

Dehumanization amidst Massacres:

An Examination of Dinka-Nuer Intergroup Attitudes in South Sudan*

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Abstract

Previous research on dehumanization has been conducted primarily in Western contexts, and outside of periods of ongoing and highly violent conflict. The present study, in contrast, examines grassroots-level dehumanization between South Sudan's two largest ethnic groups – Dinka and Nuer – during an episode of extreme inter-ethnic violence. Using a mixed-methods approach we study levels of dehumanization and how these attitudes are related to and structured around ongoing and/or very recent extreme violence. While the results demonstrated mechanistic dehumanization by the Dinka participants vis-à-vis the Nuer, no similar dehumanization was found among the Nuer: although there were clear signs of intergroup bias. Our focus groups demonstrated that dehumanization attitudes in South Sudan are to a great degree structured around recent event of mass violence. In fact, practically all dehumanizing attitudes were related to these recent events and not to events previous, or to historicized stereotypes. The core contribution of this article is three-fold. First, we deepen understanding of dehumanization by examining a non-Western case with ongoing, highly violent, conflict. Second, we further knowledge about the psychological effects of events of mass violence. Third, we provide new insights to the situation in South Sudan by our analysis of inter-group perceptions.

Keywords

Dehumanization, inter-ethnic relations, attitudes, emotions, South Sudan

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Introduction

To totally or partially deny others human attributes, particularly members of other groups, is a recurring theme throughout history. This phenomenon, known as dehumanization, is closely linked to prejudice and discrimination toward members of out-groups (Schwarz & Struch, 1989). Perceiving people as less human can justify negative behaviors and acts of violence (Opatow, 1990). Consequently, dehumanization has often been associated with violent episodes (Kelman, 1976; Staub, 1989).

The occurrence of conflict affects psychological processes, such as inter-group threat perceptions and social cohesion, regardless of whether people have had direct experiences of violence or not (Haskuka, Sunar, & Alp, 2008). Consequently, negative inter-group perceptions are often present at most levels of society in settings of protracted conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007). These perceptions in turn affect feelings of individual or collective security. Although physical violence may subside after a peace agreement or a reconciliation process, underlying dehumanizing perceptions tend to linger (Tam *et al.*, 2007).

Despite the importance of countering dehumanization, previous research is lacking in notable respects. Chief are that processes of dehumanization are practically always studied in Western contexts (cf., Jahoda, 1999; Haslam, 2006), entailing that we know little about cross-cultural validity. Additionally, studies are often conducted either long after violence has abated, or in contexts of low-level conflict (cf., Čehajić, Brown, & González, 2009). We thus have little understanding of how ongoing and extreme levels of violence affect dehumanization, and how events of mass violence inform and structure such negative perceptions.

The present study conducted a first-cut examination of dehumanization between Dinka and Nuer in South Sudan: a non-Western context with considerable levels of violence. Using both quantitative surveys and focus group interviews conducted shortly after a massive outburst of violence in December 2013, we approach two interlinked research questions: (1) what levels

of dehumanization exist between the Dinka and Nuer communities, and (2) how did the violent events of December 2013 structure and inform the expression of inter-group dehumanization? We expect – seeing to the high levels of violence present – our respondents to exhibit heightened levels of inter-group dehumanization compared to previous findings. Our mixed-methods design allows us to go beyond the quantified measurements and investigate how dehumanizing attitudes are structured in these types of conflict. We focus specifically on how high-profile events (the massacres of December 2013) come to serve as focal points or defining sources of negative inter-group attitudes.

Theory

To study the prevalence of dehumanization, and how events of mass violence structure such processes, we apply Haslam's dual model of dehumanization (2006). This model argues that dehumanization is visible in two main forms: animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization (Haslam, 2006). Animalistic dehumanization entails individuals dehumanizing out-group members by associating them with animals. Out-group members can be seen as lacking, for instance, refinement, rationality, or self-control as compared: attributes that yield human uniqueness vis-à-vis animals. If mechanistic dehumanization is present out-group members are instead likened to automatons or robots by how they lack warmth or individuality. Mechanistic dehumanization entails denying someone traits associated with *human nature* – that involve emotionality and inter-personal warmth – while animalistic dehumanization entails denying others traits that are *uniquely human* – representing higher cognition, moral sensibility, and sophistication (Loughnan & Haslam, 2007). No matter if individuals use the animalistic or the mechanistic route to dehumanization, the outcome is to view out-group members as less human: dehumanized.

Dehumanization can take on other forms than the attribution of behavioral/personality

traits as in Haslam's approach (Haslam 2006; Loughnan & Haslam 2007). The theory of infra-humanization (see, for instance, Leyens *et al.*, 2001) focuses on the attribution to groups of primary and secondary emotions. This approach can be subsumed under Haslam's dual model, as primary and secondary emotional attribution also relate to denying the out-group human essence, which can be seen as a subtle version of animalistic dehumanization (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Primary emotions are considered universal and shared with other animals (e.g. pain or caring) and secondary emotions are seen as uniquely human emotions (hope or guilt), without which someone is considered less uniquely human and more animalistic. Regardless of the valence of emotions, participants who infrahumanize attribute more secondary emotions to the in-group while more or less equally attributing primary emotions to both groups, thus reserving human essence for their own (Leyens *et al.*, 2001). We study the attribution of both behavioral traits and primary and secondary emotions, in order to paint a full picture of dehumanization in South Sudan.

Theorists of dehumanization have shown that processes of denying humanness occur even if group antagonisms are non-violent, as evident from studies in Belgium and Spain (Leyens *et al.*, 2007). Much literature has, however, studied how dehumanization occurs before and during mass violence (Chalk & Jonassohn, 1990; Kelman, 1976), demonstrating how these processes feed into violence. It is argued that group conflict leads to dehumanization becoming more explicit and more likely to take manifest form (Haslam, 2006; Loughnan & Haslam, 2007). Few studies have, however, examined directly how episodes of mass violence may affect dehumanization attitudes, and how such events serve to structure narratives of dehumanization.

Previous theory and findings give cause to assume that recent and ongoing episodes of extreme violence should cause significant and clear-cut differences being made between groups in terms of ascribed humanness (Bar-Tal, 2000; Kelman, 1976; Varvin, 2005). In relation to our first research question we subsequently expect to find high levels of dehumanization

between Dinka and Nuer. Concerning the second research question, we investigate how specific episodes of mass violence shape the structure of dehumanization attitudes in relation to Haslam's dual model (2006). In Haslam's overview of the cognitive mechanisms of animalistic vis-à-vis mechanistic dehumanization it is proposed that varying social and interactional contexts give rise to different mechanisms or pathways of dehumanization. We thus examine levels of dehumanization in a context with extreme violence to study the pathways through which such events relate to dehumanization.

