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An Analysis of the Nature and Use of Promigrant Representations in an Antideportation Campaign

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Abstract

Opposition to immigration and the rejection of migrants have long been of concern to psychologists. While much is known about negative representations of migrants in politics and the media, far less is known about positive representations of migrants and immigration. In this article, we provide an examination of social representations promoting promigrant action in the context of a community campaign opposing the deportation of a woman and her young daughter. The woman, who had come to the United Kingdom from Malawi seven years prior had lost permission to remain following changes to personal circumstances and was facing deportation. Our analysis explores the ways in which the campaign's mobilization arguments respond to and engage with antimigrant representations. It identifies the importance of categorical representations concerning the nature, norms, and interests of the local community, of the two migrants under threat of deportation, and of those seeking to deport them. Contrary to antimigrant representations, the migrants at the center of the campaign were presented as ingroup members and their potential deportation as a violation of ingroup norms and ingroup interests. Finally, we also identify points of ambivalence in the campaign's mobilization strategy where arguments reject the ascription but not the nature of negative representations of migrants.

Keywords: immigration, mobilization, prosocial behavior, social identity, social representation

Introduction

Over the last two decades, anti-immigration politics in Europe (and especially the United Kingdom), have increasingly complemented moves to tighten borders and limit the entry of migrants (Squire, 2009; Watson, 2009) with moves to expel “unwanted” migrants who have already entered (Anderson, Gibney, & Paoletti, 2011). During this time, there has been a “prodigious” increase in the number of migrants who have been deported (Blinder, 2014), described as a “deportation turn” within the general migration debate (Anderson et al., 2011; Gibney, 2008).

Since the earliest onset of increased deportation in the United Kingdom, antideportation campaigns have been a consistent feature of the sociopolitical landscape. Antideportation campaigns are community-based movements that campaign for migrants (individuals or families) to stay in the country when they are at immediate risk of deportation. These campaigns are provocative. Insofar as deportation represents the upper limit of immigration controls and the rejection of migrants—the bodily removal of people from the national territory (Schuster, 2005)—antideportation campaigns grapple with that power. To do so, these campaigns speak directly to the general public and seek to mobilize them against the rulings of the state. They ask explicitly that help and support be offered to people whom the state wishes to deport—people, who by virtue of their undocumented status, belong to one of the most marginal, ambivalently regarded groups in society. As it stands, we know little about how, with what success, and with what implications for the overall migration debate.

Indeed, in general, psychology has focused its attention on why migrants are viewed negatively, treated negatively, and socially excluded. As well as studies of the underpinnings of individual anti-immigration attitudes (for a review, see Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014), there is ample literature on the negative representations of migrants propagated by politicians and the media (e.g., King & Wood, 2013). This excludes the study of antideportation campaigns, which are a matter of positive perceptions, prosocial behaviours, and the social inclusion of migrants.

Looking beyond psychology, however, there is a small literature which does address such campaigns, particularly in terms of how they bear on the broader understanding of citizenship. While it is not a primary focus, this work does provide some insights into how antideportation campaigns seek to mobilize support. For instance, Anderson et al. (2011) list the titles of some prominent campaigns, which demonstrate that organizers often start by arguing that those under threat of deportation belong to local communities: “‘Lydia and Bernard Belong to Manchester’ [. . .], ‘Selamawit Belongs in Salford’, ‘Jhoselyn and Justina Belong in London’ and ‘Florence and Precious Belong to Glasgow’” (p. 559).

Of course, the labels that campaigns give to themselves can offer no more than a hint at the psychological processes involved in mobilizing support. To understand the range and nature of arguments an antideportation campaign uses to make its case and compel public support, a detailed examination is needed. Understanding the psychology of these arguments, which must navigate a broad social context that is indifferent or even hostile towards migrants in such a way as to persuade the public to oppose deportation, would complement existing literature on antimigrant representations and extend the psychology of collective mobilization.

In this article, we present a case study of one of the campaigns mentioned by Anderson et al. (2011)—“Florence and Precious Belong to Glasgow.” We examine the arguments used, paying particular attention to representational processes as well as the extent to which and the ways in which these arguments engage with the status quo. We also consider the wider implications of the campaigns’ arguments for the immigration debate. Our

analysis is informed and structured by the broad conceptual approach and the specific analytical framework to which we now turn.

Conceptual Approach

Our analysis is based on a critical social representations approach (Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011; Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017). This has four core elements.

First, representations are models of the social world which serve to make sense of phenomena and events within it and to determine what forms of action are possible and desirable.

Second, representations both organize and are organized around social categories. Thus, on the one hand, representations serve to characterize the ways that the parties to any event should be grouped and the nature of the relations between groups. On the other hand, the nature of the groups in terms of which people categorize themselves shape the representations through which they understand their social world.

