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Ethnic conflict without ethnic groups: a study in pure sociology[1]

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Abstract

Despite growing awareness of the limitations of group-level analyses in ethnic studies, research on ethnic conflict has paid virtually no systematic attention to variation at the individual or micro level. Addressing that gap, the present paper draws upon data from interviews conducted with members of two broadly-defined categories recently arrived in the Republic of Ireland, Muslims and Nigerians. Results indicate that while members of both immigrant categories experience a good deal of ethnic conflict or hostility, such conflict is rarely collective and invariably varies across individuals. The research data are consistent with Donald Black's theory of moralism. Black's theory, based on his theoretical system known as pure sociology, predicts that ethnic hostility increases with the social inferiority and cultural distance of the immigrant, and that higher status immigrants are more assertive in responding to hostility, though they experience less of it (the status paradox).

Keywords: Ethnic conflict; immigration; Ireland; conflict management; pure sociology

Increased global migration over the past 40 years or so has greatly diversified the populations of many countries (see, e.g., International Organization for Migration 2003). Consequently, the potential for intra-societal conflict between members of distinct cultural groups (ethnicities) is now more widely distributed across nations. But ethnic conflict remains imperfectly understood. Scholars increasingly argue that ethnic groups are rarely the optimal units of analysis for ethnic studies (see, e.g., Brubaker 2002; Wimmer 2004; Vertovec 2007). Many ethnic categories turn out to lack unity and cohesion; virtually all display internal diversity, often considerable in scale (Pilkington 2003: 2). Hence, to treat the individuals who make up the ethnic category as members of a discrete group may be highly misleading.

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This insight, however, has bumped up against the dominant collectivist conception of ethnic conflict as involving competition over scarce resources between contending groups (see, e.g., Horowitz 1985). Challenging that view, Brubaker (2002) argues that, 'the chief protagonists of most ethnic conflict – and a fortiori of most ethnic violence – are not ethnic groups as such but various kinds of organizations, broadly understood, and their empowered and authorized incumbents' (2002: 171–2). Indeed, in some instances, Brubaker acknowledges, ethnic conflict may even be carried on primarily by individuals as they negotiate the vagaries and vicissitudes of life in multicultural societies.

Continuing the move toward 'ethnicity without groups', this paper reports that most ethnic conflicts disclosed in interviews by immigrants to the Republic of Ireland involve members of ethnic categories acting alone. Yet not all immigrants are equally likely to experience hostility on account of their ethnicity. Lower status and more culturally distant immigrants are more vulnerable to ethnic hostility. These patterns are predicted by Donald Black's (1993: Ch. 8) theory of moralism, grounded in his theoretical paradigm known as pure sociology. So too is the paper's finding that those individuals most exposed to ethnic hostility tend to be the least assertive in responding to it (the status paradox).

Ethnic conflict

The great bulk of the scholarly literature on ethnic conflict focuses on antagonism between ethnic groups as a whole, such as Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland, Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East (see, e.g., Wolff 2006). The far-reaching and highly visible effects of macro conflict, including multiple or even mass death, widespread property destruction, and large-scale demographic and economic dislocation naturally attract scholarly attention. But the macro focus can obscure as much as it illuminates. Even in societies riven by divisions between ethnic groups most conflicts probably occur between individuals: for every collective lynching, riot, or boycott there is likely to be many individual slights, slurs, and assaults that do not escalate to macro disputes. Moreover, in many societies, macro ethnic conflict is comparatively rare. Yet conflict along ethnic lines typically has not disappeared from those societies but has just assumed less visible micro forms. Moreover, it typically affects some individuals more than others. Surprisingly, though, the literature contains just one systematic, stand-alone, analysis of patterns of micro ethnic conflict (Baumgartner 1998). The comparative neglect of ethnic conflict at the micro level is evident in the theoretical literature.

Theories of ethnic conflict

The theoretical literature on the sociology of ethnic conflict identifies several causal factors, including contact (see e.g., Allport 1954; Forbes 1997), internal colonialism (Hechter 1975), and split labour markets (Bonacich 1972). Competition theory, perhaps the most empirically validated perspective, traces the origins of ethnic conflict to the struggle between ethnic groups for scare resources, such as jobs, housing, or marriage partners (Barth 1969). The theory proposes that when ethnic groups occupy the same ecological niche attempts at exclusion result and conflict ensues (Olzak 1992). To test their theory, Olzak and colleagues have drawn upon newspaper accounts of ethnic conflicts. Based on event analysis, their work reveals that competition explains the timing and sequence of collective disputes between ethnic groups, such as rioting, lynching, and vigilantism (see, e.g., Shanahan and Olzak 2002).

