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"IT'S DIFFICULT TO BE A NORWEGIAN": Minority Voices in the Memorial Messages after the Terror Attacks in Norway 2011

Abstract

The terror attacks in Norway 2011, targeting what the perpetrator described as proponents of immigration and multicultural society, created exceptional circumstances for people to reflect on issues of belonging. In this kind of situation, it is assumed that people emphasise their affinity with the affected country. This, in turn, makes the problematisation of the affinities displayed particularly interesting since the act of expressing them even in a very taxing situation indicates their importance. Texts by individuals from ethnic minorities, written soon after the attacks, are analysed in terms of conceptions of 'Norwegianness'. Results show explicit support for civic values but also multiple expressions of not feeling recognised as part of majority society also from individuals obviously acculturated to Norwegian lifestyles and cultural codes. These expressions are explained in terms of whiteness – non-whiteness and religion.

Keywords

Terrorism • Critical event • Minority • Belonging • Religion

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Introduction

A critical event perceived to threaten key societal values and institutions creates exceptional circumstances for reflections on issues of belonging. The terror attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011, with 77 people killed and more than 150 injured, constituted such an event. In terms of scale and brutality, the attacks were the worst incident the country had suffered since the Nazi occupation in April 1940. Anders Behring Breivik, the perpetrator, made clear that his goal was to prevent the further development of a multicultural society by punishing those he held as responsible for its emergence. Islam and Muslim immigrants were pointed out as major threats to Europe in general and Norway in particular (Manifesto 2011).

Popular reactions to the attacks were immediate and extensive. Hundreds of thousands of citizens participated in demonstrations and memorial rallies. Memorial sites were spontaneously erected all over the country, where thousands of messages were placed. A prominent theme in these was national concord; the attacks were seen as directed against the nation, a nation absolved of social and political divisions and thus closely related to Social Democratic Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg's original framing of the attacks as a threat to the values shared by and belonging to everybody in the nation – except for the perpetrator – irrespective of political inclination. Memorial messages were written mainly by persons belonging to the majority, or dominant ethnic group, in Norwegian society, but

also by persons not obviously – as seen by themselves or by others – included in this majority (Lödén 2014; cf. Lied & Undseth Bakke 2013). These individuals, 'the minority', belong to the non-European ethnic groups that make up a considerable proportion of immigrants of later generations and Norwegian-born individuals with immigrant parents. The largest groups come from Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq, Vietnam and Iran (International Migration 2014). Messages from individuals and groups within these minorities offer a unique possibility to examine how the feelings and problematisations of belonging to Norwegian society were expressed at this critical moment. The messages also create opportunities to explore how people belonging to the minority see themselves (Bulmer & Solomos 2010: 373).

The attacks highlighted the contradiction in Norwegian society between, on the one hand, the anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiments identified among ethnic Norwegians (Blom 2010, 2011, 2013, 2016; Strabac & Valenta 2012) and high rates of self-reported discrimination among adolescents with apparent immigrant backgrounds (Løwe 2008) and, on the other, a national self-understanding of Norway as a non-racist, 'colour-blind' society (Espeland & Rogstad 2013). Possible expressions of the first sentiment took place on the day of the attacks before the information about the terrorist as a man with 'a Nordic appearance' (Norwegian