Third, people develop representations of the world through public dialogue and debate—both directly in discussion with others and indirectly through exposure to influencing agents via the media and other sources. The positions that people take on a phenomenon such as migration depend critically upon their exposure to different sources. To put it slightly differently, social understandings are rooted in a process of mobilization rather than contemplation (Reicher, 2012).

Fourth, drawing on Billig (1996), the nature and meaning of any given social representation depends upon its position within an argument with other representations. Thus, to represent people at risk of deportation in a favorable way gains sense in relation to mainstream representations that support the rejection and removal of these people. However, as Billig also shows, these arguments can take place at different levels: “the argument can center around the nature of the thing [person] to be categorised or about the nature of the category” (p. 171). That is, one can argue by exception (this instance is not part of the general category) or by generality (the general category should be understood in a different way). In this way, representational arguments can serve to affirm as well as to subvert the general representation system.

Applying this overall approach to the specific question at hand, our analysis is concerned with the ways that antideportation campaigners seek to mobilize people through an active construction of representations that define the various categories of actors who are involved and the social relations between them. Moreover, we are also interested in the ways that these “antideportation” representations relate to mainstream “anti-immigrant” or “prodeportation” representations. In what ways do the former engage the latter?

Antimigrant Representation: An Analytical Framework

To be more concrete, the literature on anti-immigrant discourse points to three core elements: “exclusion,” “normativity,” and “interests.” “Exclusion” involves the depiction of migrants as different, other, and alien in terms of their appearance, values, and culture (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2011). Indeed the very language used to refer to such people in public media—such as “illegals,” “boat people” (in the certain contexts), and even “asylum seeker”—has been argued to strip migrant groups of their humanity, reducing them to an amorphous mass of objects, completely beyond psychological identification (Lueck, Due, & Augoustinos, 2015; O’Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007).

“Normativity” involves a depiction of migrants in the country as violating group norms. This is grounded in notions of illegal immigrants whose very presence is contrary to the rule of law and to national sovereignty. This then legitimates their removal as a means of reestablishing such fundamental norms of nationhood (Lueck et al., 2015). Often this is a

matter of generalized suspicion rather than specific accusations: even if not all migrants are illegal, any migrant might be. Hence the words “migrant” and “asylum seeker” always carry the shadow of “illegal” or of “bogus” (Coole, 2002; Klocker & Dunn, 2003; Lynn & Lea, 2003).

Finally, “interests” involves the depiction of migrants not only as an outgroup, but an outgroup which stands in an antagonistic relationship to the national ingroup. Hence, it is implied that migrants threaten national interests, and it is right that the ingroup defends itself (O’Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008). This threat to interests can take multiple forms: immigrants are sometimes depicted as a threat to security due to their criminal or even terrorist ways (Anderson, 2015; De Genova, 2004, 2007). Immigrants are sometimes depicted as an economic threat, taking jobs or overloading public services, construed as ingroup properties and entitlements (Andreouli & Dashtipour, 2014; Lueck et al., 2015). And immigrants are sometimes depicted as a threat to the culture and identity of the national ingroup (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2011), thereby undermining social cohesion and harmony (Cisneros, 2008).

If, then, we are right in viewing antideportation campaigns as acts of category construction rooted in arguments with mainstream anti-immigrant discourse, then it follows that they need to engage with issues of exclusion, normativity, and interests. Our analysis then becomes a matter of examining the extent to which this is the case and the ways in which the campaign engages and interacts with the representation of immigrants in general as aliens whose presence violates the basic norms of nationhood and who act to subvert the interests of the nation.

Context of the Study

As we have already indicated, our analysis is based on a detailed case study of one campaign: “Florence and Precious belong to Glasgow.” Our choice of case was based on the following considerations. First, Anderson et al. (2011) invoke this campaign as one of those which exemplify contemporary antideportation mobilizations. Second, the campaign was taken up by a local newspaper as well as having its own social media presence. This led to a readily available body of material amenable to a study of promigrant representations. Third, the campaign was relatively successful in terms of mobilization, if not outcome. In using these considerations, we are not claiming that the representations we are analyzing are either typical or explain the campaign’s relative success in mobilization. Rather, our logic is to provide detailed analysis of the representations in a specific case that can open to the way to addressing such questions in the future.

Florence and Precious Mhango were a mother and her 10-year-old daughter from Malawi. They had come to the United Kingdom (London) in 2003 as dependents on the student visa of Florence’s husband, Precious’s father. However, Florence left her husband, citing domestic violence, and relocated in Glasgow with Precious. Mother and daughter had permission to remain in the United Kingdom until the end of Florence’s husband’s visa in 2007 at which time Florence submitted a claim for asylum based on Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights: the right to a family life. This claim was rejected and, in November 2009, the Mhangos were taken into detention by the U.K. Border Agency (UKBA) in preparation for removal.

A campaign to generate public support for the Mhangos began around this time, coordinated primarily by the Mhangos’ Scottish parliamentary representative (MSP; a member of the Scottish National Party, SNP). The campaign aimed primarily to apply pressure on decision-makers in the Mhangos’ case, particularly U.K. Home Secretary (Labour’s Phil Woolas until May 2010, then Conservative, Theresa May).