Despite its empirical support, competition theory has three limitations. First, because it relies on public accounts of conflict the approach focuses on collective conflicts only. Individual disputes – less likely to be reported in newspapers and similar sources – are excluded. Second, the competition literature tends to treat ethnic groups as undifferentiated – implying that one member is as likely to be involved as any other. In reality, members of ethnic groups are likely to vary considerably in their degree of involvement in ethnic conflicts. And, third, largely absent from the research reports is material on how the targets of hostility respond – do they typically ignore the grievance, move elsewhere, negotiate with their oppressors, or launch reprisals, covert or overt?

Several qualitative studies provide information on instances of ethnic hostility, but they do not purport to provide an explanation of conflict across ethnic boundaries at the individual level (see e.g., Feagin 1991, 1992; Min 1996; Lee 2002). In particular, they do not systematically address the question of what factors explain who is likely to be a target of ethnic hostility and how such targets respond to the hostility. There is, however, a body of theory capable of addressing these issues: Donald Black's work on conflict management.

Black's theory of moralism

Conflicts over right and wrong occur everywhere in social life, among individuals, groups, organizations, and nations. Black's (1976, 1993) theoretical work addresses the handling of such conflicts, regardless of structural level. Holding constant the substance of conflicts – what they are about – the theory explains their outcomes with their location and direction in a multidimensional social space or their 'social geometry' – whether, for example, they are upward (initiated by lower status against higher status actors) or downward (initiated by higher status against lower status actors), or are close or distant

(e.g., involve parties of different ethnicity). Vary the case geometry (by changing the social characteristics of the parties) and the way it is handled will vary as well.

The concept of social geometry is an intrinsic part of a highly original theoretical system Black has invented known as pure sociology. Pure sociology is distinctive in making no reference to several features found in virtually every other social science theory: psychology, teleology (i.e., individual or group purposes or goals), and even people as such (Black 1995, 2000). In pure sociology, social life behaves; individuals and groups are agents. Thus, when a performer sings, song behaves; when a bank issues a loan, money behaves; when a large country invades a smaller one, war behaves. Art, commerce, conflict, science, marriage, religion, education, sex, sport – each and every form of social life obeys general social principles, the content of which it is the task of sociological theory to discover and specify.

Eliminating psychology, purposes, and people creates a new form of sociology, one independent of the study of the mind or the body. Black (1976) first unveiled pure sociology in his theory of law, which consists of a set of testable principles that address not the decision making of litigants, police officers, judges, jurors, or other legal actors, but the behaviour of law itself. One such principle, for example, is that 'downward law is greater than upward law' (Black 1976: 21). According to this principle, cases brought by lower status actors against higher status actors will be less common and less successful than cases brought by higher status actors against lower status actors, regardless of time or place or legal content. Data from societies as diverse as ancient Greece and Rome, early modern England, imperial China, colonial Zimbabwe, rural India, and modern America support the principle (Black 1976: 21–4; Cooney 2009: Ch. 3).

Extending his theoretical framework to forms of conflict management other than law, Black's most general statement on the topic is found in his paper, 'Making Enemies', which addresses the issue of moralism – the tendency to treat people as enemies (1993: 144–57). Moralism, Black proposes, is a form of social repulsion that increases with social distance and social superiority. 'Social distance' is a combination of relational distance (how disconnected are people from each other?) and cultural distance (how dissimilar are their cultures?).[2] Thus, conflicts between people who are strangers and foreigners to one another ought, all else constant, to be more intense – as measured by their hostility – than those between intimate members of the same culture. 'Social superiority' refers to the relative social status of the antagonists. Hostility should therefore be more frequent and severe in a downward than an upward direction. Both propositions provide a framework for investigating the research issues.

Scholars are increasingly employing pure sociology to explain the handling of conflict of various types, including violence at the interpersonal (Cooney

1998; Phillips 2003; Jacques and Wright 2008), inter-group (Senechal de la Roche 1996; Campbell 2009), and international (Borg 1992) levels, and conflict in various settings, including corporations (Morrill 1995; Tucker 1999), suburbia (Baumgartner 1988), and egalitarian therapeutic groups (Hoffmann 2006). Baumgartner (1998) has drawn on Black's theoretical system to addresses how immigrants to the USA respond to ethnic hostility. Based on ethnographic research in New Jersey, Baumgartner reports that immigrants react more forcefully to grievances with other immigrants and lower status American minorities than with members of the majority white population.

But do Baumgartner's patterns apply beyond that one setting? Are they found in a very different social context: Ireland?

