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Mapping the meaning of ‘difference’ in Europe: a social topography of prejudice

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Abstract

This paper draws on original empirical research to investigate popular understandings of prejudice in two national contexts: Poland and the United Kingdom. The paper demonstrates how common-sense meanings of prejudice are inflected by the specific histories and geographies of each place: framed in terms of ‘distance’ (Poland) and ‘proximity’ (United Kingdom), respectively. Yet, by treating these national contexts as nodes and linking them analytically the paper also exposes a connectedness in these definitions which brings into relief the common processes that produce prejudice. The paper then explores how inter-linkages between the United Kingdom and Poland within the wider context of the European Union are producing – and circulating through the emerging international currency of ‘political correctness’ – a common critique of equality legislation and a belief that popular concerns about the way national contexts are perceived to be changing as a consequence of super mobility and super diversity are being silenced. This raises a real risk that in the context of European austerity and associated levels of socioeconomic insecurity, negative attitudes and conservative values may begin to be represented as popular normative standards which transcend national contexts to justify harsher political responses towards minorities. As such, the paper concludes by making a case for prejudice reduction strategies to receive much greater priority in both national and European contexts.

Keywords: diversity, prejudice, migration, encounter, international comparative research, Europe

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Introduction

We are living in an era characterised by the rapid growth of migration, which is producing unprecedented population change – dubbed ‘superdiversity’ by Vertovec (2007) – in cities across Europe. As a consequence there is evidence of rising levels of intolerance towards minority groups and support for xenophobic and populist parties in some parts of the continent (Zick et al., 2011). While such prejudices are transnational phenomena and global events – such as 9/11, the Iraq war, the financial crisis which has engulfed Europe since 2008 and Palestinian/Israeli disputes over Gaza – have further created the context or conditions for intolerance to emerge in European public life, nonetheless prejudices are defined and understood in specific material and social contexts which are the product of specific histories and geographies (Dirksmeir, 2014; Simonsen, 2008; Valentine, 2010).

Nations in particular are powerful entities determining or denying political and social rights; providing or denying access to social welfare for particular social groups; and shaping our commonsense understandings of the world through the wider production of social normativities and practices (Skey, 2013). In different national contexts a popular response to immigration has been claims that the nation is under threat: its boundaries breached, welfare systems unable to cope with the growing demands of new arrivals and social and cultural life under threat from different modes of living and being (e.g. Waite et al., 2014). This has led to what Darling (2010: 134) has termed a ‘(re)assertion of a national logic of territorialised prioritisation and concern’ as nations have sought to redefine who has the right to belong. Yet the national is rarely used as a lens through which to understand prejudice.

In this paper we address this neglect by comparing the two very different national contexts: one a former colonial power in Western Europe – the UK, the other a post-communist state in

Eastern Europe – Poland, recognising that, while the question of how to develop the capacity to live with difference is one confronting all countries of the European Union, the extent to which national communities are currently characterised by supermobility and superdiversity varies. At the same time, we avoid falling into the ‘territorial trap’ (Agnew, 1994) of assuming that society is completely framed by the nation. Rather, we recognise these two research locations are inextricably linked by a shared framework of European legislation and by migration and the associated transnational relationships/networks such flows produce. Such relationships necessarily shape or mediate the circulation of both positive/negative attitudes and values about difference across these national borders such that transformations in understandings and practices associated with one place may affect the other. We therefore develop a social topographic perspective treating these two national contexts as nodes, and linking them analytically to explore connectivities in national definitions of prejudice, as well as exploring how prejudices circulate between the two places.

Definitions of prejudice

The seminal definition of prejudice is commonly attributed to psychologist Gordon Allport (1954). He characterized it in terms of negative attitudes towards those identified as members of a given social group (regardless of whether this assessment of their identification is correct or not), describing it as ‘thinking ill of others without sufficient warrant’ (1954: 6). More popularly, it is summarized as an ‘unfounded hostility...fear and dislike’ of a group – even in the absence of contact – often predicated on stereotypes which can be used to justify discriminatory practices, extremism and genocide (Runnymede Trust, 1997: 4). Following Allport, the study of prejudice developed rapidly with attention focused on establishing its scale and cause. Much of this work took the individual as a starting point, investigating personality development, in which prejudiced people were implicitly assumed to be different

from tolerant people; but a further strand of research on prejudice reduction also emerged which understands prejudice not as innate, but as a social behaviour that can be changed through interventions predicated on intergroup contact.