Support was generated in part and coordinated through the campaign Facebook group which had over 2,000 members and was coordinated by the campaign's main organizer along with her assistants and a personal friend of the Mhangos. Support was also generated through a local newspaper, the *Evening Times (Glasgow)*—slogan: “Nobody knows Glasgow better”; circulation 56,843 (2009–10). The *Evening Times* adopted the campaign and worked in close consultation with campaign organizers, publicizing it extensively through both news and opinion pieces.

The campaign mobilized a good deal of support. As well as high-profile backers—such as Alex Salmond, then First Minister of Scotland—some 1,500 people sent letters of support for the Mhangos to the Home Secretary (as reported in the *Evening Times (Glasgow)*, August 28, 2010). However, the campaign failed in its primary objective. In September 2010, the Mhangos' appeal was rejected, and their claim for asylum was ultimately denied.

Our focus, then, is on how the campaign materials (in which we include campaigners' Facebook posts and articles in the *Evening Times*) represent the Mhangos and their case. At one level, our analysis is inductive and exploratory: We aim to record all and any aspects of this representation. At another level, our analysis is deductive and conceptually led: we aim, in particular, to examine whether and how the campaign engages with the themes of exclusion, normativity, and interests that constitute anti-immigration discourse.

Methods

Data

Main Data

The data corpus on which our analysis was based consists of: (1) 52 separate items published by the *Evening Times (Glasgow)* between December 21, 2009 and November 29, 2010. All texts were sourced via Nexis® UK using the search term “Mhango”; (2) 134 original posts (including 24 photographs) by campaign organizers to the campaign's Facebook group page between November 20, 2009 and July 3, 2011.

Supplementary Data

Interviews were conducted with three of the campaign's main organizers. As these interviews did not constitute part of the original campaign, they are not included in the analysis presented below. However, we have used them to check on our interpretations of the materials and to gauge intentionality in the production of particular appeals for support.

Analytic Method

The data were analyzed using a three-stage approach, derived from interpretive thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001), which is particularly appropriate given the mix of inductive and deductive elements in our approach. Similar approaches have been used previously in examinations of representations of social issues in public media (cf. Jaspal & Nerlich, 2014; Smith & Joffe, 2013).

As a first step, the data were read and re-read a number of times to ensure sufficient familiarity with their content for subsequent stages of analysis. A coding frame was drawn up which was designed to select all Extracts of data featuring social actors and social objects (i.e., all individuals, groups, and social categories). Additional codes were based on the identification of repeated motifs, notable patterns, and “important moments” within the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

In the second stage of analysis, coded data Extracts were grouped according to shared representational elements or processes. Extracts that described, defined, or positioned key figures or aspects of the case in a similar way were grouped together.

In the third stage, grouped Extracts were considered at an interpretive level (Braun & Clarke, 2006); they were organized and described according to their function in relation to social identity and representations of migrants.

Each of these stages was iterative and the relationship between stages was also iterative. That is, once we had completed the last stage, we went back through the entire corpus of materials to see if our analytic framework encompassed the data. To avoid confirmatory biases, we laid particular stress on deviant case analysis (Wickes, 2010), looking for instances that did not fit and using these to refine our framework. Analysis was deemed complete when subsequent readings produced no more substantial changes.

Analysis

All Extracts in the following analysis are numbered, identified by source (ET for *Evening Times*; FB for Facebook), and dated. For *Evening Times* Extracts, we indicate whether they are part of an opinion piece, an article, or a direct quotation (in which case the source of the quotation is named).

The analysis shows that the arguments can be grouped in response to the three themes previously identified in anti-immigrant discourse—exclusion, normativity, and interests. We also find a fourth theme which concerns the identity of the “perpetrators” who are responsible for initiating and enacting deportations.

Exclusion/Inclusion

If the exclusion of immigrants from the (national) community is central to anti-immigrant representations, inclusion in the community was a central feature of this antideportation campaign. Throughout, the Mhangos were explicitly and implicitly represented as part of local social groups to which the campaign’s audience (i.e., prospective supporters) belonged—primarily Glasgow, as indicated in the title of the campaign and Facebook group: “Florence and Precious belong to Glasgow,” but also Scotland or the Mhangos’ neighborhood of Cranhill. Sometimes category inclusion was explicitly stated, and sometimes it was implicit; the campaign both tells us and shows its audience that the Mhangos are ingroup members.