Ireland

Until recently, the population of the Republic of Ireland was overwhelming white, native born, Roman Catholic, and English speaking. Not that it was ever wholly culturally homogeneous (see, e.g., Lentin 2007: 612). Even in the first half of the twentieth century Ireland had minorities, such as Jews and Travellers (i.e. a Gypsy-like group) (see, e.g., Lentin 2002; Ní Shuinéar 2002). But if the country was not purely monocultural it was highly so. That changed in the 1990s with the dawning of a period of prosperity popularly known as the 'Celtic Tiger'. With GNP growing by an annual average of about 7.5 per cent, 1994–2001, and over 5 per cent, 2002–2006, thousands of new jobs opened up, only some of which could be filled out of pre-existing unemployment (Central Statistics Office 2004: 133; 2007a: Table B).[3] Net immigration increased substantially, 1996–2007 (Mac Éinrí 2001: 48–50; Central Statistics Office 2007b, Table 1). About 40 per cent of those coming to live in Ireland initially were returning natives (later declining to about 20 per cent) (Central Statistics Office 2003a: Table 7; 2007b: Table 2). But the remainder were immigrants (Mac Éinrí 2001: 53, 58). Where previous immigrants, such as those of the 1970s, came overwhelmingly from the United Kingdom, the new generation of immigrants increasingly arrived from farther afield (Central Statistics Office 2003b: 71, Table 24; Hughes et al. 2007). From 2001 to 2007, almost 25,000 people a year immigrated to Ireland from outside the EU or USA, a significant number in a total population of only 4.3 million (Central Statistics Office 2007b).

Research suggests that most immigrants to Ireland experience some ethnic hostility, though no more so than in other European Union countries: McGinnity et al. (2006).[4] The hostility varies in intensity, ranging from avoidance of interaction to physical violence (see, e.g., Lentin and McVeigh 2002: 1; Kelleher and Kelleher 2004: 55–6; RAXEN Focal Point for Ireland 2003). One survey of 146 minority group members (many of whom were immigrants) found that 64 per cent had borne the brunt of racial insults, 45 per cent had

experienced racist jokes or snide remarks, 21 per cent had been excluded or snubbed, and 17 per cent had been physically attacked (Casey and O'Connell 2000 see also Boucher 1998). A study commissioned by Amnesty International (2001) surveyed 622 individuals, each a member of a minority group. While most of those interviewed were immigrants, about 20 per cent were native Irish (blacks or travellers) (the exact percentage is unclear since some 24 per cent of the sample did not divulge their ethnic origin). The study found that almost 80 per cent of the sample reported that they had experienced some form of hostile behaviour because of their race or ethnicity in Ireland. Comparable findings emerged from the most comprehensive study to date, a survey of 1,100 non-European Union recent adult immigrants (McGinnity et al. 2006).[5] The authors found that of those respondents who reported ill-treatment at least 1–2 times, 35 per cent had experienced, in the previous year, harassment on the street or on public transport and 15 per cent from their neighbours, 14 per cent had been refused entry to a night spot and 10 per cent had been the victim of violence, theft, or other serious crime. Since coming to Ireland, 15 per cent had been turned down for a job for which they were qualified, 13 per cent had been denied a promotion or made redundant, and 12 per cent had been denied the opportunity to buy or rent a house or flat.

These studies document the prevalence and distribution of hostility across minority groups. However, as in most work on ethnic conflict, the data remain incomplete in at least two important respects. They do not reveal how ethnic hostility varies across individual immigrants. And they do not disclose how individual immigrants respond to ethnic hostility. These are the issues the research interviews were designed to address.

The research

In-depth interviews were conducted with 54 immigrants to the Republic of Ireland. To assure some continuity across individuals, all persons interviewed were members of just two immigrant categories. To assure some variation, the categories were broadly defined: Nigerians and Muslims.[6]

No Irish agency records the addresses or phone numbers of all Muslim and Nigerian immigrants, and hence a random sample of either category is not possible to obtain. (Any such sample would, in any event, miss undocumented immigrants.) The interviewers used a combination of personal contacts, snowballing, and availability sampling to recruit the participants. The final sample consisted of 28 Muslims and 26 Nigerians.

The Muslim sample consisted of 15 men and 13 women, ranging in age from 19 to 52. Fourteen are Turks, nine are Arabs (from Algeria, Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, and Palestine), two are Pakistani (one of whom was born in South Africa), two are Kurds (Iraq, Turkey), and one is an Iraqi Turkmen. The

Nigerian sample consisted of 16 men and 10 women. They ranged in age from 18 to about 40 (the interviewer felt it was appropriate to ask the ages of only the youngest interviewees, the others she estimated).

The major point of contrast between the two samples was that the Muslims generally had been living in Ireland somewhat longer than the Nigerians. The typical Nigerian interviewed had been resident in Ireland for less than two years, and none had been resident for more than 7 years. Eighteen of the 28 Muslims had been in Ireland from three or more years, and one woman had been resident for 18 years. Other than that, the two populations did not differ appreciably.

The interviews were conducted in Dublin by two women, in their late 20s, immigrant graduates of an Irish university, and themselves members of the same immigrants category as the interviewee. The structured interview typically lasted from about 45 minutes to two hours. The interviewers invited members of the immigrant category to participate, assuring them that the interview would be confidential. To encourage participation no questions were asked about the participant's current or former immigration status and the interviews were not taped (hence all quotes in the text are not verbatim but reconstructed from the interviewers' notes). The questionnaire called for a few initial demographic questions before asking the participants to describe their most serious and their most recent conflict with (1) native Irish, (2) other immigrants, and (3) members of their own immigrant category. Details about what happened, who the parties were, how they responded, and the nature of the outcome were elicited by the interviewers when the participants omitted to mention them in their narratives.