Although initially of particular interest to psychologists, a substantial body of work has subsequently emerged across a range of disciplines investigating the experiences of those who are on the receiving end of prejudice in different specific forms and spaces (e.g. Krzemiński, 2009; Sayyid and Vakil, 2010; Valentine and Waite, 2012) and on prejudice reduction (Amin, 2002; Mayblin et al., forthcoming; Valentine et al., 2014a). In the context of contemporary processes of supermobility and superdiversity there has been a particular focus on European cities as sites of everyday encounter (Jasińska-Kania and Łodziński, 2009; Valentine, 2008; Wessendorf, 2014; Wise and Velayutham, 2009) which offer the potential to forge new hybrid cultures and ways of living together with difference, set against a backdrop of the gradual (albeit uneven) expansion of progressive equality legislation which has contributed to the development of a powerful social norm that it is not acceptable to be openly prejudiced.

Indeed, such is the powerful social stigma that has developed around the concept of being prejudiced that research has suggested that it is rare for even those with very negative attitudes towards particular social groups to recognise themselves as such (Billig et al., 1988). Although, the denial of prejudice has not received as much attention as the cause or nature of prejudice, there is a limited but interesting literature which has identified how racists often simultaneously express negative attitudes about minority ethnic groups, while also denying they have anything against them (e.g. Billig et al., 1988; van Dijk, 1984); or they de-racialise

their attitudes by drawing on discourses of fairness and equality to explain their views as supposedly well-founded (Simonsen, 2008; Valentine, 2010).

Yet, while there is growing evidence of the social importance of being tolerant and a denial of prejudice, levels of intolerance towards minority groups persist across the continent. This is problematic because, if hate crimes and intolerance remain as persistent as ever yet few people are readily willing to admit to being prejudiced, it is potentially difficult to tackle prejudice reduction and to reach those most in need of diversity training. Moreover, it raises the question of, if prejudice is rife but people rarely admit or acknowledge themselves to be prejudiced, then how is prejudice popularly understood? What are people's everyday common-sense understandings of the meaning or definition of prejudice? How is it used and recognised in mundane practices and routine ways of thinking and talking? Rather than focus on academic definitions or theorizations of prejudice in the remainder of this paper we interrogate what prejudice means in everyday life in two contrasting national contexts.

Social topographic research: transcending cross-national comparative studies

There is a long post-war tradition of international comparative research facilitated particularly by funding organisations such as the European Commission which has initiated large-scale, cross-national research programmes and networks. However, cross-national approaches are increasingly subject to critique. Hantrais (1999) has argued that international comparative studies often fall into the trap of implicitly regarding countries as closed systems as they seek to explore the impact of processes in particular national contexts. In doing so, she suggests that they frequently emphasise either the commonality of experiences between different national case studies which are read as universal patterns that lose sight of the relevance of different spatial and temporal contexts; or they stress the specificity of each case

study to such an extent that any sense of cross-national comparison is lost. Rarely do they recognise the complex webs of connections and relations across case study sites.

Massey (1999) argues therefore that, rather than viewing place-based communities as static, bounded, or hermetically sealed, researchers need to develop more subtle accounts of the networks and webs of connection through which places and place-based identities are reproduced. A social topographic approach provides just such an innovative framework for transcending conventional comparative perspectives to explore qualitatively some of the relationships that connect places (Katz, 2001a, b; Mountz, 2011). The geographical term *topography* refers to the detailed description of a particular location and the totality of the features that comprise the landscape itself. In other words, it is the examination, not just of particular features, but also of the broader relationships situating particular places in relation to other areas or scales, exposing both structure and process. Here, physical geographers use contour lines to connect places at a uniform altitude to reveal the three-dimensional form of the terrain without measuring every spot on Earth. In a similar way, the notion of social topographies links selected different places analytically along lines that represent, not elevation, but particular relations to a process ‘in order to both develop the contours of common struggles and imagine a different kind of practical response to problems confronting them’ (Katz, 2001b: 722). Katz argues (2001a) that this methodology thus enables researchers to scrutinise critically the effects produced in multiple locations by the processes associated with globalisation without erasing the uniqueness of local situations.

This paper adopts this approach to examine popular understandings of prejudice in the UK and Poland. Within these countries the specific cities of Leeds and Warsaw were chosen as research sites because the proportion of minority ethnic residents in Leeds is close to the UK

national average (approximately 15 percent, 2011 census); Warsaw was selected because it is the most socially diverse and multicultural city in Poland. Both cities have witnessed a recent influx of migrants from other European countries.