Explicit Inclusion

The simplest way in which category inclusion was achieved was through the labeling of mother and/or daughter. For instance, the label “Glasgow girl,” applied to Precious Mhango, was a key motif throughout the campaign. But often more elaborate warrants were used to justify category ascriptions. One form of warrant was to show that the Mhangos possessed certain markers of identity. One key marker of Scottishness is accent (Kiely, Bechhofer, Stewart, & McCrone, 2001), and much was made of Precious’s Glasgow accent as well as her attendance at a local school:

Extract 1. “Precious’ accent is just as Glaswegian as my own two children. I would challenge anyone to come and stand outside the bedroom door when they are chattering away and tell me which one of the voices coming from behind the door is from the little girl born in Malawi.” (ET, campaigner, 07/20/2010)

Extract 2. “Precious Mhango has lived in the United Kingdom for more than half her life and has received her whole education in a Glasgow school as a result, she speaks with a Glasgow accent and, like many asylum-seeker children, she has settled into education well.” (ET, Lord Provost, 08/10/2010)

The Mhangos' inclusion was further warranted through emphasis of notions of home and belonging. The life the Mhangos had built, their emotional connection to Cranhill and Glasgow, the length of time spent "here" (see Extract 2, above) were all cited in a way that underlined the Mhangos' embeddedness within the local context. An SNP MSP was quoted as arguing that: "Florence and Precious have built a life in Scotland. This is their home, they belong here" (ET, 07/16/2010), a sentiment echoed by others:

Extract 3. "[I]t is Precious and how she has become part of the community that has sealed the bond with her adopted city." (ET, article, 02/15/2010)

The Mhangos' status as part of the ingroup was reinforced by a consistent image of the welcome and acceptance afforded to the Mhangos by members of these same ingroups, for example, (FB, 10/08/2010): "My girls and myself . . . are missing them very much and want them to come home!!," and "Glasgow has taken them to their hearts" (editorial, 07/09/2010). Among the photographs posted to the campaign's webpage were many examples of local community members and even British celebrities embracing the Mhangos.

Implicit Inclusion

We also find a number of cases where no explicit claim to category membership was made but rather evidence was offered which points to membership, and the audience was left to draw out the conclusion for themselves. There were many subtle (and not so subtle) portrayals of the Mhangos as sharing local tastes, sensibilities, values, and lifestyles and hence as ordinary or even typical members of the ingroup category.

These representations were visual as well as textual. Many snapshots of the Mhangos' everyday life depict a way of life including activities, interests, types of housing, and other local settings all familiar to the campaign's audience. In one particularly powerful photograph posted to the campaign's Facebook page, which also appeared in the *Glasgow Evening Times* (July 7, 2010), Precious was portrayed smiling at the camera, wearing an *X Factor* t-shirt, and holding a half-empty bottle of *Irn Bru* in her hand. The *X Factor*, a reality TV show based on a singing competition, was the most watched show on British television in 2010 (BBC, 2010) and a particularly potent symbol of popular culture. It is, therefore, not surprising that we find references to the *X Factor* repeated in the data set. *Irn Bru* (a sweet, carbonated drink) is another potent cultural symbol, but of a distinctively Scottish popular culture. It is referred to as "Scotland's other national drink" (besides whisky, that is) and was selected by actor Sean Connery as his contribution to the new Museum of Scotland (Murphy, 2015). Although the categorical ascription remains unstated, it would be hard to think of a more iconic image of a young Scot as defined by taste and consumption.

Extract 4, below, combines various elements we have addressed in this section. Here, Precious was presented as an "ordinary" little girl with the same preoccupations, the same tastes, and the same interests as any other local girl her age:

Extract 4. "[Precious] is a 10-year-old Glasgow schoolchild who likes X Factor and playing with dogs." (ET, opinion piece, 09/27/2010)

Just as their ingroup membership was affirmed, so was there a playing down or outright denial of the Mhangos' outgroup belonging. For instance, Florence and Precious were described as "originally" from Malawi, thus acknowledging a prior identity but distancing them from it in the present. Elsewhere, it was affirmed that Precious could not speak

Malawi's native language (Chichewa). On those few occasions where Malawian identity was invoked, it was precisely in order to reject it as a valid categorization:

Extract 5. "I don't think of her [Precious] as Malawian because she doesn't feel Malawian." (ET, campaign organizer, 02/15/2010)

The Uses of Inclusion

Representations relating to the inclusion of the Mhangos achieve several things regarding the campaigns' mission to mobilize support. They promote ingroup identification with the Mhangos and hence a favorable response to their situation. At the same time, they undermine processes by which the Mhangos might, as migrants, be excluded. Asserting the "ingroupness" of the Mhangos precludes their designation as "other"; if they belong to a local "us," they cannot also belong to category of people subject to removal. What's more, the above Extract creates a sharp contrast with "otherising" representations of migrants as different, alien, or exotic (Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2011); its reference to feeling also humanizes Precious in the face of dehumanizing representations of migrants (O'Doherty & Lecouteur, 2007).