Strikingly, only one collective conflict emerged from the interviews. Two men, one Algerian, the other Albanian, got into an argument at a government office. Each was backed up by men of the same ethnicity; blows were exchanged and blood spilled. Returning to the scene the following week, the two sides made peace through an intermediary with ties to each of them. In no other instance did ethnic alliances emerge to transform an individual conflict into a bilateral group conflict (although occasionally a small group of Irish confronted a lone immigrant).

The interviews have some limitations. One is that the fleeting nature of most of the conflicts made it possible to interview only the immigrant. This drawback is not peculiar to the present study: research on disputing commonly relies on information provided by one party alone (see, e.g., Baumgartner 1998; Phillips and Cooney 2005). It does mean, however, that instances of ethnic hostility that the immigrant did not define and treat as such were not recorded (e.g., native Irish avoiding certain types of interaction with the immigrant), while instances of hostility that the immigrant defined and treated as such but were, in fact, not, were recorded. To help minimize these problems of under- and over-inclusion, each of the participants was asked whether the

conflicts they reported were attributable to their ethnicity. Some allowed that it was not – that the incident could have occurred had they been native Irish. Cases in which the ethnic content appeared to be low or non-existent were dropped from consideration. Another limitation is that the lack of randomness in the sample precludes any guarantee that the research findings are fully representative of the experience of the two immigrant categories. At the same time, there is no reason to believe that the sample is wholly distorted either. The interviewers made an effort not to recruit special individuals with unique stories but ordinary people with common, though varied, experiences. It is reassuring that the patterns reported by the participants are highly compatible with those of earlier studies, such as that conducted by McGinnity et al. (2006).

Patterns of ethnic hostility

Ethnic conflict (i.e., hostility due to ethnicity) is unequally distributed across immigrants to Ireland. Particularly vulnerable are dark-skinned people. Previous research has consistently found that that black Africans experienced the highest rate of ethnic animosity (Boucher 1988: 56; Casey and O'Connell 2000: 29–30; Amnesty International 2001, McGinnity et al. 2006). McGinnity et al. (2006: 50–1) found, for example, that Nigerians were the target of considerably more discrimination across several domains of life than were Filipinos. The present study likewise discloses higher levels of hostility directed against Nigerian immigrants than their Muslim counterparts.

   Eleven of the 28 (39 per cent) Muslims interviewees experienced some form of openly hostile actions from strangers. By contrast, 24 of the 26 (92 per cent) Nigerians interviewed had been subject to some form of racial hostility at the hands of strangers. Moreover, the conflict experienced by the Nigerians was more unambiguously ethnic in nature. Where some of the Muslims had encountered behaviour that may or may not have been due to their status as foreigners (e.g., losing a job), the Nigerians consistently reported antagonistic conduct directed against them that was unequivocally ethnic in character. As in the Casey and O'Connell (2000) and Amnesty International (2001) studies, the most common form of hostility was verbal taunts and insults, especially name-calling ('nigger,' 'monkey,' 'sponger'), in public places. In one incident, for example, an Irish man observing four young Nigerians behaving exuberantly but peacefully on a Dublin street contemptuously uttered the term 'animals' within earshot of the young men and others. Events of this kind occurred at different times, but appear to be more common at night (with the consequence that some dark-skinned immigrants avoid going out after sunset altogether). Nor are these incidents necessarily isolated. 'Oh all the time' several people responded when asked whether they have ever been racially insulted. More physical forms of public enmity also occur. One man had

bottles thrown at him from a passing car. Another was spat upon. A woman reported having been sexually assaulted on the streets – men touching her breasts – on three separate occasions. Another woman was with her mother when a young man slapped her mother on the bottom before running off (see also Sinha 2002).

Nigerians may also be excluded from certain places (see McGinnity et al. 2006: 42). Approaching a pub or club, they are sometimes told, 'Not tonight, boys'. The other people observed at the time streaming into the premises, the bouncers explain, are 'members', or 'have already been inside' or 'are abiding by the dress code'. Whatever the reason given, it rings hollow to the Nigerians left standing at the door. To them, the real meaning of the bouncer's words is clear: No blacks allowed. One man received virtual confirmation of this when he was refused entry to a pub while his similarly-attired, non-member, Irish companion was waved through.

Nigerians report racial grievances from other settings as well. A woman stated that other children taunt her daughter at school about her skin colour. A second woman recalled renting a new flat but having been burgled before she spent a night there. An expectant mother, she became fearful of living in the flat and sought to get out of the lease. The landlord refused. When she persisted with her request he called her 'a nigger bitch' and told her 'Ireland does not want you and your bastard child.'