The research on which this paper is based involved in-depth qualitative case study research with 60 participants (30 in each city) who were recruited from a survey of social attitudes conducted in both cities (n=3021) that asked about the respondents' encounters with people who are different from themselves in terms of ethnicity, religion, sexuality and disability in many kinds of sites (results of the quantitative element of this project are published in Piekut et al., 2012). Each qualitative case comprised: 1) a time-line; 2) life-story interview; 3) audio-diary of everyday encounters; (4) semi-structured interview about attitudes towards difference; and 5) an interview reflecting on the emerging findings. The advantage of using this biographical approach was that it enabled a focus on both the personal and public ways that lives develop and an opportunity to explore both continuities and change in participants' attitudes and values (Valentine and Sadgrove, 2014). The participants selected included those from a range of socio-economic backgrounds; whose personal circumstances and lifestyles afforded them a range of opportunities to encounter 'difference'; and who demonstrated a range of social attitudes (from openness to prejudice) in the survey. All the interviews in Poland were conducted by native Polish speakers and then translated into English. The quotations included in this paper are verbatim and have been anonymised.

The contours of popular prejudice in two national contexts

In the 16th and 17th centuries the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania was characterised by ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity and the extension of broad political and civil liberties (for the period), including tolerance of different faiths (Borzymińska et al.,

1995; Buchowski and Chlewińska, 2010). At the turn of the 18th century the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Kingdom of Prussia and the Russian Empire partitioned the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, annexing it into their respective states. Poland was erased from the map of Europe, regaining its independence as a democratic Republic only in 1918 after World War I. At this time, about one third of the Polish population were religious and ethnic minorities. Yet, by the end of the Second World War – as a result of the holocaust, border changes and population exchanges, Poland had become virtually homogenous both ethnically (Poles) and religiously (Roman Catholic). Indeed, during the socialist period (1945–1989) achieving population homogeneity was an official aim of the State, such that although ethnic and religious minorities were recognized and had cultural associations, minority issues were downplayed and largely absent from public life. Following the re-emergence of democracy in 1989 Poland reluctantly adopted liberal laws on religious freedom, ethnic and national minorities – in the face of hostility from some politicians and elements of the public – in order to gain accession to the European Union (achieved in May 2004). This in turn created the space for minorities who, during the socialist era had been fearful of revealing a minority ethnic, religious, or lesbian and gay identity in a mono-ethnic and totalitarian state to in effect ‘come out’ (cf. Binnie and Klesse, 2012). As a consequence, NGOs to advance the rights of minority groups and to inform these communities of their entitlements are recent developments in Poland and are not yet very co-ordinated. While Poland is beginning to experience processes of individualisation (Burrell, 2011a), it is still a relatively traditional society in which the Catholic Church has grown in influence since the end of the socialist period having emerged as a champion of national interest during the revolution. Likewise, despite the rapid growth of mobility (both immigration and emigration) in the post-socialist era, Poland is still a relatively mono-ethnic society albeit one that is beginning to change quite rapidly (Burrell, 2011b; Hörschelmann and Stenning, 2008; Stenning, 2005). The 2002

census recorded 64,600 foreigners as resident in Poland; by the 2011 census, this figure had risen to 111,700. Data from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy are also indicative of a steady growth in immigration with the number of work permits issued to third-country nationals for a stay of over a year trebling between 2007 (n=12,153) and 2010 in (n=37,121) (Duszczuk and Góra, 2012). As such, Polish society is understood to be at ‘the threshold of multiculturalism’ (Kempny et al., 1997) and is just beginning to address the challenges of living with difference (Buchowski and Chlewińska, 2010).

Prejudice was characterised by our Polish interviewees in terms of distance – as the quotations below illustrate. This was described in terms of a lack of familiarity, or a lack of knowledge (*‘approaching someone from a huge distance’*; *‘without knowing anything or anybody’*) which is suggested to be a consequence of a lack of direct contact with difference.

Interviewer: how do you understand ‘prejudice’?

