewees in both groups referred to powerlessness and denial of personal responsibility for the tragedy. Interestingly, the narratives in Group two present a notable shift in footing, defining their home country as belonging to the nations of victims, thus possibly allowing them to clarify and justify their own non-engagement, which can be seen as interpretative denial:

(2a – gr. II) “I mean like in Poland (3) people are hungry (2) there is nothing to put in the pot (3) like in Poland (...)”

Downward social comparison was evident too, and so were some attempts to explain the tragedy by focusing on its causes. In the first part of the following quote, implicatory denial shows that the lack of personal influence on the humanitarian disaster stems from the political tyranny that corrupts the whole social system:

(2b - gr. II) “they don’t have any developed democratic institutions (.) it is like in Russia (.) have a look at Russia (.) have a look (2) their situation is even worse than ours (...)”

This presents the interviewee as a good-natured person whose good intentions are blocked by the sleaze of misgovernment. In the second part of the same quote, interpretative denial unambiguously casts the interviewee’s home country, Poland, as being in too unfortunate a state itself to act as a benefactor. The reference to Russia smoothes the refocus from Malawi on Poland, making such a transition appear to be less extreme and increasing the seeming credibility of the proposed argument:

What deserves attention is that in Group 1 similar instances of interpretative denial, redefining who the victim is, were even more explicit. Shifts in footing were also used to validate the view that charity should begin at home and occasional references to experiences of poverty in Poland were made too:

(2c – gr. I) “let’s start by saying (1) that at least it is my impression (1) that for the time being Poland should help our own countrymen (...)”

This argument could represent yet another form of self-exemption from accountability for others’ predicament. It looks plausible that presenting the victims as gathering at a church enabled the Catholic interviewees to explain their non-intervention

with fewer constraints of “political correctness.” Having admitted to being Catholics in a Catholic place, the risk of appearing intolerant to the church victims was minimized and the potential threat of being personally charged with religious prejudice could be effectively reduced, although we admit that cannot be known for sure:

(2d - gr. I) “we ourselves have poverty (1) let them take care of our country first and then help others (...)”

This might be understood as a self-protecting “it’s-got-nothing-to-do-with-me” rationalization, leaving the room for the wealthy to step in and do something. In no group, however, was there any literal denial that the presented state of affairs was dismal.

Theme three: Accusal of the West and business corporations. When asked the fourth question about the responsibility for the tragedy, in Group one most blame was put on the West that was portrayed as affluent, competent and capable of making a real change. At the same time, implicatory denial of its effectiveness was reflected in its allegedly selfish and uncaring image, morally and financially exempting Poland from delivering any assistance on the grounds of its underprivileged economic status:

(3a – gr. I) “I think that the developed countries would be able to help (1) but they just don’t want to (3) they have no business interest in helping them (...)”

Parallels in Group two could be discerned when the interviewees made attempts to clarify the origin of the tragedy by elaborating upon the links between pauperised and advanced nations that hence were also to blame. Rich countries were almost construed as viruses sponging off the poor hosts, which consistently excuses the interviewees developing home country from any accountability through interpretative denial:

(3b - gr. II) “The West trades in diamonds that they pay for with their sweat and blood (...)”

In both groups, then, such narratives charge the Western world with cynical exploitation, projecting its image as self-centred and indifferent to the suffering of others. This implicitly casts the interviewees and their native homeland as impotent bystanders that are simply unable to take positive action. Not only could the interviewees thus exempt themselves from the general responsibility to act, but they could also rebut a possible charge of insensitivity by emphasizing their own powerlessness.

Other forms of implicatory denial could be found too, like the *discerning bystander* discourse (Seu, 2010) that impugns the appeal for positive action and recasts it as an egocentric and unscrupulous marketing strategy that should not be trusted. This was particularly clear in Group 1 that pointed the finger of blame at authorities, especially politicians who were depicted as attending first and foremost to their own interests and opinion polls:

(3c - gr. I) “a politician concludes that it might help him in the future (2) and then you will see great banners reading that he went there to help the poor (1) right? (...)”