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Broadcasting Corporation [NRK] 2011) was publicly known. During these hours, several instances of verbal and physical harassment towards individuals of foreign descent were reported in the media (*Dagsavisen* 2011; *Verdens Gang* 2011a, 2011b). Expressions of the second sentiment, the 'colour-blind' narrative, are important elements in what one scholar calls 'a Norwegian master story' about the events on 22 July as expressed in the phrase 'From hatred to love' (Kverndokk 2013: 189), with Breivik representing hatred, while the official and popular reactions were seen as expressions of love. According to one scholar, the reiterated calls for openness and a more inclusive society as a response to the atrocities resulted in 'a notable shift' in the dominant discourse regarding 'what it is to be a Norwegian'; in the months following the attacks also, people of colour were included in majority society (Muller Myrdahl 2014: 488). In fact, 22 July could be a particularly significant case in shifting the dominant understanding of what it takes to be a Norwegian, in the direction favouring a 'colour-blind' position. The messages in this study provide insight into how individuals from visible minorities perceive this contradiction between anti-immigrant and 'colour-blind' narratives at a moment spatially and temporally close to an extremely critical event in a nation's history. The writers of these messages did so in a very special situation, in the close aftermath of the attacks, expressing their relationships and belonging to a bereaved community. In this kind of situation, it is assumed that people – with a particularly high degree – emphasise their affinity with the affected country and what is perceived as its most important values (cf. Santino 2004, 2006; Senie 2006). In doing this, the commemorations, as was suggested after the 7 July 2005 London bombings, contributed to 'the restoration of social life by constructing tragic events as moments of national consensus' (Lorenzo-Dus & Bryan 2011: 294). Again, this renders problematisations of such affinities of particular interest because they are likely to be deemed so important that they are expressed even in a very demanding situation.

Several messages present problematisations regarding experiences and feelings of exclusion despite – the often – ambitious adjustment to Norwegian society in terms of language, norms and mores. I argue that these expressions are difficult to explain without addressing notions of ethnicity and of whiteness and non-whiteness. This does not imply that all findings should be interpreted through a master lens of race/whiteness, but that such concepts can help us see important nuances that we might otherwise miss. Alongside this undercurrent of problematising of belonging, strong support was expressed for democracy and an open society. It is notable that many choose to emphasise their ethnic origin and/or religious affiliation as well as their belonging to Norwegian society.

The central questions of this article are as follows: How do people from visible minorities present themselves in the context of the critical event? How do they express their relationships to the majority society? How can these presentations be analysed using the conceptions of Norwegianness presented in the following sections? The answers are used to discuss the prerequisites and the desirability, as expressed by individuals within the minority, of being or becoming Norwegian, thus contributing to the understanding of the importance of the visible markers of the immigrant origin of feelings of belonging in Western societies characterised by diversity. The data comprised the memorial messages from the spontaneous memorial sites in Oslo, from inside Oslo Cathedral and from the area around Utøya Island. These are categorised and analysed using the conceptions of 'nationness' introduced by Jacobson (1997) and further refined by Vassenden (2010).

Concepts, Data and Analytical Approach

'Critical event' serves as an analytical hub for the study. The concept is used here to highlight the political and societal implications of a terror attack (Browne, Frendreis & Gleiber 1986). Unexpected, extensive and dramatic events that affect the greater part of a population at one and the same time (Diermeier & Stevenson 2000) have significant potential as a starting point for the study of personal and societal values since such events urge people to reflect upon issues of relationships between individual and society. This potential is related to the given that such an event can be designated as *weakly scripted*; when it occurs, the individual does not have access to a full 'script' indicating how to react (Filipp 2001). Notions of the event are gradually formed in human interaction, often on the basis of media reports. In this process, the individual builds on previous experiences and knowledge of events perceived as similar. If a critical event is seen as threatening key societal values and institutions, it affects the way in which individuals conceive themselves, others and the society at large (Fimreite *et al.* 2013). In the Norwegian case, it appears that non-whites held perceptions of threat specifically against them as a result of the terrorist attacks, which caused increased risks of post-traumatic stress reactions (Thoresen *et al.* 2012).

Among scholars in Norway, the 'critical event' concept has been used above all in the way proposed by Das (1995: 6), who claims that such events have typically entailed that 'new modes of action came into being which redefined traditional categories' of understanding. Espeland and Rogstad (2013) use the concept for explaining how incidents of suspected abuse of dark-skinned persons by officials enabled the emergence of anti-racist social movements. These incidents have also been invoked as critical events by Andersson *et al.* (2012) when discussing political engagement and transnational orientations among Norwegian minority youths. While Espeland/Rogstad (2013) and Andersson *et al.* (2012) analyse the modes of action and redefinitions of the traditional categories of understanding months or years after the events, this study takes the spatial and temporal closeness to the event as its starting point, thus focussing on minority reactions in the immediate aftermath of the terror attacks.