However, although it takes on antimigrant representations in this way, the campaign does not explicitly challenge the nature of the category of "migrant." It focuses on the ways in which Precious and her mother do not conform to that categorical ascription, both by offering alternative categories and also through particularization (Billig, 1996), that is, the stress is on how the Mhangos as a distinct case are not culturally different and conform to local cultural norms. It is not in arguing that cultural difference per se is no impediment to inclusion. Indeed, representations that downplay the Mhangos' cultural difference—as something to be rejected (e.g., Hanson-Easey & Augoustinos, 2011). In this way, an argument with the mainstream rooted in particularization does not mount an overall challenge and may even buttress anti-immigration discourse.

Normativity

Denying Presence as Norm Violation

Just as campaigners refuted mainstream dehumanizing antimigrant arguments, so they refuted mainstream arguments that represent the presence of migrants as an illegitimate violation of the foundational norms of nationhood and hence their removal as a legitimate reassertion of those norms. Concretely, we have seen how the implication of illegality is used to make deportation legitimate. Hence, it was repeatedly stressed that the Mhangos were innocents, both in general terms (e.g., "an innocent little girl and her mother"; ET, 10/07/2010) and in relation to the nature of their entry to the United Kingdom. Notably, Glasgow's Lord Provost wrote to the Home Secretary stating that: "my understanding is that Ms Mhango and Precious entered the UK legitimately in 2003" (October 7, 2010). He went on to insist that principles of protection pertaining to victims of abuse should be prioritized when in conflict with principles of legality:

Extract 6. "I am sure that you will agree that it could never have been the intention of the law to coerce women and children to remain in violent and abusive relationships." (ET, Lord Provost of Glasgow, 07/10/2010)

Here again, it is worth noting that these arguments do not directly challenge antimigrant logics or antimigrant laws but rather challenge their application in the case of the Mhangos.

Constituting Deportation as Norm Violation

The campaign doesn't just refute the counternormativity of the Mhangos continued presence in the country, they also imply the counter-normativity of deportation. This latter argument occupies a central place in the campaign material.

As in Extract 6, normative arguments centered on notions of protection towards vulnerable groups such as women and children.

Sometimes the focus was specifically on gender; Florence and Precious were positioned separately as female, the one a woman and other a girl. Both were positioned as under threat, invoking a norm of protection which would be violated by deportation. This threat took different forms. In Extract 7, it is a matter of actual male violence in the United Kingdom impinging on both Florence and Precious. In Extract 8, it is a matter of gender-based oppression impinging particularly on Precious when she deported to Malawi:

Extract 7. "I cannot allow two human beings who have done nothing wrong, a mother and child who have been victims of a man's violence and a society that does very little to protect them, to suffer in this way." (quote from campaign organizer, 07/08/2010)

Extract 8. "Young women are treated like second class citizens. Women are made to sit on the floor, while men have chairs. Females don't have any say in anything really, and it is men that make all the decisions." (ET, Glasgow teacher, 08/09/2010)

At other times, the focus was on the family rather than gender per se (although it is a highly gendered representation of familyhood): Florence and Precious were positioned interdependently as mother and child. Within this family focus, attention was variously directed to norms of sanctity regarding the child, the mother, or the mother-child bond, all of which would be violated by deportation—the campaign asserted that in the event of deportation, Florence's in-laws intended to invoke Malawian marriage law to take custody of Precious. Let us consider each of these in turn. The next extract presents a significant point in a child's life—her birthday—which should be marked by friendship or fun, but where, for Precious, these were denied due to the mere threat of removal. Her life was therefore the antithesis of what a childhood should be:

Extract 9. "It should be a day of joy and fun. But for one Glasgow girl there were no birthday presents, no cake and no friends round to play. For Glasgow girl Precious Mhango who turned 11 yesterday her birthday was just another grey day in her stressful ordeal." (ET, article, 10/30/2010)

Extract 10 again invokes the unnaturally fearful childhood of Precious but also stresses how deportation undermined Florence's ability to fulfil her natural role as a mother.

Extract 10. "Neither Florence or Precious will sleep because they are so frightened that U.K. Border Agency staff will turn up at their door. They will be in the same bed, clinging onto each other with fear, a mother unable to comfort and reassure her child that she is safe because she does not know if she is." (ET, campaign organizer, 07/15/2010)

Finally, Extract 11 condemns deportation for separating mother and child and hence violating their sacred bond:

Extract 11. “No stronger bond exists than that between a mother and child, and it is one which should be cherished and protected. Which is why the attempt to deport Florence and Precious Mhango, to Malawi, where they face separation, is quite simply wrong.” (ET, opinion piece, 06/15/2010)

As with inclusion, these representations function visually as well as verbally. One photo, featured both on the campaign’s Facebook page (July 2, 2010) and in the *Evening Times* (November 2, 2010), was particularly powerful. It shows Florence, Madonna-like: Precious resting upon her. Together, they hold up a campaign flyer which depicts a heart torn in two, the image of Florence in one-half, and the image of Precious in the other. The natural and sacred bond of mother and child is juxtaposed to the potential destruction of that bond.