The Research Context: The South Sudanese Civil War

To understand inter-ethnic attitudes between Dinka and Nuer in South Sudan one must grasp the context of our study (summer of 2014). Since December 2013 South Sudan has been shattered by a civil war that has killed between 50-100 000 people (UNOCHA, 2016). In addition, over 4 million South Sudanese – about a third of the population – have fled their homes (UNHCR 2017).

The war in South Sudan is primarily a result of a crisis of governance where elites compete for political power (Brosché & Höglund, 2016). One key aspect of this competition is the rivalry between South Sudan's two largest ethnic groups –Dinka and Nuer – visible in how the leader of the rebel organization SPLM/A-IO, Riek Machar, is Nuer and the incumbent president Salva Kiir is Dinka. The two communities have been rivals for decades, occasionally engaging in intense violence. Dinka-Nuer relations are, however, not always characterized by conflict: between 2005 (the end of the South's war with Sudan) and the latest war relations between the groups were relatively peaceful (Brosché, 2014).

The current war began when Dinka presidential guards loyal to incumbent president Salva Kiir disarmed Nuer guards associated with former Vice-President Riek Machar. The government claimed that this was done in response to a coup attempt by Machar, but

independent analyses deem these accusations false. In the days that followed, of Nuer civilians were killed by government soldiers in Juba. In one incident on 16 December 2013, between 200 and 300 men were massacred in the Gudele neighborhood (HRW, 2016). This sparked outrage in the Nuer community, and became a core motivation for Nuer in joining opposition forces. The Juba Massacre constitutes a significant trauma for the Nuer community and many felt targeted by genocidal tactics (Young, 2016). The events in Juba led to numerous revenge attacks where Dinka were targeted. As attacks and retribution escalated, a UN commission warned in December 2016 that ethnic cleansing was underway and that without an international intervention South Sudan may descend into genocide (Reliefweb, 2016).

Historical events and historicized stereotypes also feed into hatred and suspicion. To exemplify, the Bor Massacre of 1991 constitutes an important event for understanding Dinka hatred against the Nuer and Riek Machar. In this incident, more than 2000 Dinka were massacred in an attack ordered by Machar (ICG, 2009). The aversion between the groups in terms of language and history is articulately summarized by Young:

The Nuer looked down on the Dinka and their military skills, while the Dinka considered themselves to be culturally superior and ‘men of men’ (Pritchard, 1940, quoted in Adeba, 2015). In the Nuer language the Dinka are called *jeing*, which can be translated as ‘slave’, and is due to their claimed submission to various powers and their employment by the Nuer as farm labourers.” (Young 2016:21).

Given the historical inter-group grievances between Dinka and Nuer, as well as the timing of our study – carried out during intense conflict, and proximate to atrocities in Juba – we expect our respondents to exhibit high levels of inter-group dehumanization. We also anticipate that recent events in South Sudan will be important when respondents explain their attitudes towards the out-group as these events constituted a trauma for both groups.

Method

Samples

Structured interviews were conducted with 25 Dinka and 22 Nuer (total N=47), constituting our quantitative sample. Respondents were recruited using snowball sampling in Area 107, Juba. The sample consisted of only male respondents which were predominantly Christian (96%), and in the age range 22-71 (Dinka M= 31.8, SD=13, Nuer M=33.4, SD=8.1). A large part of the sample reported having directly experienced violence, as witnesses or victims, in the past six months (Dinka 72%, Nuer 77%) as well as being recently relocated due to violence (Dinka 56%, Nuer, 43%). The respondents were mainly university students, small business owners, and farmers. Eight of the Nuer survey respondents and four of the Nuer focus group participants were Area 107-residents that were residing in the UNMISS refugee camp at the time of study. The remainder were residing in Area 107 at the time of the study. No inducements beyond refreshments were provided to the participants.

The qualitative sample used for focus groups was composed of 18 residents of Area 107, identified via snowball sampling. Four focus groups (2 Dinka, 2 Nuer) were conducted, consisting of between three to five people each. The majority of the sample reported having experienced violence directly (Dinka 67%, Nuer 76%) while fewer than in the quantitative sample had been relocated (Dinka 38%, Nuer, 50%).

Our samples are not representative of the Dinka and Nuer communities. Accessing such samples was impossible due to the ongoing conflict. Instead, our two samples are convenience samples, used as a first step in examining our research questions. Area 107 in Juba was deemed a suitable location for our study, since this was an area of fierce fighting in December 2013, experiencing much violence against civilians.

Instruments

Inter-group dehumanization: To measure dehumanization our point of departure is the dual model presented by Haslam (2006) and further operationalized by Loughnan and Haslam (2007). Respondents were presented with a questionnaire with 19 attributes and 12 emotions assessing various types of humanness that they were to attribute to both their in-group and their respective out-group (see Table 1).¹ This instrument was based on how a set of previous studies measured attributes and emotions: attributes are derived from Loughnan and Haslam's research (2007) on mechanistic and animalistic dehumanization, while instruments for emotions are from Leyens *et al.* (2001) and Paladino *et al.* (2002). The respondents were asked to assign all the attributes and emotions to each group in turn, and only to one group. As visible in Table 1, the emotions are divided into primary emotions, or emotions that are more instinct-like and that humans share with animals and; secondary emotions, or emotions that are considered uniquely human as they are associated with higher cognition. The emotions were mainly used in order to account for inhumanization, but also to shed additional light on inter-group perceptions and potential bias.

Animalistic dehumanization, or the denial of *uniquely human traits*, will be visible in if *fewer* animalistic characteristics are attributed to the out-group compared to the in-group. This indicates a perception of the out-group as lacking, for instance, in refinement and higher cognition. Likewise, mechanistic dehumanization, or the denial of *human nature traits*, will be demonstrated if *fewer* mechanistic characteristics are attributed to the out-group compared to the in-group. This indicates a perception of, for instance, a lack of emotionality and individual agency. Our method of scoring attributions was chosen since a pilot study revealed that Likert scales (as used in Bain *et al.*, 2012) were confusing to the respondents and resulted in attribution

¹ To ensure that respondents understood the instruments correctly we conducted discussions with all respondents on the meaning of the terms. This piloting approach meant that we excluded one animalistic attribute, 'curious', as it was not clearly understood.

error. The challenging research context also ruled out the use of methods such as Implicit Association Tests (used, for instance, in Paladino *et al.*, 2002).