The greater vulnerability of Nigerians to hostility appears to be a function of their greater cultural distinctiveness or distance from the native Irish. Recall that cultural distance is the extent to which cultures differ in content (Black 1976: 73–4). Protestantism and Islam, for example, are more distant than Protestantism and Catholicism. Ethnicity, including race, is an indicator of cultural distance since people of the same ethnicity are culturally closer than people of different ethnicities. And some foreign ethnicities are closer to a native ethnicity than others. In a traditionally homogeneous nation such as Ireland, skin colour is a highly visible indicator of cultural distance: to be black is to be different.

Skin colour is not the only indicator of cultural distance. Even among light-skinned immigrants, displaying symbols of cultural distinctiveness is apt to arouse resentment. The wearing of *hijab* or a Muslim headscarf has the power to trigger hostility, regardless of the ethnicity of the wearer. A veiled Arab woman had a man hound her out of a phone box and then follow her down the street, hurling xenophobic abuse at her. A Turkish woman recalled teenagers jeering her and throwing stones at her. A third woman – an ethnic Pakistani, long-time resident in, and a citizen of, Ireland – was walking with her family beside the sea shortly after the 11 September, 2001 attacks on the USA when a group of teenagers shouted at them 'Go back to your own country'.[7]

Other indicators of cultural difference can equally evoke hostility. Speaking with a foreign accent prevented one young woman from getting a job and

another man from getting a flat. In both cases, Irish acquaintances of theirs who phoned shortly afterwards were told that the position and flat were still available. Merely speaking a foreign language can sometimes elicit animosity. For instance, a group of young Turkish men were chatting in their own tongue at a shopping center when an Irish man approached them and reprimanded them for not speaking English.[8]

While cultural distance helps to predict ethnic hostility, it is by no means the only relevant factor. Of crucial importance is the social status of the immigrant.

The paradox of social status

Social status, in pure sociology, refers to an actor's location in several dimensions of social space, including the vertical (economic), horizontal (relational), normative (moral), corporate (organizational), and symbolic (cultural) dimensions (Black 1976). It therefore includes an actors' social integration (i.e., participation in social life), functionality (i.e., contribution to group welfare), reputation for deviant behaviour, degree of organization (i.e., whether they are isolated individuals or groups), level of education, and the relative size of any minority groups to which they belong.

Black's theory of moralism proposes that status influences the amount of conflict that immigrants experience as well as how they respond to it. That need not be true. The status of individual immigrants might be irrelevant in conflicts with natives – perhaps the status of foreigner is all that matters. Or perhaps status is relevant to hostility in one direction only – in how immigrants respond to native Irish hostility but not in whether that hostility is expressed in the first place.

In fact, the interview data support the idea that status matters in both directions. Status affects the expression of hostility by native Irish and the response to it by immigrants. While the relationship between status and experiencing hostility is negative, the relationship between status and responding to hostility is positive.

Experiencing hostility

Higher status immigrants are generally exposed to less ethnic hostility than their lower status counterparts. Thus, wealthier, more educated individuals who have well-paid jobs in Ireland report fewer ethnic slurs than poor, less educated persons who have low-paid jobs or no jobs at all.[9] There appear to be several reasons for this. One is social insulation: immigrants have less access to the world of the privileged. Few immigrants have the wealth, education, and connections required to live in expensive suburbs, join exclusive

clubs, or acquire highly lucrative employment. Those who do gain some access to high status circles as peers are rare enough to be a novelty and to have little impact on the lives of the natives. By contrast, immigrants are able to penetrate the social worlds of lower status people more easily and in greater numbers. They are more likely to live in the same neighbourhoods, ride the same buses, patronize the same stores, socialize in the same pubs, and compete for the same jobs as lower status Irish people. Both the greater numbers of, and the amount of contact with, immigrants are conducive to conflict (as competition theory predicts) A second reason is theoretical: lower status immigrants attract more ethnic hostility because, as the theory of moralism predicts, lower status people attract more hostility of all kinds (Black 1993: 144–57). Whatever lower status people do – display eccentricities, commit crimes, pursue unconventional leisure activities – their actions are, all else the same, more likely to be defined and treated as deviant (see, e.g., Black 1976; Baumgartner 1984; Horwitz 1990).

The insulating advantages of high status are illustrated by the case of a Nigerian doctor. Although resident in Ireland for four years, he, unusually, could not recall any conflicts with Irish that had anything to do with his being an immigrant. He has 'a brilliant relationship' with his Irish colleagues and has many friends among them. Another Nigerian doctor stated that he had not had any problems at the hospital where he works. The staff treats him with respect. Not so fortunate, however, are several Nigerian doctors who have been unable to find employment in their profession and have had to take less prestigious jobs. They have had experiences common to those of their less educated compatriots. One doctor, for instance, works as a security officer as he studies to take his Irish medical exams. He has been called a 'nigger', told to go back to his own country, and has had objects thrown at him by young people as he walked on the street. A female physician expressed regret at having left her job at a university teaching hospital in Nigeria to come to Ireland. She has been unable to find work and has had to endure some racial taunting in public places.