Thus, in its representation of the Mhangos, the campaign circumvents arguments favoring deportation based on norms concerning legality. Instead, it places alternative norms at the center of the case, norms that impel prosocial action—the support and protection of mother and child, a woman and a little girl.

The use of these normative arguments warrants further comment. While potentially effective with respect to the campaign’s immediate goal of individual rescue, they simultaneously buy into problematic representations of the other—this time, a Malawian or African Other as culturally regressive. Further, although they champion the rights of women and girls, these arguments simultaneously turn on somewhat paternalistic gender norms. Such is the complexity of the context of immigration and deportation that arguments against the removal of migrants can also play into ethnic, national, and gender inequalities.

Norms and Social Categories

In the extracts provided so far, we have seen many examples of norms being invoked. In many of these cases, it has not been explicit whose norms they are. Yet there are multiple occasions where, in different ways, norms are associated with particular ingroups. Consider Extract 11, for instance. There, the campaign organizer declares that the separation of mother and child is “quite simply wrong.” But elsewhere, she states that “The decision to send this mother and child to a country where they expect to be separated goes against all our principles of humanity and compassion” (ET, 06/09/2010). In this instance, these principles are not free floating, they are “our” principles. They belong to a circumscribed “us,” even if the nature of this “us” is not explicitly stated.

Or again, consider Extract 8, where a Glasgow teacher expresses concern that norms of gender equality will be violated if Precious were to be deported to Malawi. That extract does not speak to whose norms. But, in further comments, the same teacher declares: “a Malawian school is very different to a Glasgow school” (ET, 08/09/2010). Here, it is not just that the norms underlying opposition to deportation are named as “ours” but that this “ours” is also named.

Even more directly, the star of a Glasgow based soap opera suggests that “It just does not sound like Glasgow to send a child away” (ET, 07/20/2010). A week or so later, the paper quotes a “Glasgow man” bemoaning the deportation of mother and child as a violation of Glaswegian norms. In this way, the campaign argues not only is there a need for action in the Mhangos’ case, but that the Glaswegian “we” should be the ones to act.

Extract 12. “A Glasgow man, who now lives in Spain, said: I’m glad I’ve left Scotland if this is what is happening. The Glasgow I knew would never have turned a young mum and her child away.” (ET, article, 07/28/2010)

Interests

A third set of arguments used by campaigners concerned the implications of the Mhangos' case for ingroup interests—both how the continuing presence of Florence and Precious was an asset to the community and how their removal would harm it.

The Mhangos as an Asset to the Group

Given the centrality of the notion in antimigrant argumentation that migrants subvert ingroup interests in terms of economy, safety, and culture, much of the material we have already presented could be seen as refuting such ideas. The Mhangos are not alien and not criminal. They share “our” culture. They are a mother and daughter, a family, and therefore defined by innocence and by nurturance. At times, however, the issue of interests became the focus of argument, and it was clearly stated that not only were the Mhangos no liability, they were a valuable asset to the “community”:

Extract 13. “I am so proud of Florence and Precious, they do so much to help out in the community and, even though they are going through so much, they never moan and never groan.” (ET, campaigner, 07/20/2010)

Deportation as a Liability to the Group

For campaigners, the cost of deporting the Mhangos was not merely practical (a matter of losing valued individuals who contribute to the community), it was also reputational. Were they to be removed to Malawi, this would damage the way the community is seen, not only in the eyes of others but also in the eyes of community members themselves. Accordingly, the notion of shame was invoked:

Extract 14. “I have never felt so ashamed of my country” (ET, reader's letter, 28/07/2010)

But, if the prospect of deportation brought shame, the campaign against deportation brought redemption. It reaffirmed the positive identity of the ingroup:

Extract 14. “While the legal system has let them down, the community has stepped in and shown the true caring nature of people in this city and country.” (opinion piece, 14/10/2010)

The Mhangos as Desirable Migrants

On rare occasions, the Mhangos' case was elided with the issue of migration in general, and hence their defence involved a challenge to the way in which migrants generally are portrayed with respect to ingroup interests. In the following case, a Scottish cultural commonplace is employed (“we are all Jock Tamson's bairns”—we are all equally human) in order to contest the notion that migrants are a threat and instead to assert that they are an asset to the country.