In terms of scale reliability Cronbach’s alpha for trait attributions were, however, poor. Animalistic attributes and mechanistic attributes had alphas of only .26 and .48, respectively. This entails that, in this non-Western context, the instruments are inconsistent and may thus not be measuring the proposed theoretical concepts, and that results should be interpreted with care. We discuss these issues in more detail in our Discussion-section.

Table 1: Dehumanization attributes and emotions

Attributes		Emotions	
Animalistic	Mechanistic	Primary Emotions	Secondary Emotions
Friendly	Broadminded	Anger	Humiliation
Fun-loving	Humble	Fear	Guilt
Sociable	Organized	Pain	Hope
Trusting	Polite	Optimism	Shame
Aggressive	Thorough	Excitement	Love
Distractible	Cold	Caring	Calmness
Impatient	Conservative		
Jealous	Hard-hearted		
Nervous	Rude		
	Shallow		

Structure of inter-group dehumanization: To study the reasoning behind and expressions of inter-group dehumanization we applied a different protocol in our focus groups. Participants were here presented with the same 12 emotions assessing various types of humanness used for the quantitative study (see Table 1). However, respondents were not only asked to attribute each item collectively to one side, but also asked to motivate their choices. The emotions were thus

primarily used as discussion points in order to extract in-depth information concerning the construction of dehumanizing attitudes. This was done to collect rich data on the processes behind dehumanization, something quantitative analysis struggle to account for (Sirsi, Ward, & Reingen, 1996).

Data Collection

Structured interviews was selected as the method for quantitative data collection primarily as it allows for structured and uniform data collection that facilitates explanation and clarification of key terms. Self-completion questionnaires were used, and the researcher read the questions aloud and participants individually noted answers. The structured schedule of the interviews ensured participant comprehension of questions and terminology. Structure was essential since the research relied on interpreters to ensure validity. Moreover, since our study applied tools that had never before been used in South Sudan this approach ensured some measure of reliability. Since some of the participants are likely to have different understandings of words such as ‘hard-hearted’ or ‘calmness’, a pre-written oral explanation was also provided.

In the focus groups we presented participants with the 12 emotions outlined in Table 1. First, participants were asked to attribute these emotions to Dinka and Nuer based on their general perception of the two groups. Second, the participants engaged in group discussions and justified their attributions. The moderator and other participants had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions aimed at generating insight into the justifications and reasoning behind dehumanization. Third, in the cases where an emotion was attributed to both groups, or where disagreement existed, participants were encouraged to engage in further discussion to decide which of the groups the emotion was most strongly associated with.

Before, during, and after data collection, several steps were taken to avoid issues regarding translation and interpretation. First, local bi- or multi-lingual translators were

employed to ensure uniform interpretation of key terminology. Second, the researchers were continuously in dialogue with the interpreters to ensure correct interpretations of responses. Third, we selected qualitative analytical techniques that were not sensitive to verbatim interpretations of responses.

Data Analysis Procedures

Three-way repeated measures ANOVAs: To analyze inter-group perceptions and the degree of humanness attributed to the in-group *vis-a-vis* the out-group, three-way repeated measures ANOVAs were carried out on the quantitative data. This method enabled analysis of the discrepancies between intra- and inter-group perceptions. In these ANOVAs we also study interactions with valence, or attributions of positive/negative characteristics. Accounting for valence when studying attributions is important as it provides insights into how the participants perceive these characteristics in terms of positive/negative connotations, and how they are attributed to different groups along this dimension.

Thematic analysis: Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns in the justifications of dehumanization in the qualitative data. This method allows for an analysis of the data in direct relation to the research question, identifying prevalent themes in the participants' responses (Braun & Clark, 2006). We apply what Braun and Clark (2006) term semantic thematic analysis, as our research question on how the December 2013 events may structure dehumanizing attitudes is descriptive and comes without explicit theoretical assumptions about thematic contents beyond the primacy of the December violence. This style of thematic analysis allows us to focus on identifying broader patterns in the focus group data, such as references to events, politicians, or other ethnic groups, rather than trying to extract discursive meaning from people speaking in a non-native tongue. Thus, we look for semantically shared elements of the

construction of inter-group dehumanization and the ties between these attitudes and the violence of December 2013.

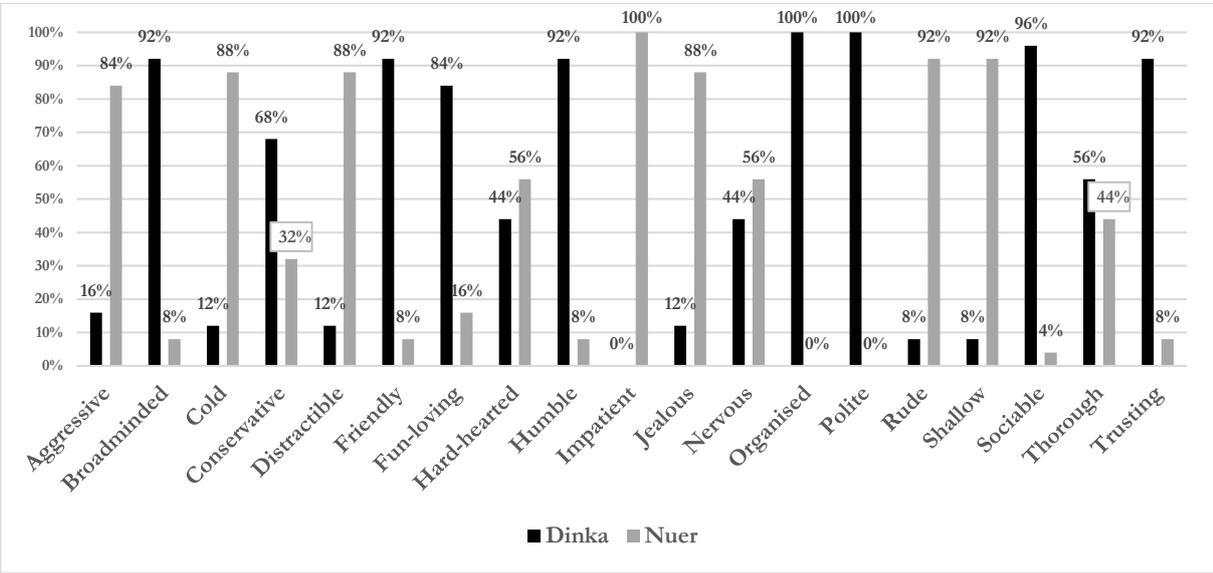
Quantitative Results

Dinka Sample

Attributes

Results in the Dinka sample showed that negative attributes, such as “rude”, “shallow”, and “aggressive” were mainly given to the out-group, while more positive ones such as “organized”, “polite” and “broadminded” were given to the in-group (see Figure 1, where black indicates characteristics attributed to the in-group and grey those given to the out-group). These results indicate that out-group derogation, if not dehumanization, is evident within the sample.