Well, I don’t know, *approaching someone from a huge distance*, with a lack of trust, and most often usually a lack of knowledge...For example, people with AIDS, well, I don’t know, some people *lack knowledge*. They’re afraid that they could catch it by touching hands and through that prejudice they are *really afraid to be near these people* at all, so often it’s a lack of knowledge. Well this distance, some fear, I think I would put it like that. (Female, part-time employment, white Polish)

Prejudice [pause] this is an attitude towards somebody else involving distance and caution, *once we are prejudiced about somebody, we treat them with some distance*. (Male, student, white Polish)

This definition of prejudice in terms of ‘distance’ has clear resonance with Poland’s contemporary history in which the opportunities to encounter ‘difference’ have been circumscribed. Our survey identified that 91.2 percent of the respondents live in a neighbourhood *without* any non-Polish residents. Only 15.8 percent of the respondents have contact with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds in work or educational spaces, and 8.9 percent in social spaces.

This absence of everyday encounters with ‘difference’ is perceived by the participants to make themselves and others vulnerable to absorbing stereotypes. In this sense, prejudice is implicitly understood to be an ignorance or lack of understanding of difference as a product of the social homogeneity of the everyday spaces within which they are situated. Indeed, researchers (Bilewicz, 2004; Janion, 2006) have observed what has been dubbed ‘anti-semitism without Jews’ in Poland – namely the representation of Jewish people as a symbolic folk devil despite the fact that, as a consequence of the holocaust and immediate post-war period, this community is no longer a very visible minority in contemporary Poland. Likewise, prejudice towards Muslims in Poland has also been described as ‘phantom islamophobia’ (Wloch, 2009) because it is predicated on popular stereotypes and media coverage of international events rather than actual contact with this social group (*you are actually prejudiced because you hear some things from other places; a stereotype that someone has heard from others, they have not necessarily seen or met*). More optimistically, however, Polish interviewees (chiming with prejudice-reduction theories about the significance of contact) suggested that their social attitudes might be challenged if there was an opportunity to encounter those who are negatively othered.

For me being prejudiced is just to believe in all the stereotypes, all that you hear, knowing really nothing about it, but you heard something from somebody, on TV...*you are actually*

prejudiced because you hear some things from other places. Well, in fact prejudice can vanish once you learn more about those people or you get to know them, right?...My worst feelings are towards Muslims, but I think that if I met a group, learnt more about their religion, about what they want, what they are looking for here...then I think that I might change my opinion. (Female student, white Polish)

[Prejudice] This is just labelling people, meaning that there is *a stereotype that someone has heard from others, they have not necessarily seen or met...*For instance he has heard about black people, that they steal. Or that every Muslim would run carrying a Kalashnikov, right, and murder everyone else in the name of Allah. And so I think that prejudice is like that. (Male, salesperson, white Polish)

The Polish interviewees also defined prejudice in terms of emotions of fear or mistrust in which the desire to create or maintain distance from the unknown is regarded as a ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ response to unfamiliarity (*‘through that prejudice they are really afraid to be near these people at all’*; *‘once we are prejudiced about somebody, we treat them with some distance’*). Indeed, authors have acknowledged that societies where diversity emerges more visibly following the implementation of democracy, are not usually prepared to cope with encountering difference and it can take time to become accustomed or familiar with ‘strangeness’ (Nowicka and Łodziński, 2001; Sadowski, 2007). In particular, a lack of experience of contact or models of how to relate to ‘others’ can lead to defensive intolerance (Łodziński, 1990) which often manifests itself in avoidance behaviour that has its origins in fear or anxiety rather than enmity or hatred. In this sense, the interviewees both acknowledged the agency of their prejudice, while also suggesting that their feelings of (dis)comfort were a product of the wider environments in which they lived and moved.

But I do feel comfortable here [name of neighbourhood removed] because people who live here are simply more similar than those who live there [referring to a more diverse neighbourhood]. But it also suggests that I am somehow prejudiced because I don't want to live with people who are different, I want to live with people who are similar. (Female, health care worker, white Polish)