Social status, including the distribution of information about it, may vary from one setting to another. A person who enjoys elevated standing in one context might not in another if, for example, others have no information about his or her status (see Black 1989: 64–7). Thus, one of the Nigerian doctors who had experienced no problems at work had encountered racial hostility in public spaces. But where the immigrant's status is apparent, there appears to be less likelihood of hostility. A middle-aged Nigerian man who owns his own store said that he had never been racially denigrated or insulted. A Turkish man who works as an assistant financial controller also reported no problems in Ireland. His boss addresses him as 'you bloody Turk', but he treats it as a joke. He remarked, 'Irish people are so kind and friendly when you need any help'.

The advantages of social status show up clearly in immigrants' dealing with police. Interviewees expressed contrasting opinions about the Irish police, the Garda Síochána. A few esteem them. A Turkish man stated, 'I think the Gardaí are the best people in Ireland.' However, a greater number think the police are biased against immigrants (a pattern also noted by the Amnesty Report 2001: 30–7).[10] For instance, a young Turkish woman had her wallet stolen on a main Dublin street. When she complained to the police, the officer told her to go home to her own country if she did not want things like this to happen to her.

The Turkish man who is so positive about the police is a restaurant manager who has learned that he can rely on them if trouble erupts. Similarly, another Turkish man interviewed drives buses in Dublin. Occasionally he has passengers – typically young men – who 'tell me that as I am not Irish they do not have to pay me', but he simply summons the police who invariably take his side. His status as an employee of a large and highly visible corporate entity overwhelms his status as an ethnic outsider. By contrast, the young Turkish woman who had been robbed comes from a poor family and works in Ireland in a fast food restaurant.

Responding to hostility

The targets of ethnic hostility may respond in a variety of ways, ranging in assertiveness from toleration (doing nothing) to physical violence. An intermediate response – avoidance (the curtailment or elimination of interaction) – has been a particularly common response to oppression by ethnic groups throughout human history (Black 1998: xvii). The present data reveal significant variation among the members of the same ethnic groups or categories. In responding to racial and ethnic ill treatment, high status immigrants are generally more assertive. Low status immigrants typically do little or nothing in the face of ethnic hostility – they simply tolerate it or avoid their tormenter. However hurt or frustrated or angry they feel, they rarely confront their adversary, especially when alone. For example, an Egyptian woman who, as part of a job-training programme, was promised a job at the reception desk by her hotel manager was quickly assigned to the stocktaking department after she turned up the first day wearing a headscarf. Although disappointed and privately irate, she accepted the reassignment without complaint. A Nigerian man who was asked, 'Nigger, what are you doing in this pub? It's only for the Irish' did not respond but simply finished his drink and left.

Immigrants of higher social standing are more likely to voice their complaint directly to their adversary. An illustrative case involved an ethnic Pakistani immigrant, one half of a dual professional couple who have long been resident in Ireland and are Irish citizens. She was driving her sons to soccer practice when she almost ran a man down after he suddenly stepped out in front of her

car. The man treated her as being at fault and followed her to the soccer club where he angrily scolded her. But instead of ignoring the abuse or walking away, as most immigrants seem to do, she stood up to him:

> I asked him why he was picking on me. Was it because of my scarf or was it my skin colour or was he just being racist? He told me that people like me should not drive. I told him that his being racist was the only reason he was picking on me.

The same woman also experienced some trouble in her neighbourhood when one of her neighbour's children kicked her son while playing soccer, bruising his ankle and shoulder. She and her spouse went to the neighbours to complain. The neighbours responded abusively and loudly told them, several times, they should go back to their own country. The woman reported that she and her husband quietly but forcefully warned the neighbours that there would be trouble if there were any repetition of the incident. (There was none.)

The assertiveness of those in high status positions is also evident in the case of a Nigerian doctor who was concerned that an insurance company was processing a claim too slowly. He became persistent, demanding that they put more effort into it. He was surprised to overhear a woman in the background saying that he had phoned yesterday and had been rude. He did not think he had been rude, just tenacious. (But perhaps tenaciousness is more apt to be treated as a breach of etiquette when it comes from an immigrant, even a high status one.) A second Nigerian doctor was also forceful in responding to the Irish driver of a van he and others had rented for an occasion: when the driver berated the immigrant for criticizing his fast driving the immigrant 'gave it back to him in equal dose', telling the driver that he was a professional person and should be treated with respect.