Extract 15. “We in Glasgow pride ourselves in recognising we are all Jock Tamson's bairns and recognise the need for Scotland to attract talented young people.” (ET, James Dornan, 10/09/2010)

Overwhelmingly, however, this notion goes unchallenged. Rather, the prevalent argument is solely that the Mhangos as individuals do not contravene ingroup interests. At times, this argument rests on the idea of the Mhangos as exceptional individuals, not to be grouped with

migrants in general. Indeed, the Mhangos' exceptional nature was repeatedly emphasized (e.g., "I have written to the Home Office asking for them to remain because these are exceptional people and they are in exceptional circumstances"; Labour MSP, June 15, 2010). At other times, the argument rests on a distinction between desirable and undesirable migrants—those with social (if not economic) capital and those without (Lueck et al., 2015), or much more fundamentally, those who are "good" and those who are "bad":

Extract 16. "Ironically Precious, a girl hailed by teachers, neighbours and politicians as clever and industrious, faces being sent home in the same week that a preacher of hate has won the right to stay in the UK while his extradition to the US is debated further." (ET, opinion piece, 09/07/2010)

Both forms of this argument operate within the logic that migrants who are not good for us do not deserve to remain among us. So, while there is some evidence of contestation of overall category definitions, by and large the argument concerning interests is again at the level of particularization, and what is more, there are times when it explicitly as well as implicitly affirms general anti-immigration discourse.

Perpetrators

The foregoing analysis has largely concentrated on representations of the Mhangos and their relationship to the community. However, imminent in many of the extracts we have considered is a third party. That is the agent behind the deportations—what, from the perspective of campaigners, can be described as the perpetrators. Who were they? How did they and their actions relate to group inclusion, group norms, and group interests?

Officially, of course, they, as government and state, represent the national category, uphold national standards, and defend the national interest. But this was contested by the campaigners. For them, in the case of Florence and Precious the authorities didn't represent the wishes of the people. Indeed, they and their actions were contrasted to the popular will:

Extract 17. "The plight of Florence and Precious has touched the hearts of many people across Scotland but the authorities have refused to allow this lovely mother and daughter to remain in Glasgow." (ET, SNP councillor, 09/10/2010)

Early on in the campaign, the recalcitrance of the authorities, of the Home Office and Home Secretary in particular, was presented as a matter of contingency. Theresa May was simply ignorant of the case and would change her stance once she ascertained the facts. However, after the Home Secretary failed to answer a plea from Glasgow's Lord Provost (i.e., mayor), this gave way to a claim that she was acting deliberately against the Glaswegian ingroup. She was, it was argued: "not just insulting (the Lord Provost). She is insulting every Glaswegian" (ET, opinion piece, 07/14/2010).

Over time, this contrast was entrenched and extended. As more prominent national figures appealed for clemency and were ignored by the Home Secretary, so her stance was contrasted not just with Glasgow but with Scotland as a whole:

Extract 18. "When the First Minister, Lord Provost of Glasgow and the country's two most senior church leaders unite behind a cause it carries some weight. Not with Home Secretary Theresa May, however, who has dismissed their plea to intervene and allow Florence and Precious Mhango to stay in Glasgow." (ET, opinion piece, 08/19/2010)

By this point, the distinction between the community and the authorities had shifted from being contingent to being essentialized, rooted in an essentialized contrast between Scotland and the United Kingdom.

Discussion Findings

The primary aim of this article was to examine the nature representations in a campaign to support migrants and to analyze whether and how these engage with mainstream antimigrant representations.

In terms of whether the campaign engages with anti-immigrant discourse, the answer was clear. We found much of the argument does indeed seek to contest the application of anti-immigration discourses to the principals of this campaign: Florence and Precious Mhango. They are not “other,” they are part of “us,” whether that “us” is defined at the level of the neighborhood (Cranhill), the city (Glasgow), or the country (Scotland). Their presence is not counternormative, rather their removal would violate our norms, whether those are gender norms or family norms and whether the categorical provenance of these norms is stated or left unstated. They do not threaten our interests but rather enhance them through their contributions; indeed it would be deportation that would damage the ingroup interest.

The one argument that appears to be novel is the notion that the perpetrators of deportation are not part of “us,” but “other.” They don’t share “our” values, they are not of “us,” they are insulting “us.” Is this, then, an exception to the notion that antideportation campaigns constitute counterargumentation against anti-immigration discourse? After all, to our knowledge, there is relatively little evidence showing that such discourse explicitly constitutes those who exclude migrants as part of the ingroup. Of course, this could simply represent a gap in the evidence. Alternatively, it may simply be that it is taken for granted that those who police the national borders are “our” authorities, and hence the claim does not need to be made explicitly. This only becomes open to being problematized in special circumstances, such as the United Kingdom, where state and nation map uneasily onto each other—especially in a contemporary period of rising support for Scottish independence where it is increasingly argued that British authorities (who retain control over immigration and deportation) are not “our” Scottish authorities, and therefore the perpetrators are open to become cast as outgroup (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2014).