Whereas the Polish interviewees defined prejudice in terms of distance, the UK research participants largely conceptualised prejudice in terms of the consequences of 'proximity'. The UK is an example of a European state with a colonial history that has produced a complex pattern of immigration throughout the 20th and into the 21st century resulting in unprecedented diversity in which encountering difference in everyday public spaces has become normalised (Modood, 2007; Wessendorf, 2014). While anti-immigration rhetoric has a lineage dating back to debates about post-war commonwealth migration to the UK in the 1960s, nonetheless until 2006, when the UK Government changed the regulations regarding the acquisition of citizenship (establishing learning English as a formal requirement for attaining citizenship and introducing a citizenship test/ceremony), there had been little explicit policy emphasis on 'integration', although this has subsequently emerged more strongly in contemporary political discourse (e.g. Meer and Modood, 2009). Rather, in the context of a loose policy of multiculturalism migrants have had relative freedom (despite racist rhetoric and well-documented discrimination) to define their own identities and to create their own communities. In the early 1990s, the highly publicised racist murder of a black schoolboy, Stephen Lawrence, resulted in an inquiry into the criminal justice system which sparked a national debate about race and justice and ushered in a comprehensive review of institutional racism and race equality policies. Processes of de-traditionalisation and individualisation are evident in contemporary UK society. In particular, there has been a

decline in the influence of the Christian Church (though concomitantly the growth of ‘new’ faith communities associated with migrants), significant changes in gender roles, and the visible emergence of more diverse lifestyles and ways of being evident in the growing public confidence/presence of LGBT communities. These changes have been reflected in the extension of equality legislation. However, a number of commentators have suggested that there is growing cultural unease in the UK about the way populations are changing, particularly among white, working-class communities and older populations (Rogaly and Taylor, 2011; Valentine, 2010).

This was reflected in the UK data with interviewees defining prejudice implicitly as a consequence of the tensions that are perceived to arise from lived experiences of difference (*‘someone else has got – in a better position than he is or she is’*; *‘because of whatever you have experienced’*). Our survey found that 85.7 percent of the UK respondents have day-to-day contact in public space with people of a different ethnicity, 44 percent have contact with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds in work or educational spaces and 32.8 percent in social spaces. In this context, prejudice is conceptualised as a consequence of antagonistic social relations or intergroup struggles which are founded in material inequalities rather than as an irrational negative perception of an unfamiliar other. Whereas the Polish interviewees defined prejudice in terms of fear, the emotions that surfaced most strongly in the UK definitions were jealousy and resentment.

Well, I think – you see if somebody’s got a grievance it might be founded on the fact that *someone else has got – in a position of – in a better position than he is or she is*. It might lead to a bit of jealousy and it might be, because the person might be different in many respects, either religiously or racially or anything else. So they take it out on that. I think that prejudice might arise from that. (Male, retired, Asian British)

Hate's a strong word, but it's when you really despise a group, or a collection of people *because of whatever it is you've experienced* or heard...So I think it's quite a destructive thing. (Female, manager, white, other)

The emotional specificity and complexity of prejudice has often been overlooked in the literature which has commonly focused on a general negative response to others rather than the nuances of different types of feelings. Yet, the particularity of emotions can be insightful because it provides clues about the world we live in and the social structures or power relations within which we operate (Barbalet, 1998). In the quotes below, the UK interviewees' claims – that minority groups refuse to integrate in British society or are taking advantage of the welfare system and receiving preferential treatment – are expressed through emotions of jealousy, anger and resentment. In this way, the UK interviewees' emotions expose the way the majority population is becoming oriented or aligned against particular others with majority privilege implicitly seen to be under threat.

Prejudice? Well you're against something that's different basically. Because you don't like it. That's how I define prejudice. I am prejudiced against Muslims but I'm not prejudiced against much else, apart from Muslims...so yeah, the biggest prejudice with me is people who come and live in my environment and...don't accept my county's ways...[Muslim] women are [treated] like second class...They're [treated] worse than animals...You see women walking behind the men and to me they shouldn't even be here...I don't like to be among them, I don't like to be near them...I open doors, I wouldn't do it for Muslims. I purposefully let the door go if a Muslim is following me. But any other person I would always hold the door. (Male, retired, white, British)

I think you get an awful lot of people coming [immigrants]... who I feel are – scroungers – I suppose is the word. You know, they come here and they accept a lot. I think I was reading in the paper about somebody in London – Asian I think – who was living in this really very expensive house in London – you’ve probably read about it – and getting something like £8000 a month [in benefits]. And I just thought, this is wrong you know, then of course you hear about some of the different cultures where they’ve got two or three wives and we’re paying for that, you know. And I think that does create a lot of my resentment and anger. (Female, white British)

Here too, the UK interviewees, like the Polish interviewees, readily admitted holding and acting on their prejudices, justifying this by reference to material circumstances and social relations that extend beyond the spaces they occupy, and over which they feel they have little influence or control.