The very point of organizing help for the victims was questioned by criticizing the system that is supposed to provide them with relief on the grounds of its alleged double-dealing and profiteering. Not only were then authorities construed as ignoring or aggravating humanitarian disasters, but other serious charges were thrown at them too. They were accused of actually thwarting the efforts to alleviate human misery by attending only to their own interests:

(3d - gr. I) “most of that help is robbed by UN organizations (3) and by the corrupt officials (3) they steal most of the help! (...)”

In Group two, implicative denial could also be identified when the already dire situation was put down to the exacerbating role played by profit-driven corporate organizations and food companies. Such businesses were accused of morally questionable business practices and avarice at the cost of the have-nots, which similarly to Group 1 marks ways of dealing with the indirect moral threat of non-intervention:

(3e – gr. II) “great commercial organizations created the situation (2) when food companies send their stocks to waste disposal areas to increase food prices (...)”

Shifts in responsibility, for instance, were used to put the blame on unscrupulous authorities that were portrayed as interested only in clinging on to power rather than in helping the down and out. One interviewee went so far as to refer to the underworld and superstition, expressing his uncomplicated, but strong views on a complex web of interlinked social, political and military factors. He gave vent his dissatisfaction with the military involvement in Iraq, labelling it as a cynical attempt to divert people’s attention from its more urgent problems, like joblessness:

(3f - gr. II) “Satan and money are responsible! (2) it is all great mafia (1) I think that the Iraq war is used for reducing unemployment (...)”

The trust bestowed upon charitable organizations run by the (Catholic) Church may give away the attachment to Catholicism, which is all the more interesting as such appreciation of the Church came despite the mosque salience. This could serve the function of casting the mosque as being of the nature similar to that of the church in terms of social support provision:

(3g – gr. II) “I think that church charitable organizations could help most (3) the rest wastes that money (...) and quite frequently it is a good way of earning money (...)”

The criticism of secular charities in Group two represents yet another form of shifting responsibility. Such implicatory denial, which presents charitable action as being selfishly misused for publicity and perverted by aid agencies whose competence and integrity were repeatedly questioned, again allows one to be exempted from any involvement. Thus, non-intervention could be justified, presenting one's goodwill as being blocked by the alleged corruption of secular bodies:

(3h - gr. II) "before they begin to organise everything efficiently (1) it always takes too long (2) but the help is needed here and now (...)"

Theme four: Questioned relevance of the church. In Group one, the consoling role of the church was not entirely belittled and signs of tolerance to other beliefs were manifest as well, although this was the case only when the researcher asked about the church directly:

(4a - gr. I) "I think that church is a very good feature (2) as it is spiritual (1) one could find support depending on what one believes in (2) because not everybody is a Christian (...)"

Even though this narrative creates an image of ingroup Catholic Poles as open-minded and sensitive, the practicality of taking shelter at the church was also questioned when other interviewees literally denied that merely seeking such sanctuary would be sufficient for the victims to get by:

(4b - gr. I) "the spiritual help alone would not help them (2) they need food (1) donations (1) clothes (...)"

Thus, in Group one religion itself as a solution was implied to be irrelevant to bringing about any real and practical change when calls for greater self-reliance and initiative were made and the victims were not praised for seeking rescue at the church. The implied recommended solution was for them to take practical action themselves. Caring for one's own interests was construed as natural, deflecting a potential charge of indifference to the tragedy:

(4c - gr. I) "what does God have to do with that? (2) if we do not help ourselves (1) nobody is going to help us (2) we should attend to our own interests (...)"

Such implicatory denial, doubting the provision of any help from third parties and directly questioning the point of turning to the spiritual, corresponds with lesser verbal sympathy for the church (Group one) than for the mosque victims (Group two). This might seem surprising in view of the literature showing that generally people express more concern for those who are more of an ingroup than outgroup (Levine & Thompson, 2004; Sturmer, Snyder, & Omoto, 2005).

However, such talk could serve another important role here. Its indirect implication might morally free the interviewee from any obligation to act, rendering the

somewhat common religious link between him and the church victims immaterial and without running the risk of bigotry. The passivity of the church-gathering victims could then be expressed with few reservations. Stories of individual self-reliant survival were presented to get across that success has to be earned, not received from anybody. The following instance of not being moved by the presented tragedy implicitly blames the victims for their inaction and dependence on others:

(4d - gr. I) “nothing (2) I know what hunger is (2) I really do (...)”