Figure 1: Summary of attribution of characteristics by the Dinka sample



Three-way repeated measures analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted with tribe, valence, and type of characteristic as between- and within-subject factors. As expected, these analyses showed that there were significant differences in attributions in terms of tribe (1,

15.12=13.72, $p < .001$), valence*tribe (1, 305.04=276.69, $p < .001$), tribe*mechanistic/animalistic (1, 26.62=24.17, $p < .001$), and tribe*valence*mechanistic/animalistic (1, 13.00=11.8, $p < .001$). Results thus demonstrate that significantly more characteristics were attributed to the in-group; significantly more positive characteristics were attributed to the in-group; significantly more mechanistic characteristics were attributed to the in-group; and significantly more positive mechanistic attributes were attributed to the in-group. These results were further validated through paired T-tests, showing that the Dinka attributed significantly more mechanistic characteristics to the in-group overall ($t=3.01$), thereby depriving the Nuer of the same characteristics. Moreover, additional paired T-tests showed that Dinka also attributed a significantly higher number of both positive animalistic ($t=14.4$) and positive mechanistic ($t=16.45$) characteristics to the in-group compared to the out-group, as well as significantly more negative animalistic ($t=8.79$) and negative mechanistic ($t=5.10$) traits.

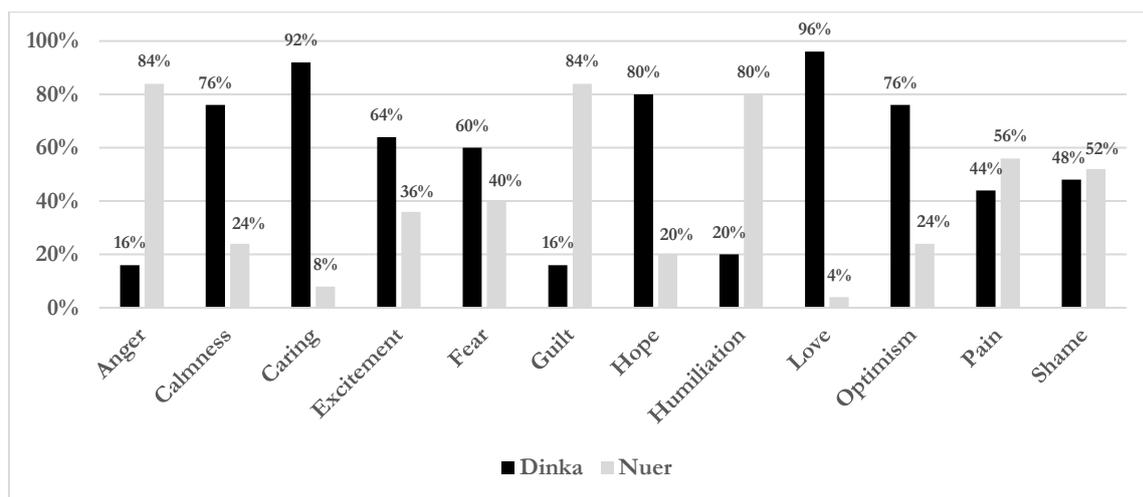
While the attribution is complex, two points can be made. First, no conventional animalistic dehumanization of the Nuer was present, as no significant differences were found in patterns of attribution. Thus, the Dinka do not, on average, attribute fewer or more animalistic attributes to the out-group. Second, the Dinka sample demonstrated significant differences in the mechanistic characteristics given to the in- and out-groups, entailing the presence of mechanistic dehumanization.

Emotions

Three-way repeated measures ANOVAs were again carried out also for emotion attribution, with tribe, valence, and primary/secondary nature as between- and within- subject factors. For the Dinka sample, these showed significant differences in terms of tribe (1, 11.05=17.59, $p < .001$), valence (1, 2.65=4.21, $p < .042$), primary/secondary type of emotion (1, 3.13=4.98, p

<.027), primary/secondary type of emotion*valence (1, 83.20=132.5, $p <.001$), valence*primary/secondary type of emotion (1, 3.13=4.98, $p <.027$), and tribe*valence*primary/secondary type of emotion (1, 3.64=5.81, $p <.017$). Regarding significant results, more emotions were attributed to the in-group; more positive emotions were attributed to one of the groups overall; more primary emotions were attributed to one of the groups overall; more positive emotions were attributed to the in-group; and, there is a tendency for primary and secondary emotions to be differentially distributed in terms of valence. The overall attribution made by the Dinka sample is visible in Figure 2.

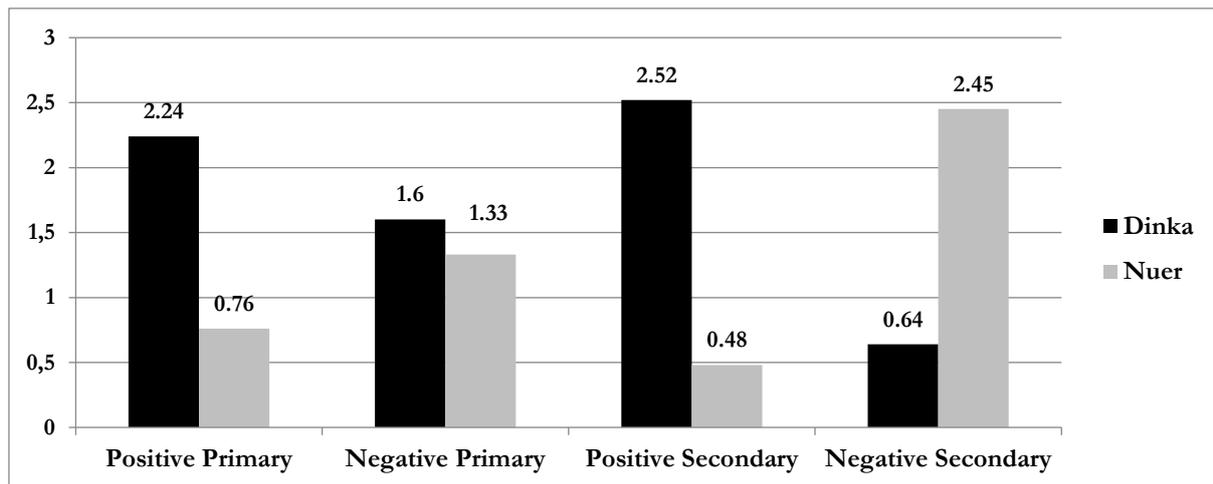
Figure 2: Summary of attribution of emotions in Dinka sample



The only non-significant interaction was the tribe*primary/secondary type of emotion, which indicates infrahumanization (1, 0.00=0.00, $p <0.93$). This was expected, as infrahumanization is a subtle expression of dehumanization often present in contexts where extreme violence is absent. In other words, significantly more primary/secondary emotions were not attributed to the in-group or the out-group. However, as visible in Figure 3, aside from negative secondary emotions, more emotions were attributed to the in-group in general. This is especially the case for positive emotions. This indicates a denial of primary as well as secondary emotions to the out-group. Thus, while this does not constitute conventional infrahumanization,

it still demonstrates an out-group bias in that the Dinka reserve positive secondary emotions, negative primary emotions, and positive primary emotions to their in-group while depriving the out-group of the same.