I mean it’s not your fault...that's why with prejudice and all the rest of it – sometimes I think you're entitled to your prejudism if that’s the right phrase. Did I tell you about the guy that I talked to the police about on the tube?... the best way I can describe him, he looked Afghan...anyway clearly Muslim and he was wearing one of those round cap things that you only ever see on the news, the Taliban wear...He was already on the tube actually when I got on...He had a backpack...I was looking at him and I was thinking I just don’t like you being on the same train as me. He went into his pocket and he pulled out what I thought were wires...I really panicked – my heart was going...I don't think that was wrong to feel like that because I was – legitimately really scared. I got off that tube...I said to myself if I see a policeman I'm going to say something, if I don't I won't. I saw a policeman so I told him...there's an Afghan Taliban guy on the tube. (Male, engineer, white British).

So what does connecting the Polish and British participants' accounts analytically in a social topographic approach reveal about prejudice? Although both countries have discrete and distinctive geographies and histories – and consequently the interviewees' understandings of prejudice are necessarily situated in these national contexts – this section has nonetheless identified inter-linkages between the definitions. Specifically, in both national contexts interviewees have not defined prejudice as an individual failing or a product of personality type or psychological problems as some previous research has suggested it to be. Rather, the interviewees' accounts share an implicit recognition that prejudice is a product of existing social structures (e.g. lack of contact with difference as a product of global socio-political relations or inequality of resource distribution). It is these socio-material conditions which are understood to make people vulnerable to embracing negative stereotypes of others and to have particular emotional responses (such as fear and resentment) to difference. In this sense prejudice is understood to be an intentional position but one that is adopted in response to socio-economic conditions and relations that transcend the spaces within which they are experienced. In this sense, while prejudice is recognised to be a negative attitude it is nonetheless also understood to be justified and therefore to be a legitimate position to hold. For this reason – contrary to previous studies which have suggested most people deny they are prejudiced – participants in this study were willing to admit negative attitudes towards others and to reflect on how they manage these relationships (ranging from avoidance to active discrimination).

Connections: the relational configuration of prejudice in the UK and Poland

Of course understandings of difference are not isolated within particular national contexts but also circulate between places. In particular, processes of globalisation and mobility are

producing new contexts where transformations in attitudes and practices associated with one place may necessarily affect others. The European Union provides one example of a framework which formally connects the UK and Poland and through which ideas about equality and diversity flow.

In 1999 Article 13 of the European Union Treaty of Amsterdam – signed by the European Union member states in 1997 – took effect. This gave the EU a mandate to require member states to protect citizens from discrimination on the grounds of sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability age or sexual orientation. At this time Poland was not yet a member of the EU, but in the UK the Treaty of Amsterdam prompted a review of equalities policy in the UK which resulted in new national legislation (Colgan et al., 2007). While equality legislation had previously been implemented in the UK on race (1965, 1968, 1976), sex (1975) and disability (1995), the EU directives arising from Article 13 led to the introduction of the Equality Act (2010) to standardise the protection offered to these three groups and also to extend these rights to other, what were termed, ‘protected characteristics’ including: age, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, religion or belief, and sexual orientation.

Yet, interviewees from the UK criticised the ways that this legislation is popularly perceived to be redefining spatial normativities about how people should talk and behave in routine interactions in public space, de-legitimising certain language, practices and uses of space. Participants claimed to be fearful of legal action and/or social ostracism if they are accused of prejudice suggesting that equality legislation limits self-expression and free speech in public life and favours minorities over the majority community, and that support for cosmopolitan public norms is, as a consequence, greatly over-estimated.

Somebody will brand you as being a racist because you've made one racial remark. It's like that football match the other day. There was a £2500 fine...

Interviewer: John Terry, are we talking about? [a footballer arrested after he was caught by television cameras shouting racial abuse at a black opponent during a match]?

Yes. Well if you were to call somebody a bastard you'd call them a bastard. The lad's black so he was called a black bastard, right? Well I'm white. If you called me a white bastard, well where's the issue in that? Why is it prejudiced to say black? Why has black now suddenly become a prejudice...Well I'm sorry, if you're offended by that should you be living here? (Male, builder, white British)

In Poland, following accession to the European Union in 2004, anti-discrimination directives were implemented for the first time, and in 2011 an Act on Equal Treatment was also introduced. As Poland was the only European member state without an equality body, this legislation established the office of the Ombudsman in this role, as well as providing protection from discrimination in all aspects of public life on the grounds of race, ethnicity, nationality and in part, gender (although sexual orientation and age were only afforded such protection in relation to employment) (Bojarski, 2011). Yet, despite the extension of this protection our research, and previous studies (Bojarski, 2011; Gołębiowska, 2009), suggest that there is a low level of awareness about equality legislation in Polish society which, combined with a belief that the legal system will favour employers or be stymied by the Catholic Church, prevent many people from attempting to claim their rights.