Similarly, the paucity of any remarks on the victims’ Africanness creates the impression that their skin colour does not appear to matter, although it might also testify to the controversial character of the racism issue that such remarks might have raised. Cases of interpretative denial could be found when some Group one interviewees even questioned the labelling of the situation as abnormal:

(4e - gr. I) “but is it really disorder??? (1) technically we are supposed to share what we can with others (2) but on the other hand (1) life is predatory (...)”

This could allow them to impugn the seriousness of the tragedy, challenging indirectly any need for intervention that might possibly interfere with the constructed “equilibrium” that was presented as part and parcel of the natural world. Such normalization portrays the tragedy as common and far from extraordinary on the Black Continent, which reduces the urgency to assuage its repercussions.

Theme five: Rebuttal of prejudice against Muslims. The Group two interviewees did not mention the mosque shelter spontaneously unless the researcher asked about it directly. This may suggest that bringing it up could perhaps be awkward and problematic, whereas not referring to it paints the interviewees’ image as broad-minded and unbiased. Once its presence was raised in the fifth question, though, it was commented upon as just as normal as the church. It was mainly at this point that the more explicit concern for the implied Muslim victims was voiced. Such literal denial of prejudice against them could well serve as strategic inoculation against a possible charge of indifference to others because of their different faith:

(5a - gr. II) “compassion (1) great compassion (2) and the helplessness that they cannot be helped (2) because (1) the drought was not brought about by them (...)”

Furthermore, in contrast to Group one, the practical relevance of the shelter was not questioned. On the contrary, comments were made not to present the mosque victims in terms of lower social status that might make them look as deserving less aid:

(5b - gr. II) “the people have been badly affected (1) and (2) certainly (1) I do feel for them (...)”

Such normalization of the mosque is particularly manifest in the narratives alluding to the Polish history. The comparison between the presented mosque victims and Poles seeking shelter at churches during wartime could be seen as interpretative denial of preconceived notions of Muslims:

(5c - gr. II) “it is natural (2) it is like it was in our Poland (1) we had WWII (1) or some other disasters and the people were heading for the church to get help (...)”

It appears plausible that “othering” the mosque victims could have been socially risky, whereas the created image of tolerance and acceptance lends support to the significance of impression management in discussions of emergency situations. This might hint at the engagement in protecting the image of the Catholic Polish ingroup as capable of sympathy for implied Muslim outgroup:

(5d - gr. II) “for me it doesn’t make any difference (1) they could be Muslims (1) blacks (3) they could even be Pakistanis (2) there are good and evil people everywhere (...)”

At the same time, the above reference to some interracial hierarchies of unequal power and status, which clearly presents some ethnic groups as more underprivileged than others, might still bespeak the implicit and politically correct preference for the implied Christian over the Muslim outgroup.

Discussion

The given prompts were designed to resemble fragments of a morning newspaper report that most people can come across on a regular basis. We must also acknowledge the fact that Polish people in England have already been found to present themselves differently in different languages and that the language itself should not be treated as an undifferentiated medium (Temple & Koterba, 2009). This means that the presented English translation in this study cannot be taken as reflecting exactly the same representations that our interviewees created in Polish. The translator’s personal views and knowledge must have had some inevitable influence upon them. Recognizing that it is fair to ask how our study is relevant to anybody who is not interested in what Polish Catholics in a multicultural context say, we strove to demonstrate how relations between ingroup and outgroup appear to be more complex than many experimental studies on the effect of social categorization let us believe.

Having examined the narratives of the two groups, we identified both parallels and differences between them. It is worth noting that in somewhat similar research on reactions to human rights appeals in a secular setting, it turned out that audiences’ relationships with those who appeal to them through humanitarian communications were far more important than the connection with distant sufferers (Seu, 2010). What probably made it different in our research was the culturally specific religious context, bringing the complexity of the Catholic-Muslim relationship to the fore. Nonetheless, any negative evaluation juxtaposing Christians against Muslims was starkly avoided so that they were

construed mainly in super-ordinate social categories, like humanity, rather than in intermediate social categories, like ethnicity, race or religion. Many recurring themes in the two studies lie in the rich discursive repertoires that position some respondents as savvy about the marketing character of appeals in general and skeptical about the trustworthiness or effectiveness of charities. Enabling respondents to claim a high moral ground, such repertoires may also help them to deny any personal responsibility for the presented state of affairs by hinting at resistance to manipulation, positioning them as victims (of a marketing ploy or of national fate) and casting cynical doubt on giving help.