Figure 3: Mean attribution of emotions in Dinka sample by valence and level of humanness

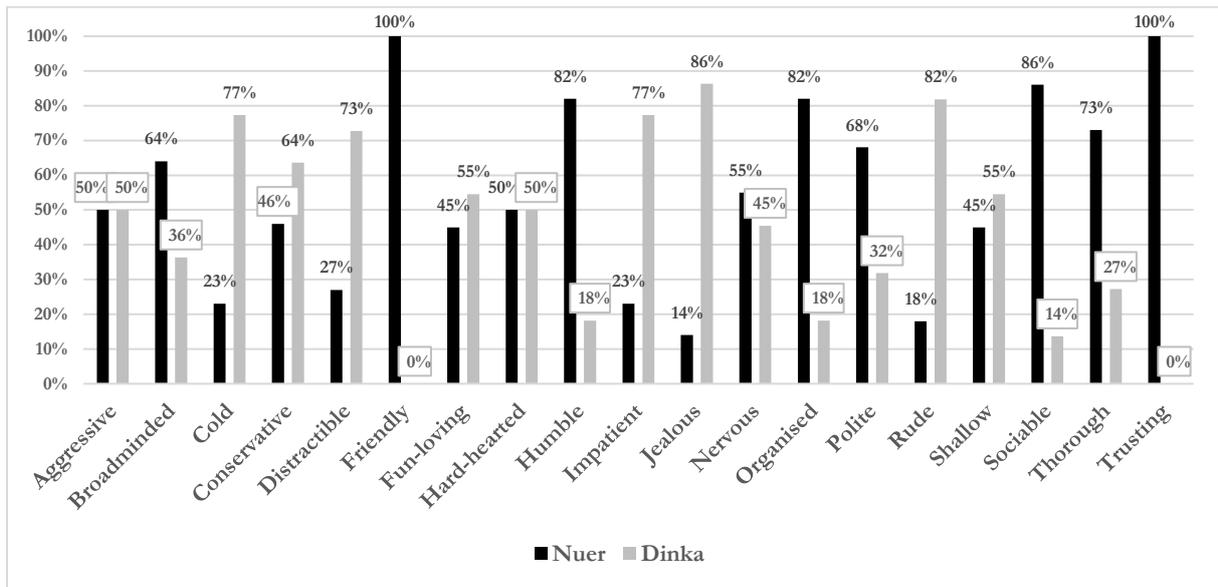


The Nuer Sample

Attributes

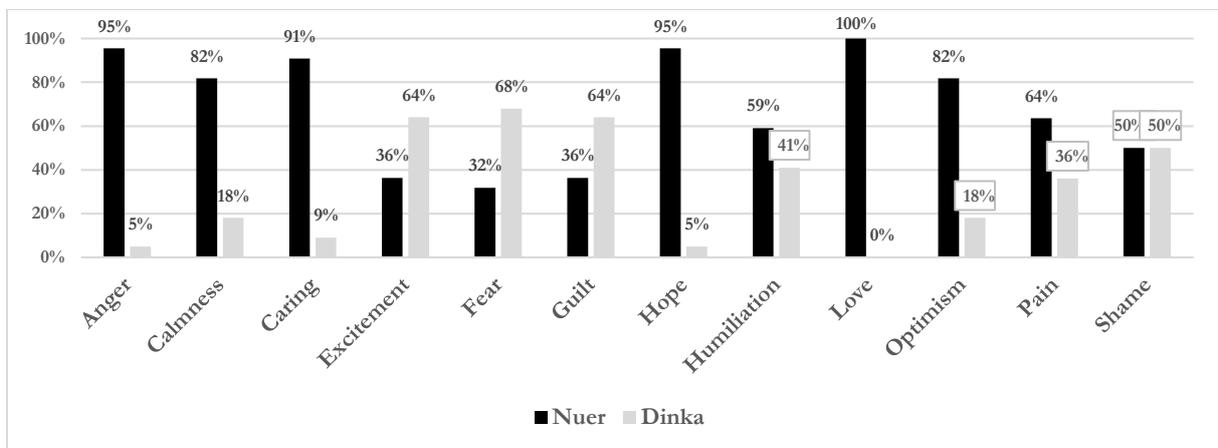
Turning to the Nuer group, a few similarities and differences vis-à-vis the Dinka sample are visible in Figure 4. ANOVAs displayed distinctive findings, with significant differences in terms of attribution according to tribe (1, 38.20 = 32.81, $p < .001$), and tribe*valence (1, 84.57 = 72.62, $p < .001$), but leaving any other relationship statistically insignificant. That is, significantly more characteristics were attributed to the in-group, as were more positive characteristics. However, as the Nuer do not attribute significantly more of either mechanistic or animalistic characteristics to the in-group compared to the out-group, no conventional dehumanization is visible amongst this sample. This was an unexpected finding, as we had proposed that the high levels of violence in Juba would produce clear dehumanizing tendencies among both tribes.