Social status often varies over time, generally increasing over the life course and, for immigrants, with the amount of time spent in their adopted country: the longer they are there, the more socially integrated they are – and the more assertive they are in responding to ethnic insults. For instance, a young woman who enrolled in a college course shortly after she arrived in Ireland had to stand in front of a camera and make a short autobiographical video to be sent out to possible employers. She introduced herself by saying she was from Holland. The teacher immediately interrupted, telling her that no employer would believe she was Dutch because she was wearing 'that thing'– pointing to her headscarf. The teacher instructed her to say she was from Lebanon (where her parents had lived for many years after emigrating from their native Palestine), even though she had been born and raised in The Netherlands and had never been to Lebanon. Reflecting back, the woman said she complied because 'I was quite new in Ireland at the time'. She was adamant that if the same were to happen again, she would insist on the truth.

There are exceptions, cases where lower status immigrants voice their complaints directly. In one incident, for instance, an Algerian working in a factory who, along with six others, came back a few minutes late from a break was the only one to be reprimanded by the supervisor. The man responded heatedly, loudly accusing the supervisor of picking on him. Perhaps more details about this case would reveal additional status factors that might explain his behaviour (e.g., a particularly good work record) as most instances of immigrant forcefulness turn out to have such features. Thus, although immigrants as a whole are of lower social status than native Irish as a whole, when individual immigrants outrank their individual native Irish adversaries they are less tolerant toward them. Several immigrants reported stopping and confronting young people – teenagers or pre-teenagers – who had abused or insulted them, though never adults. In one case a Turkish man was working on a building site. He was assigned a 16-year old Irish boy as an assistant. The assistant liked to joke around and banter, and one day started to poke fun at the man's accent. After tolerating the teasing for some time, the man asked him to stop, but the assistant persisted, making fun of the way the man pronounced certain words. Eventually the man could take no more and hit the assistant, who promptly ceased his mockery. The man's unusually forceful action seems closely linked to the inversion of the normal immigrant-Irish status hierarchy by the relative ages of the adversaries and the fact that he, the immigrant, was the occupational superior.

Conclusion

Aware of the internal diversity and variable boundedness of ethnic categories, sociologists increasingly look beyond the group in conducting ethnic studies. Thus, Brubaker argues that 'ethnic conflict . . . need not, and should not, be understood as conflict *between ethnic groups*' (Brubaker 2002: 166; emphasis in original). Although he goes further than most, Brubaker's escape from the intellectual pull of the ethnic group remains partial. He continues to conceive of ethnic conflict as collective in nature, only that the collectivities are organizations claiming to represent the ethnic category, rather than the ethnic category collectively mobilized. This is understandable given the dearth of studies of micro ethnic conflict. Yet much ethnic conflict is conducted at the individual level and never involves groups of any significant size or degree of organization at all. The data from Ireland presented in this paper provide the first systematic illustration of this pattern.

Ireland's participation in the 1990s in the global system of migration not as a point of departure but as a point of arrival from many destinations has greatly diversified its population. Irish scholars report that immigrants to the country experience a considerable amount of ethnic hostility, primarily from

the native born population. The present research both confirms and qualifies that finding. Interviews with Muslim and Nigerian immigrants reveal many instances of ethnic hostility. Some occur in public places, perpetrated by strangers; some take place in work settings and neighbourhoods; and some are found in interaction with police. Physical violence is not unknown, but name-calling, taunting, and other insults are reported more often and by more immigrants. At the same time, ethnic conflict is neither constant nor universal. Some individuals are considerably more vulnerable to ethnic antagonism than others. And groups are rarely involved.

The dominant sociological theories of ethnic conflict do not explain the research patterns. True, competition theory predicts that the propitious economic conditions Ireland enjoyed during the 1990s and first half of the 2000s should result in relatively little collective conflict. But ethnic groups are not monolithic, and neither competition nor any other theory is fully equipped to explain variation in ethnic conflict at the micro level. Only Donald Black's work on conflict management, based on his paradigm of pure sociology, systematically addresses how conflict varies across individual cases. While Black's ideas have not previously been applied to hostility directed against immigrants, his theory of moralism – which predicts greater antagonism with greater social distance and status superiority – turns out to successfully explain the Irish data. The theory reveals order beneath the apparent chaos of ethnic hostility, disclosing clear underlying patterns, a few of which have been described in the present paper.

One such pattern is that cultural distance increases ethnic conflict. That need not be. People could be most hostile to those who differ from them only slightly and more tolerant toward those who clearly belong to different cultures. Or after a certain point people could be equally hostile to all foreigners. Instead, people's hostility, all else the same, increases with how foreign their adversary is. Thus, dark-skinned people and those who wear the Muslim headscarf regardless of ethnic origin are especially vulnerable to hostile treatment at the hands of the Irish, a predominately white-skinned, English-speaking, Christian people. Some vulnerability also attaches to those who exhibit foreign culture in public places, such as speaking a language other than English.