The term 'minority' here refers to the different ethnic groups that make up considerable parts of immigrants of later generations, in contrast to 'national' minorities, especially the Sami people in the Norwegian case (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli 2014: 401).¹ The term 'majority' refers to ethnic Norwegians constituting the dominant ethnic group in Norwegian society. A considerable proportion of the immigrants come from Muslim countries. Considering the identity change among European Muslims that has been described by Roy (2000) as a shift 'from ethnic identity to religious recasting', special attention is paid to the role of religion when individuals within this group express their relationship to majority society (cf. Naguib 2002).

Reactions to the terrorist attacks were expressed at spontaneously erected memorial sites and inside churches. Messages at these sites can be seen as, in Grider's (2001: 3) words, 'pure expressions of public sentiment'. All texts at the sites in Oslo and around Utøya were collected and digitalised by The Norwegian National Archive and made available for research (Archive Register 2012). Messages collected inside the Oslo Cathedral have also, subsequently, been made available for research but are not digitalised (Archive Register 2012). Among the approximately 15,000 texts collected outside the church, about 1,500 are considered to be something other than

traditional condolences. Among these messages, which contain explicit comments or remarks about the event, I have identified 50 as messages from individuals, groups or organisations within the minority. The messages from inside the Oslo Cathedral were collected from its Silver altar, where requests for intercession are usually placed. Approximately 4,600 were examined, with an estimated 400 categorised as something other than traditional condolences. Among these messages, 45 were identified as messages from individuals, groups or organisations within the minority, which gives a total number of 95, or 5%, of the relevant messages included in the study.² The share is less than the estimated percentage of people of colour in Norway of approximately 7.5% (Thorsnæs 2014) but is deemed as sufficient in order to indicate diverse opinions within this group. The messages are of different lengths, from one full printed page to single hand-written sentences. Messages made up of three to five sentences are most common. The identification of messages from the minority was made on the basis of the following categories: 1) the writer identifies as belonging to the minority, by using expressions such as 'as a Muslim I ...' or 'I am from [name of country] but live in Norway'; 2) the message is written in the name of or on behalf of an immigrant organisation or group; and 3) the message is written in Norwegian or Norwegian/other language and signed with 'typical immigrant' name(s). The first two categories are thus based on self-identification. Taking into account the interdependent character of self- and other-identifications (Brubaker 2012: 2), these self-identifications probably give information also of the writer's view of the 'other(s)'. The self-selection problem that lies in the very act of self-identifying as a minority individual – i.e. that those authors are probably more attuned to ethnic/religious considerations than minorities who did not self-identify in this way – is considered minimal since only a handful of messages belong to the first category. Messages from minority organisations or groups are expected to display a more 'ethnic' profile than messages from minority individuals since the collective expressions are often based on ethnic affinity. The third category is more uncertain for identification purposes. It is conceived that persons who do not regard themselves or are not regarded by others as belonging to the minority may have a 'minority' name. This category is therefore used with particular caution. The vast majority of messages are written in Norwegian. When the language used is not Norwegian, this is pointed out.

The two sets of materials exhibit similarities and differences. All messages were written close in time to the terror attacks and were placed in close proximity to the places where the attacks were carried out. Hence, the writers of the messages were acting in similar situations and, accordingly, the content could be expected to be quite uniform, irrespective of where the messages were placed. But, a cathedral is different from the bus stop overlooking Utøya Island, which was one of the major spontaneous memorial sites. The cathedral is seen by believers as a holy place for communicating with God, and messages placed there are expected to express a religious content, especially Christian, to a greater degree than messages collected at other sites. Messages from the outdoor sites are expected to include collective statements to a greater extent than those meant for intercession, which are more personal, even private, in character.