Moving on and turning to the question of how the campaign for Florence and Precious engages with anti-immigrant discourse, the answer is rather more nuanced. There are cases where there is an explicit critique of the general categories which structure this discourse—as in the rejection of any notion that immigrants are “other” since “we’re all Jock Tamson’s bairns.” There are also cases where there is an explicit endorsement of these general categories—as in the acceptance that there are immigrants who threaten our security, and these should be deported. Most of the time, though, the Mhangos are particularized as nonother, as nonillegal and as nonthreatening without explicitly stating whether other immigrants are or are not. The impact of this is in itself ambivalent. One of our interviewees argued: “I think that Florence and Precious, they were also symbols for immigration rights. They were very photogenic symbols.” Conversely, in many of the specific arguments used—the denial of the Mhangos’ cultural difference, an emphasis on their exceptionality—the campaign implicitly accepts a dichotomy between wanted and unwanted migrants, working only to position the Mhangos on the correct side of that divide. What’s more, the way it does so has consequences beyond the immediate context of migration. In evoking norms of protection, for instance, the campaign leans on harmful cultural stereotypes of Malawi and even paternalistic gender norms that sustain gender inequality (cf. Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012).

Overall, then, one cannot view anti-immigration and antideportation as a simple moral binary in which oppressive representations are countered by liberatory alternatives. Rather, the debate is more complex. Antideportation representations do not necessarily challenge the overall terms of the anti-immigration mainstream and can even strengthen them. Antideportation campaigners can also draw on other oppressive representations to buttress the case for allowing specific individuals to stay in the country. In all of this, much turns on the employment of different levels of category argumentation as identified by Billig (1996).

Limitations

There are two clear limitations to our analysis. As we made explicit at the outset, a single case analysis like ours allows for a detailed analysis of the types and the range of arguments and representations that are used. It cannot answer questions of generality. Indeed, the points we have been making about argumentative context suggests that different campaigns at different times and in different places may well use different arguments due both to what they are arguing against and the range of representational resources that are available.

What we can do, however, is to raise issues about generality and variability which can guide and be addressed in further studies. To continue our discussion in the previous section, what is the balance in different campaigns between contesting the application of antimigrant representations and contesting the very nature of these representations? Can we identify factors which shape this balance—for instance the nature of the audience which campaigners seek to mobilize? In this way, the value of our work is as much to generate questions as to provide answers.

The second limitation is that, while we have analyzed the appeals used by campaigners, this does not in and of itself allow us to determine which, if any, of these arguments was effective in generating the campaign's public support. At best, we discover association, not causation. Again, we contribute to the generation of causal hypotheses not to hypothesis testing. However, we regard both as important phases of the research process with neither having precedence over the other (Blumer, 1969). After all, there would be little point in testing the impact of factors that one thought crucial to the mobilization of solidarity if one then found that those factors were not involved in such mobilizations.

Once more, then, our contribution lies not only in what we have done in the present study but equally in helping to shape further studies.

Conclusion

Haslam and Reicher (2012) note that “there is a general tendency for social psychologists to focus on processes of oppression” (p. 154). Accordingly, they argue for a social psychology of resistance. The present article was intended as a contribution to such an enterprise. The literature on migration tends to ask why people are hostile to migrants. Correspondingly, there is a focus on antimigrant representations which are propagated by politicians and the popular press. We set out to change the focus to promigrant, antideportation campaigns, and provide—to our knowledge—one of the first detailed analyses of such a campaign.

In specific terms, our findings could be said to muddy the distinction with which we began. Certainly, the campaign we analyzed engaged with anti-immigration arguments. Certainly, the aim was to resist the deportation of Florence and Precious. But did it either aim to challenge or succeed in challenging the anti-immigrant mainstream? There the argument becomes more complicated. What is resistance at an individual level may be affirmation at a systemic level. Whether it is or not, and what makes it so, is clearly a matter for further enquiry.

More generally, though, our analysis provides a clear illustration of the centrality of category constructions and category argumentation to debates around immigration and deportation. Indeed, by highlighting how the dominant discourse is challenged by those who oppose the drive to limit immigration, we see more clearly the assumptions on which this anti-immigration drive is based. What is taken for granted becomes topicalized and challenged. The notion that immigrants are “they” and that they stand in a relationship of antagonism to the national “us”—both by subverting our norms and undermining our interests—is exposed as the pivot on which opposition to immigration depends. Equally important, these constructions are replaced by an alternative wherein immigrants are “us” and that their removal subverts our norms and undermines our interests.

This provides a powerful demonstration of the critical social representations perspective of this article. The analysis shows social positions on an issue like immigration are products of rich and integrated multidimensional representations of the social world; it shows how these representations are organized around the definition of categories and category relations; it shows how these category constructions are constructed and contested; it shows how these constructions gain meaning through engagement with alternatives. To put the core point more succinctly, it is not that mobilization for or against migrants that flows from pre-given identities and pre-given notions of legitimacy and illegitimacy. Rather, the act of crafting these identities and notions of legitimacy is the core of the mobilization process.

Finally, our analysis shows the inherently political nature of category constructions and how category constructions are central to politics. The issue of whether an immigrant is one of us or one of them is not just a matter of defining who I am and how I should feel and act, it is also a matter of defining the social relations that structure my world, of whether I should use my social power for or against immigration controls, and of how I respond to policies and policymakers who propose tighter or looser controls. In the analysis of category construction and contestation, we conduct an irreducibly political psychology.

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