Figure 4: Summary of the attribution of characteristics in Nuer sample



Emotions

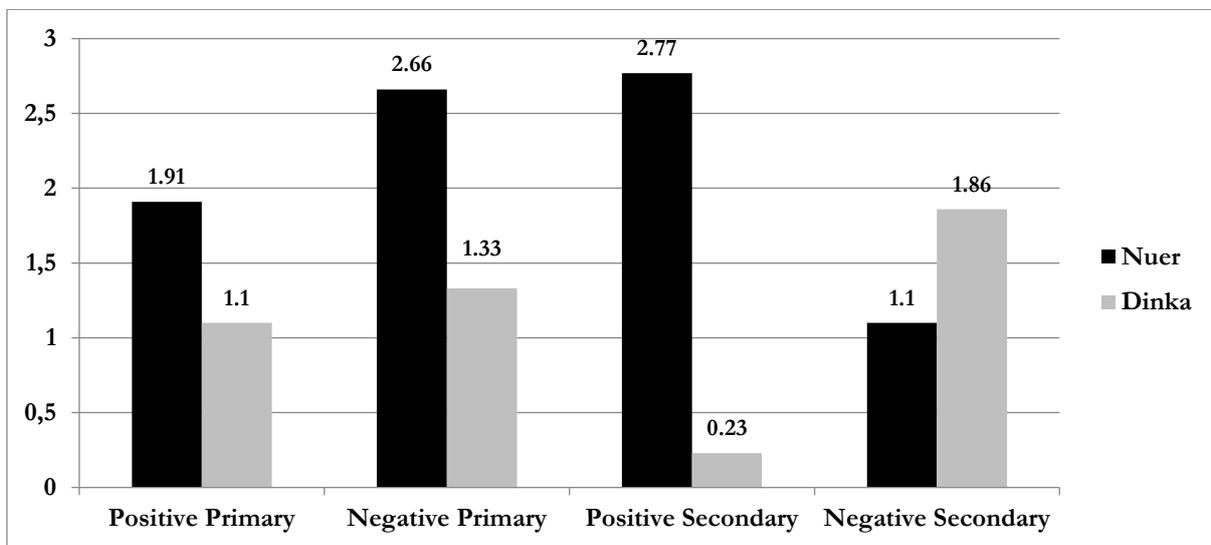
Figure 5: Summary of attribution of emotions in the Nuer sample



Turning to the ANOVAs for the attribution of emotions in the Nuer sample, these display similar findings to those of the Dinka group (see Figure 5. Significant differences were visible in terms of tribe (1, 45.01=87.97, $p < .001$), valence (1, 3.01=5.86, $p < .016$), primary/secondary type of emotion (1, 4.14=8.01, $p < .005$), primary/secondary type of emotion*valence (1, 21.14=41.32, $p < .001$), and tribe*valence*primary/secondary type of emotion (1, 28.64=55.98, $p < .001$). That is, more emotions were attributed to the in-group; more

positive emotions were attributed to one of the groups overall; more primary emotions were attributed to one of the groups overall; more positive emotions were attributed to the in-group; and a tendency for primary and secondary emotions to be differentially distributed in terms of valence. Figure 6 displays the breakdown of the attribution of emotions according to whether they are primary/secondary and their valence.

Figure 6: Mean attribution of emotions in Nuer sample by valence and level of humanness



Similar to the Dinka sample, the only interaction that was not significant was the tribe*primary/secondary type of emotion, which indicates infrahumanization ($1, 0.05 = 0.1, p < 0.75$). In other words, significantly more primary and secondary emotions were not attributed to the in-group or the out-group in the Nuer sample. Similar to the Dinka, the Nuer thus do not express conventional infrahumanization. Rather, our measurements demonstrate an out-group bias in that the Nuer reserve more positive primary emotions, negative primary emotions, and positive secondary emotions to their in-group while depriving the out-group of the same. Again, this was expected as we did not predict to find such subtle expressions of dehumanization as violent contexts are perceived to exacerbate subtle expressions into more blatant ones.

Summing up

A few points can be made when comparing the attributions of human characteristics between the two groups. As mentioned previously, a significant mechanistic dehumanization is visible among the Dinka, while the Nuer only express an inter-group bias in terms of the valence of the characteristics: rather than dehumanization per se. To further unpack the findings, a set of paired T-tests were conducted, showing that Nuer give a higher number of both positive animalistic ($t=9.72$) and positive mechanistic characteristics ($t=4.87$) to the in-group compared to the out-group, although not significantly more of either mechanistic nor animalistic to the in-group overall. The paired T-tests also showed that the Nuer attributed a higher number of both negative animalistic ($t=4.49$) and negative mechanistic ($t=2.91$) to the out-group compared to the in-group, further adding to the deduction that the attribution is mainly driven by valence, not animalistic or mechanistic dehumanization. That is, the Nuer seemingly associate positive human characteristics with their in-group rather than their out-group to a greater extent than the Dinka, but this does not mean that dehumanization among the Nuer is necessarily taking place.

To compare the groups furthermore, two-way ANOVAs were conducted, demonstrating that the Dinka give more negative animalistic attributes to the out-group compared to the Nuer ($F(1, 4.92 = 5.52, p < .024)$) as well as more positive mechanistic attributes ($F(1, 7.28 = 9.41, p < .004)$). Thus, while the Dinka seemingly attribute more characteristics to the out-group than the Nuer in some regard, the attributions of the Nuer group only renders significant differences in terms of valence rather than animalistic or mechanistic dehumanization of the out-group.

Placing our findings in relation to other work, our results differ quite substantially from previous studies (c.f., Loughnan & Haslam, 2007; Vaes *et al.*, 2012). We did not identify any significant levels of infrahumanization, nor demonstrate blatant dehumanization among both of the groups. In the case of the Dinka sample, we can see signs of attributions that go beyond

inter-group bias, as significantly more mechanistic characteristics were attributed to the in-group compared to the out-group. This indicates a simultaneous humanization of the in-group as well as a mechanistic dehumanization of the Nuer out-group. In the case of the Nuer sample, we did not observe any significant differences in the attributions to the in-group and out-group beyond that of valence, indicating an inter-group bias but no expressions of standard dehumanization. Thus, while there is some evidence of mechanistic dehumanization among the Dinka, our results indicate lower levels of dehumanization than expected considering the violent context. These results are discussed further in our concluding section.

Qualitative Results

We now turn to the main qualitative findings and our second research question on how events of mass violence serve to structure dehumanizing attitudes.

Relevance of the political situation to the conflict

Overall, our focus groups provided insight on how the events of December 2013 shaped and expressed the identified dehumanizing attitudes and inter-group biases. The importance of these events was demonstrated through how three themes dominated the reasons for in-group versus out-group attribution of emotions: *the violent events of December 2013, the political nature of this conflict, and how political representatives of both groups were linked to the aforementioned events*. These three themes of justification imply that dehumanization and bias were mainly structured around recent events of mass violence, and specific characteristics of these. We identified these themes inductively, focusing mainly on semantic and not latent content as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) when themes have not been theorized beforehand. One of the authors carried out the steps recommended by Braun and Clarke, immersing himself in the data through several rounds of study, after which preliminary themes were identified

based on semantic statements, which were lastly collated into the identified themes for further review. All authors agreed on the primacy of the identified themes within the material. Below, we illustrate how these three themes were linked to certain sets of emotional attributions.

The following passage provides a link between the portrayal of the out-group as an anonymous mass unable to feel fear (as identified in the quantitative study) and the December 2013 events:

Moderator: You put fear on the Dinka side, why is that?