Out of the 95 texts emanating from the minority, 74 were categorised as representing individuals and 21 as representing groups or organisations. Several of the messages were placed in more than one of the conceptual categories, since a text can contain several messages of different kinds. This conceptual overlapping

implies that the number of observed messages can appear to be >95. We do not know how representative the material is relative to the minority. What we know is that critical events in themselves can be seen as 'significant cases' (Larsson 2009: 29) meriting attention. As argued earlier, a critical event seen as threatening key societal values and institutions can serve as a starting point for the study of personal and societal values since it affects the way individuals conceive themselves, others and the society at large. Further, if 'the particular setting investigated is typical of some larger whole or aggregate' (Hammersley 1992: 86), it allows for empirical claims regarding similar settings. Obviously, the terror attacks, directed against multicultural society, Islam and Muslims, are a significant case highlighting feelings of belonging in a diverse society. The case should therefore be of interest beyond the explicit Norwegian context. It can also provide the basis for generalisations as general implications can be drawn from the singular case if context similarity and recognition of patterns are considered (Larsson 2009: 33–36). In this singular case, diversity and patterns of inclusion and exclusion experienced and expressed by individuals belonging to ethnic minorities are contextual similarities applicable to most Western societies. The analysed texts were produced in a wider context of reactions to the attacks. This context included speeches given by societal leaders, such as the Prime Minister and the Crown Prince, as well as interviews with survivors, demonstrations, memorial rallies and religious services, all framed by intensive media reporting. The messages are seen as parts of a discourse of statements originating in a specific social context of what 'can' and what 'cannot' be said (Bergström & Boréus 2000). Here, the observed consensus in the memorial messages and in official responses constitute a possible limitation on what cannot be said, thus making deviations from this consensus even more interesting.

Jessica Jacobson developed her conceptions of Britishness using data from a qualitative study conducted in a London Pakistani community in the early 1990s. She (Jacobson 1997) showed that British national identity among the Pakistani young people does not have a fixed content but is expressed by three interrelated 'boundaries of Britishness': 'civic', 'racial' and 'cultural'. The first defines people according to their citizenship, the second on the basis of their factual or believed British ancestry and the third in terms of the values, attitudes and lifestyle embraced. The respondents largely see the formal side of the civic boundary, i.e. British citizenship, as secure and stable, while they also find it incomplete or inadequate regarding the sense of solidarity between members of the national community. The 'racial' boundary is perceived as manifested in private rather than in public discourse although always clearly present (Jacobson 1997: 191). The cultural boundary is expressed among the respondents through 'a constantly shifting amalgam' of issues of language, religion and ways of behaving or dressing (193). Often, expressions regarding cultural issues were lumped together with views on the 'racial' boundary.

Anders Vassenden, who conducted a qualitative interview study in the period 2002–2004 of white majority Norwegians living in multicultural suburbs of Oslo, replaces the 'racial' concept with the 'ethnic' and adds a fourth to those suggested by Jacobson, namely whiteness–non-whiteness (Vassenden 2010). These changes in the analytical framework allow for a more nuanced discussion on the issues at stake and will be used here. This is especially true of the whiteness–non-whiteness concept used by Vassenden to discuss the meaning of the phrase 'white Norwegians', used by some of his respondents. According to his interpretation, one should understand it as an articulation, in contrast to what is seen