Indeed, criticisms of the way equality legislation is perceived to have redefined social normativities in the UK were mobilised to evidence the potential harm that anti-discrimination laws may have in Poland and to justify a lack of need for prejudice to be

addressed. In this sense, attitudes towards discrimination and legal protection in one national context cannot be understood in isolation, but rather it is also important to recognise their relational configuration, in that they can be affected by the conditions, relations and actions that occur within and across other places.

I believe, that for example the subject of discrimination is terribly exaggerated. Well because it's clear for many years that they [minority ethnic groups] have it really good, right?...These dark skinned, black people [Translation of the Polish terms: ci ciemnoskórzy, czarnoskórzy] win all these court cases regarding racism. They take advantage of it, really.

Interviewer: And how, how do they take advantage?

For example I was in England, because my uncle lives in England, and he was telling me that in this factory where he works they [minority ethnic employees] can stand around all day and not do anything, and when the shift manager corrects them...they are ready to sue him for racism.

Interviewer: But did you also hear about instances like this in Poland?

Not in Poland. (Female, part-time worker, white Polish)

Among younger interviewees there was a strong conviction that language is becoming more regulated and that limits about what can be said in public space are being introduced. This 'political correctness' was characterised as a Western practice – evident in the UK – that is being spread to Poland, and that Polish social normativities are starting to be re-shaped as a consequence of the deployment of these ideas from another context.

...only twenty years ago, in the eighties, the word Negro [Translation of Polish word: Murzyn] was such a normal word it was used so neutrally.

Interviewer: So when you talk about black people, how is it best to say it in Poland? Is Negro an insulting word, a neutral word or a positive one?

Right now it's negative, that's what it has become. You supposedly cannot say it. But in my circle of friends we always say Negro or something, for a good laugh....I mean in other countries it's like this. In South America the word Negro is neutral, but for example in England it is insulting...Have you heard of the football player from Liverpool, Luis Suárez?...He used the word Negro during a match towards a black player and received an eight game suspension, yet in his country it is normal to speak like that. (Male, student, white Polish)

They [in UK] just have a different policy to tolerance, in my opinion, exaggerated, so maybe that's the cause of all of it, maybe they learn it at school that they have to think in a particular way and not in any other. And in Poland, it wasn't discussed so much, and now we start to talk about it and have some tolerance programs, and so on.

Interviewer: What do you mean when you say 'exaggerated tolerance'?

Yes, well, because when we start to write in passports or documents not Mum and Dad, but parent A and parent B, well, it's...tolerance towards homosexuals. I mean, it, it scares me and, frankly speaking, I would not want to live in a country where such a rule is in force...for example, where we must allow children to choose which gender they are, when physically, I think it is determined that a person is a woman or a man. That's why I think it is excessive, excessive tolerance. (Female, translator, white Latvian)

Whereas the postcolonial discourse of Western hegemony is often mobilised to construct post-socialist countries as backward and lagging behind the more progressive West to which they should aspire to catch up (Buchowski, 2006), the interviewees represented Poland as

superior to, and attempted to distance it from, the West. Here, it was argued that Poland has been relatively unspoilt by social change and consequently has stronger moral values precisely because it has avoided mass immigration and remained a relatively mono-ethnic and mono-cultural society that has retained its religious traditions.

I would not like for Poland to find itself in a situation like in France... at some point there was unregulated immigration there. They had to accept people from the Maghreb because it was their colony, and suddenly it turned out that those people were unwilling to integrate with society. They started living with their own enclaves speaking only in Arabic, and France started having whole Arabic cities. They started evicting the French from their estates because with time, more of them immigrated there and the value of those flats was lower, right? Many people had to move out because of that. I wouldn't like for that to happen in Poland...based on my observation of French, British and Dutch society, it seems that mass acceptance of migrants from Muslim countries has a negative impact on society in the long run.
(Male, self-employed, white Polish)