Dinka participant 1: They [The Nuer] are attacking because they have no fear, but we [The Dinka] are afraid because we are defending the government. We [The Dinka] need all South Sudanese to be free, and we need all to live in peace, not to fight... those who are fighting they have no fear, but we are afraid. They [The Nuer] are terrorizing our civilians. That is why fear belongs on the side of Dinka.

Dinka participant 4: I agree, because this here, has fear (...) if something would happen here, we will die here. But for them [The Nuer], they have no any fear. They have to bring fighting here, Juba is very populated, there are foreigners here. But those people they just die for no reason, and somebody who has fear cannot bring fighting here. That is why, Dinka have fear. You need to have fear of the people you are governing.

Moderator: Does everyone agree? What about you?

Dinka participant 2: I agree, the main reason being that this here in December, when the fighting erupted, when you have fear you do not crazy things, but they [The Nuer] do. Innocent people died because bad things happened in the city.²

² Dinka Focus Group 2, 4 participants. Juba. 30 July 2014.

As demonstrated, Dinka attributed the emotion ‘fear’ to their own group rather than the out-group. The reasoning links perceived Nuer traits such as impatience, aggression, and carelessness to short-term individualistic goals, and ties these characteristics to the December 2013 events.

Another example from the data refers to the political conflict between the two groups, where the Dinka perceive themselves as demonstrating a strong sense of political responsibility in their actions; while the Nuer do not.

Similarly, the Nuer focus groups reserved “hope”, “caring”, “love”, and “optimism” for the in-group. Surprisingly, the Nuer focus group participants also attributed “humiliation” and “pain” mainly to the in-group, and only “excitement” mainly to the out-group. This indicates a more complete denial of the out-group’s humanness than previous quantitative measurements demonstrated. In essence, the Nuer focus groups predominantly attributed nearly all emotions to the in-group, depriving the out-group of almost any emotional or empathic capacity. Such sentiments were linked, again, to the violence that began in December 2013:

Nuer participant 1: *According to Nuer nature, Nuer also, they love and hate another, everyone. As we are now in South Sudan, we [The Nuer] love everybody who are in South Sudan.*

Moderator: And Dinka don’t?

Nuer participant 3: *Dinka, they do not love. They can love, but they do not love more than us. If they [The Dinka] can love, then what is happening now? Whenever you love your country and your people, you cannot bring someone to defeat your whole people, then you do not love your nation.*

Moderator: Do you all agree?

Nuer participant 2 *Regarding this love. I can support it strongly also. In our nature, in our Nuer community, we interact with many people, this show the kind of love. Even other people, like Dinka, they come to us, they get into our community. We love a lot, it is in our culture. It is difficult for us to hate others, if they come to us (...) there are many things that show love among us.*

(...)

Nuer participant 3: *If they [The Dinka] really love, then they could not have done this [The Juba Massacre] to all of us, to our country.*³

By describing their in-group (Nuer) as people who “love everyone”, a perception of their own group as tolerant, affectionate, and caring becomes apparent. In contrast, the out-group’s capacity to love is questioned by linking their emotional incapability to the perception of them ruining South Sudan. A distinction between the in-group and the out-group is thereby evident, and recent violent events serve as the focal point around which such attitudes are organized.

The relevance of the December 2013 events for structuring dehumanizing attitudes was further demonstrated when discussing the emotion of “humiliation” with the focus groups:

Moderator: So you are saying that the Nuer feel humiliation stronger than the Dinka?

Nuer participant 5: *Yes, I agree. The Dinka are still in Juba and we are still in the UNMISS camp. And our people [The Nuer] have been killed in Juba, and that is why I feel like this.*

Moderator: They do not feel humiliated because they have not lost or because they cannot feel it?

³ Nuer Focus Group 1, 3 participants. Juba. 29 July 2014.

Nuer participant 5: *They [The Dinka] cannot feel this, like us. I am feeling like this because I have lost my home. I have lost a lot of people. And now, I am not staying in my home, I am in the UN camp, that is why I am feeling like this.*

Nuer participant 7: *I think, between Nuer and Dinka, Nuer feel more humiliated.*

Moderator: *You think that they feel more humiliated than Dinka?*

Nuer participant 7: *Yes. What happened only affected the Nuer tribe. Many people died. People have lost their properties, they left their home. Many Dinka people who are responsible are still in government, that is why Nuer people feel more humiliated.*⁴

Arguably, the Nuer attributed “humiliation” to the in-group rather than the out-group. Their reasoning connects this attribution to their current social and political status. They express a sense of frustration and perceived discrimination, referencing that many Nuer now reside in refugee camps, as well as recent political marginalization. Situationally, this excerpt demonstrates that many Nuer relate to both the in-group and out-group through the ongoing political conflict and the Juba Massacre. Interestingly, the Dinka also attributed humiliation to the Nuer over their in-group. However, as visible in the excerpt below, their justifications were starkly different:

Dinka participant 9: *(Humiliation) belongs on the Nuer side. Because, when you make a decision to take an action, and you fail, you fail to achieve and you feel humiliation. So it is the Nuer who feel humiliation stronger. They [The Nuer] desired to overthrow the government, they decided to overthrow to defeat the government and they failed. So they feel humiliation, the Dinka don't. The Nuer now in the bush, they are more humiliated.*

⁴ Nuer Focus Group 2, 5 participants. Juba. 1 August 2014.

Moderator: What do you feel?

Dinka participant 6: *Nuer are humiliated, because they have failed to fulfil their desire.*

Their [The Nuer's] desire was to topple the government and maybe get what they want to get out of it.

[Silence]

Moderator: And you, do you want to say something?

Dinka participant 7: *We are also embarrassed, not only Nuer. As Dinka, we are now in power, people are fleeing under our leadership. As Dinkas, we do not like that. But Nuer feel it more than we, because it was their desire...*

Dinka participant 9: *... And they will feel more humiliated when they come back.*⁵

In contrast to the Nuer, however, the Dinka also raise the alleged coup attempt in December 2013 as a reason for why “humiliation” is perceived as intrinsic to the Nuer. They not only argue that the out-group feels more humiliated than the in-group, but also indicate that the out-group deserves to suffer. Thus, this excerpt helps to shed additional light on the construction of the dehumanizing attitudes demonstrated in the quantitative section, connecting the perceptions of both in-group and out-group to the recent violence.

Turning to how attributions are linked to political representatives of the opposing side, this theme can be illustrated by, for instance, how Nuer leader Riek Machar is perceived among the Dinka:

Dinka participant 3: *They [the Nuer] are guilty, they are really guilty. This man [Riek Machar], who are causing the problem here this year, are also the man who made the other problem some years ago. Now we are in the process of making peace and making*

⁵ Dinka Focus Group 2. Juba. 30 July 2014.

elections so that he will come as the new leader. He was feeling guilty for not getting voted, for if he would not have become the president. He will not get any votes. That is why he want to make a conflict, because he feel guilty.