Building on the research on crossed-categorization (Crisp & Hewstone, 2000; Crisp, Hewstone, & Rubin, 2001), we can also conclude that the status and outgroupness levels of distant sufferers can be flexible, intricate and shaped by the often-ignored cultural factors, like respondents' and victims' religious affiliations. Thus, our data shows social constructs that typically cannot surface in experimental designs, which supports our argument against cross-decategorization. Furthermore, it also illustrates that the refutation of negative stereotypes about one's ingroup does not have to be limited just to national stereotypes, like the conventional image of Scots as ungenerous, for instance (Hopkins et al., 2007). Apparently, the refutation of one's own negative religious image, i.e., Catholics as being unsympathetic to the Muslim outgroup, can be equally important and does not have to involve any helping action or direct non-intervention dilemma.

It might be worth noting that it was already shown how hybridised codes, such as accent, dress and manners, can undermine negative religious stereotypes, like a view of the Muslim as antithetical to the construction of English and Scottish codes of cultural belonging (Kyriakides, Virdee, & Modood, 2009). We argue that staying detached from reports on natural disasters, like the one in our research, might potentially create an indirect accusation of insensitivity to human suffering in general, which needs to be preemptively countered particularly in case of a starkly different outgroup. This appears to be especially the case when an opportunity arises to support the positive values that are not usually associated with the ingroup, eclipsing the relevance of ethnic, racial and religious categories by the much broader concept of mankind, which might increase the outgroup inclusiveness even more than the hybridised codes.

Even though the particular multicultural setting of our study does not permit generalizations to more culturally uniform contexts, racial, ethnic and religious identities are often intertwined in complex ways and do not exist separately in any social vacuum. Taking advantage of such a setting, our contribution shows that negative stereotypes of the West can still hold out even when Eastern Europeans are in the West themselves and have access to it as EU citizens. It seems that for them living in the West does not equate with belonging to it—at least not when such belonging entails certain obligations that they themselves might expect from the West. This, in turn, has clear implications for how they hold Western nations co-responsible for disasters in the Third World.

Interestingly, the interviewees verbalized direct prejudice denial without being asked about their intolerance and their narratives may appear to be aimed at projecting a positive image of their whole ingroup. Extending the research on exclusionary aspects of the racialization process (McDonnell & De Lourenço, 2009), we argue that culture and religious identity should not be underestimated in their combined influence on how people can be aware of the ways distant others, not just themselves, can be clearly disadvantaged. We can only speculate that the migrant status of our interviewees

probably played a role here, possibly facilitating a sense of solidarity with the African victims.

To confirm it more conclusively, however, extra studies of how Christians and Muslims outgroups are construed in a non-religious setting or how they are portrayed by women, for instance, are called for. Little is known about how Carol Gilligan's (1993) ethics of feminine care and masculine justice are moderated by religious identity, while Skoe and Lippe (2002) call for such research in non-English speaking cultures. The emergent narrative picture cautions against categorizing men as simply holding the attitude that in general people get what they deserve (justice-orientatedness) without acknowledging the significance of a particular cultural context. Future studies might redress the imbalance of research on non-helping by focusing, for example, on the victim-benefactor relations if the potential helper's status is also far from privileged. Would a similar picture, portraying the West as self-centered and exempting individuals from personal responsibility, emerge from a similar study of overwhelmingly Catholic Latino Americans living in the USA? Answering this question might be a step forward in planning how to encourage them to make at least some little individual contribution (not necessarily financial, but also knowledge- and experienced-based), which might be quite significant collectively, to reducing poverty elsewhere. Studying varying levels of victim outgroupness could potentially lead to ideas of how to better mobilize social support that is so badly needed when over one billion people across the world face hunger.

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