While Poles were reflexive about the effect of changes in social attitudes and practices in the UK upon Polish society, British interviewees were much less aware of conditions in Poland, reflecting the wider asymmetries of global relationships. Although there was some romanticisation of the fact that Poland has not been subject to the same social change as the UK, in part because the power of the Catholic Church is perceived to have limited the development of liberal legislation – and a consequent dilution of moral values – in relation to gender, sexuality and religious diversity. However, both countries are inter-linked by the shared framework of the European Union and there were clear connections in the way interviewees in both Poland and the UK claimed their own national contexts to have been

reshaped by European discourses about equality and by the perceived power of European Courts with the consequence that minorities are perceived to have been afforded too much accommodation or tolerance. Here, interviewees in both contexts highlighted the French decision to ban the veil in public space – which drew much criticism from other European states – as a positive act of resistance against the threat Muslims are perceived to pose to their respective nations through what is represented as their failure to conform to Western cultural norms and values (cf. Meer et al., 2010; Phillips, 2012; Valentine et al., 2014b).

I think we should be like France and say right you can't wear the burqa because I think to look at people is important...The trouble with Muslims is that they're not trying to integrate into our society; they're trying to take it over...Rather than integrate and become part of an English society they are just breeding within their own little conclave and wanting to expand this so that eventually there'll be more of them than us, I think, and then they'll take over. (Female, retired, white British)

Well at the moment, more, and more in Warsaw, I see women dressed in Arab clothes, covered. This is what the West shouts about. They can't do it in France, they must remove it [the veil], uncover their faces, otherwise they are not allowed to go to university, or enter somewhere public, right. Well, if they [Muslim people] move here...[to Poland] I don't know, sure you can't look at someone, you can't say that anyone who is covered must be a terrorist, but, we also need to see more notices on bank doors or other public places that they will not serve people with their faces covered. (Female, unemployed, white Polish)

Contemporary processes of accelerated connectivity are often celebrated as producing progressive opportunities for cross-cultural exchange to promote secular, liberal and cosmopolitan values. Yet, as this section has shown, linkages can also be established through

a critique of equality, and used to circulate prejudices with the potential consequence that negative attitudes and conservative values might begin to be represented as normative standards which transcend specific contexts to challenge progressive values and legislation.

Conclusion

Rather than focus on academic definitions or theorizations of prejudice this paper has investigated popular understandings of what constitutes prejudice in two national contexts. In doing so, it has shown how everyday, common-sense understandings of the meaning of prejudice in both Poland and the UK are inflected by the specific histories and geographies of each place: framed in terms of distance and proximity respectively. Yet, by treating these national contexts as nodes and linking them analytically this paper has exposed, not just the specificity of the two places, but also a connectedness which brings into relief the common processes that produce prejudice. Namely, the research shows that in both places prejudice is an effect of social structures: the Polish lack of contact with difference, or resentments in the UK about contact with difference, are both an outcome of global socio-political relations and inequalities of resource distribution. In other words, it is socio-material conditions which are responsible for generating the insecurities which make people vulnerable to taking on negative stereotypes of others and to respond in emotional ways to difference (albeit differently: fear in Poland, resentment in the UK). Contrary to previous research which has suggested few people are willing to admit being prejudiced, this research found this was not the case. Rather, interviewees were self-reflexive about their attitudes, identifying being prejudiced (adopting tactics ranging from avoidance of others to active discrimination) as an intentional and logical position to adopt in response to the socio-economic conditions and relations in the particular places within which they live and move.

This paper has also recognised that understandings of difference are not isolated within particular national contexts but also circulate between places. This is a product both of transnational political structures like the European Union as well as processes such as globalisation and mobility. Such accelerated connectivity offers the potential to promote progressive transformations in attitudes and practices. Article 13 of the European Union Treaty of Amsterdam represents one such example, through its requirement for the common implementation of anti-discrimination directives across member states. Yet, the evidence of this research is that inter-linkages between the UK and Poland within the wider context of the European Union are producing – and circulating through the emerging international currency of ‘political correctness’ – a common critique of equality legislation and a belief that popular concerns about the way national contexts are perceived to be changing as a consequence of processes of supermobility and superdiversity are being silenced. This raises a real risk that, in the context of European austerity and associated levels of socio-economic insecurity, negative attitudes and conservative values may begin to be represented as popular normative standards which transcend national contexts to justify harsher political responses towards minorities. As such, this paper makes a case for prejudice-reduction strategies to receive much greater priority in both national and European contexts.

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