The cultural distance pattern readily lends itself to further investigation. It implies, for example, that in Ireland members of a white, Catholic, European immigrant category, such as Poles, should, on average, experience less ethnic hostility than a brown-skinned, predominately Muslim, Asian group, such as Indonesians. However, the effects of cultural distance can be moderated by additional factors such as social status. The poor, unemployed, and those who work in menial jobs are especially vulnerable to attracting hostility on account of their ethnicity. By contrast, doctors, accountants and business owners have a greater, though still imperfect, immunity to the sting of ethnic conflict.

Moreover, when they do experience ethnic enmity, higher status immigrants respond more assertively, a pattern also noted for New Jersey by Baumgartner (1998: 173–4). Hence, the paradox of social status: those who experience the least hostility complain most about it, while those who suffer the greatest burden of ethnic antagonism are the least forceful in addressing it.

There does not appear to be anything particularly unique about these Irish patterns. Hence, the cultural distance and status findings reported in this paper are likely to be of broader significance, providing a starting point for the investigation of ethnic conflict in other countries, not just in Europe but elsewhere in the world. However, they do not exhaust all those found in reality. Many others await elucidation, among them the issue of escalation – the collectivization of ethnic conflict.[11] While most ethnic conflicts do not involve the ethnic group as such, some undoubtedly do. A line of pure sociology theory and research addresses partisanship, the conditions under which third parties participate in the conflicts of others and the likely outcome of those conflicts (Black 1993: 125–43; Cooney 1998; Phillips and Cooney 2005). One strand in that line examines how and when micro conflicts develop into macro conflicts, such as rioting, lynching, vigilantism, terrorism, and genocide (Senechal de la Roche 2001; Campbell 2006). Future work could profitably elaborate that strand of the theory in order to improve understanding of the transformation of immigrant conflict from the micro level discussed in this paper to the macro level addressed by most studies of ethnic conflict.

Finally, the status paradox evident in the research data is unlikely to be limited to immigrant conflict. Pure sociology predicts that the paradox is a general principle of human conflict and therefore ought to be found, all else constant, across all social settings (Black 1976, 1993). In universities, for example, undergraduates may well have more grievances than post-graduate students against faculty, yet surely voice those grievances less often and less forcefully. In workplaces, factory floor workers are likely to have more complaints against managers than foremen do, but are probably slower to complain, at least without group support. In cities and suburbs, middle-class neighbourhoods may experience less noise and nuisance from teenagers and night-time revelers than working-class neighbourhoods, but are usually quicker to seek official help eliminating it. Whether less assertive behaviour contributes to the low standing of more oppressed groups remains to be established. Still, there are reasons to believe that the status paradox evident in Irish immigrant conflicts is of considerably broader sociological significance. Beyond that, it is evident that that pure sociology not only has much to offer the study of ethnic conflict but represents a powerful new way of imagining and explaining social life.

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Notes

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2. Black's sociological concept of social distance is quite different from the psychological concept of social distance of Bogardus (1925a; 1925b) (i.e., the understanding and feelings that persons experience toward each other) which has been employed in several analyses of prejudice in Ireland, most notably in MacGréil (1978, 1996)

3. The social impacts of the Celtic Tiger are discussed in Nolan, O'Connell and Whelan (2000) and Fahey, Russell and Whelan (2007).

4. In June 2004 the Irish electorate overwhelmingly approved an amendment to the Constitution eliminating the right to citizenship of children born in Ireland who do not have at least one parent who is an Irish citizen or is entitled to Irish citizenship (see, e.g., Lentin 2007).

5. 'Recent' means that the 'vast majority . . . came to Ireland in the last 5 years' (McGinnity et al. 2006: 64).

6. Since the two categories overlap – a substantial number of Nigerians are Muslim – there was the potential for examining the effects of multiple dimensions of difference, although in fact no such instances emerged from the interviews.

7. Young people appear to be less publicly tolerant of the headscarf than their elders. This may be due in part to the greater familiarity of their elders with women wearing head covering for religious reasons. Nuns in religious costume – including a headdress – were extremely common when most native-born middle aged and elderly people were growing up, but by the beginning of the century they had virtually disappeared and are now increasingly exotic to most young people.

8. A distinct language and lifestyle helps to explain the oft-noted hostility toward Irish travellers as well (see, e.g., Ní Shuinéar 2002).

9. McGinnity et al. (2006) report that more educated immigrants report higher levels of discrimination, but they do state whether such respondents were currently occupying high status positions.

10. For England, see Bowling and Phillips (2002: 128–67).

11. Another relevant variable (not recorded in the present study) is immigrant legal status (asylum seekers versus work-permit holders versus undocumented immigrants). Since this factor affects an individual's social status it should, on the present account, influence the amount of hostility he or she experiences, a prediction partially confirmed by McGinnity et al. (2006) who found greater discrimination against asylum seekers than work-permit holders.

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