This quote, and similar discussions in the focus group, demonstrate how the Dinka attribute the traits of untrustworthy, jealous, impatient, and aggressive to the Nuer, with reference to Machar's involvement in the December 2013 events. Hence, the actions of a few key politicians during a national crisis came to reflect onto a majority of the out-group. In sum, both Dinka and Nuer firmly relate their dehumanizing attitudes directly to the December 2013 events: practically without exceptions.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our study posed two interlinked research questions: (1) What levels of dehumanization exist between the Dinka and Nuer communities of South Sudan, and (2) how did the violent events of December 2013 structure and inform the expression of inter-group dehumanization?

Our quantitative analysis demonstrated, first, that both groups displayed some inter-group bias. The main difference between the two groups was that the Dinka demonstrated a reservation of mechanistic characteristics for the in-group, thereby expressing a mechanistic dehumanization of the out-group. Thus, while both groups tended to reserve positive characteristics to their in-group and attribute negative characteristics to their respective out-group, the Dinka were alone in displaying actual dehumanization.

Haslam (2006) has argued that levels of dehumanization found in more peaceful societies are likely to be exacerbated in contexts of violent conflict. Indeed, even Kelman's (1973) account of dehumanization involving US army veterans also point towards violent contexts weakening the perpetrator's moral restraint on violent behavior. In contrast, while

looking into dehumanizing attitudes among the Israeli public, Bar-Tal (1990) argued that dehumanization grows more prevalent during widespread inter-ethnic violence. Yet, surprisingly, our findings do not demonstrate exceedingly high levels of dehumanization in Area 107 of Juba - the location of a massacre that left thousands of people dead - than what is visible in many Western contexts. With the above results in mind, a possible conclusion in relation to our first research question is that, despite the highly violent context, levels of inter-tribal dehumanization in South Sudan do not seem to be significantly higher than in more peaceful contexts.

These results and such a conclusion are puzzling, as one should probably expect high levels of dehumanization in a context such as South Sudan. Part of the explanation for this puzzle may lie in the poor scale reliability identified for our trait-attribution instrument. As stated in the research design section, these low alphas indicate that results should be interpreted with great care, as the separate instruments are clearly not measuring unified theoretical concepts. Part of our failure to identify higher levels of dehumanization thus likely stem from the questions – derived in Western contexts – not being valid measurements of the dehumanization present in South Sudan. With this in mind it would seem prudent to conclude, instead, that further tests in violent and non-Western contexts should be carried out to better understand the limitations of existing measurement tools.

Answering our second research question provided insights into the likely sources of those identified negative inter-group perceptions that were, nevertheless, present. The qualitative study supported our assumption for the second research question: that the December 2013 events were important for the structure and expression of negative inter-group perceptions. When respondents elaborated on their attitudes, these political events were frequently referred to for justification. In particular, the Nuer emphasized that the Juba massacre was crucial for their emotions vis-a-vis the Dinka. In fact, few other factors – such as historic

animosities or common ethnic stereotypes – were even brought up. Extensive inter-ethnic violence which is proximate in time hence appears to have a strong influence on how dehumanization and negative attitudes are structured and expressed.

This second part of the findings may be applicable to other contexts of large-scale violent conflict. From a theoretical perspective contexts such as Darfur, Rwanda, or Bosnia & Herzegovina share similarities with South Sudan. Notably, these contexts have all experienced high levels of inter-group violence, have a clear ethnic dimension, and display inter-group dehumanization (Hagan & Rymond-Richmond, 2008; Haagensen & Croes, 2012; Čehajić, Brown, & González 2009). Thus, the theoretical argument on how recent events structure dehumanizing attitudes is likely to be applicable to contexts that share these characteristics.

How and why violent events structure dehumanizing attitudes may be related to the salience of factors of (1) loss of self-esteem and (2) fear of death in affecting in-group humanization and out-group dehumanization (Vaes, Heflick, & Goldenberg, 2010). Socio-cognitive research has previously explored how recent experiences of inter-ethnic violence affect in-group and out-group categorization (Alexander *et al.*, 2004; Rydgren, 2007). Instances of violence can have an impact on pre-existing perceptions and transform pervasive attitudes into manifested and destructive ones, increasing the likelihood for future violence (Fearon & Laitin, 1996). Extreme violence may thus exacerbate in-group humanization and out-group dehumanization simultaneously, and give latent perceptions a manifest structure to counter loss of self-esteem and fear of death. The result is highly visceral attitudes that serve as vehicles for action. Such attitudes need to be countered, for instance through positive inter-group contact help that can reduce inter-group tensions and stereotypes (Pettigrew *et al.*, 2011). Such contact could take the form of carefully facilitated non-competitive activities in neutral spaces, which have led to successful reconciliation efforts in some contexts (Lederach, 1997; Svensson & Brounéus, 2013). For such initiatives to be successful, however, they need to be carefully

tailored to suit local conditions, as well as accepted by potential participants and stakeholders. In a context heavily affected by violence, this will likely be challenging.

The above conclusions should be read in conjunction with a few caveats. First, our lack of repeated measurements – ideally collected before and after atrocities – deny the possibility to make direct claims regarding the effect sizes of violent events on dehumanizing attitudes, as well as exactly how these help structure attitudes. Second, our sample is small and non-representative. Third, the poor consistency of our instruments makes it necessary to interpret results with care. All three caveats are a result of seeking to examine dehumanization under highly challenging circumstances. Nevertheless, this study has deepened our understanding of dehumanization by applying and expanding on Haslam's (2006) and Loughnan and Haslam's (2007) conceptual and empirical work in a non-Western case with ongoing, highly violent, conflict.

This study strongly suggests that there is a further need to scrutinize dehumanization in contexts of protracted and highly violent inter-group conflicts. Chief in such endeavors should be to further analyze how applicable both the concepts and the measurements of dehumanization are in highly violent and non-Western contexts. The low internal consistency for dehumanizing traits identified indicates problematic measurement issues that need to be dealt with to understand dehumanization in contexts similar to the one studied here. Such an endeavor should likely begin with an in-depth study of a country's value structures, to identify which of the traits included in Haslam's conceptualization are related to stereotypes of animals and automatons. While conducting studies during ongoing conflict in non-Western locations is very difficult, such ventures are important to deepen our theoretical understanding of dehumanization, as well as for creating tools for conflict management. Further studies on this topic can deepen our understanding of how the level – and structure – of dehumanization relate

to fundamental aspects of inter-group relations such as elite manipulation, and how inter-group contact should be designed to decrease community tensions.

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