as an undifferentiated and exclusionary notion – which assumes that a Norwegian has to be white – of Norwegianness (Vassenden 2010: 743). In this study, the conceptual frameworks suggested by Jacobson (1997) and Vassenden (2010) were used and modified in the sense that I suggest ‘religion’ as a separate concept and analytical category in the analysis of expressions emanating from minority individuals of Muslim background.³ This decision rests on research showing that religion has come to be a – some would even claim *the* – major defining factor among immigrants of Muslim background living in Europe. Since religion is increasingly detached from its cultural context, there is the risk of missing important meanings in religious expressions made by ‘minority individuals’ if religion is merely seen as part of a larger cultural expression. Olivier Roy points to the key roles of deterritorialisation and deculturation in the transformation of religion today (Roy 2010). Deterritorialisation involves the movement of people and ‘the circulation of ideas, cultural objects, information and modes of consumption generally in a non-territorial space’. The process of deculturation implies that religion has to be disconnected from a specific culture in order to be understood and grasped in new settings (Roy 2010: 6). Kastoryano (2004: 1234) refers to this when claiming that in Europe, Islam evolves as a minority religion, while, in the US, Islam appears as ‘the religion of a minority’ among other ethnic groups. Naguib (2002: 355) draws attention to the fact that Muslim immigrants in Norway have a common religion but not a common culture. According to her, migration has forced them to reflect upon their diverse identities and to choose which to retain or reject. Despite their original national and ethnic affiliations, they thus emphasise their religious affiliation.

The main empirical indicator of the civic concept is citizenship. Support for values of democracy or for the ability of people to live together despite different ethnic origins or religious beliefs is treated as the civic aspect of the cultural concept, which also includes expressions regarding ways of being, modes of understanding, lifestyles, cultural codes, patriotism, language or linguistic skills. The ethnic conception deals with relations of belonging to a clearly – in this case – self-identified ethnic group. Empirical indicators of the concept whiteness–non-whiteness are, for instance, explicit or implicit expressions of the importance of ‘race’. In the context of religion, such indicators would be open references to religion or expressions suggesting that formulations regarding the event and relevant reactions to it are grounded in religion.

Results regarding how people from ethnic minorities present themselves in the context of the critical event and how they express their relationships to the majority society are examined and analysed in relation to the contradiction between experiences and feelings of exclusion, as manifested in research about, on the one hand, anti-immigrant sentiments and, on the other, experiences and feelings of inclusion, as expressed in the understanding of Norway as a non-racist, ‘colour-blind’ society.

Results and Analysis

Apparent expressions that can be connected to the ‘colour-blind’ strand are especially obvious among empirical indicators of the civic conception and the civic aspects of the cultural conception. Explicit references to whiteness–non-whiteness are not represented. This is in line with Vassenden’s (2010: 740) observations but, as in his study, it will be shown that perceptions of ‘race’ operate as a subtext.

Civic conception

Distinct civic values are expressed in approximately half of the examined messages and, among these, self-evident assertions of belonging – like ‘I was born in Norway’, indicating Norwegian citizenship – dominate. But, even messages in the vein of the civic conception, which has little to do with race, include expressions indicating uncertainty regarding belonging to majority society. The most obvious expressions of adherence to a civic conception are expressed in messages claiming to represent organisations or groups with ethnic minority origin and placed at the outdoor memorial sites. This is in accordance with the use of spontaneous memorials as sites for political communication, identity building and social struggle, as observed by folklorists (cf. Marchi 2006). Among the requests for intercession, no messages claim to represent organisations or groups, as expected considering their private character. Those representing or claiming to represent a group of ethnic origin probably found it particularly important to declare the group as part of an obvious Norwegian ‘we’, under the current circumstances. A message from a Kurdish youth organisation to ‘The dear Norwegian people, AUF [Worker’s Youth League] and the government’ reads as follows:

The tragedy has struck us all. We must stand together to defeat all kinds of racism, discrimination and xenophobia. Together we can stop acts of terrorism that threaten democracy, and together we can build a society without hate and racism (Statement from Democratic Youth Union of East Kurdistan).

Similar messages, with an explicit collective sender, are from The Palestinian-Norwegian Association and The Norwegian-Somali community. A further step is taken in a message that reads as follows:

You fought for democracy, the free community. We will carry forward your dream about one nation, regardless of religion, race, country. You will always be remembered as heroes of Norway (male ‘immigrant’ name).

The message is clearly indicative of a civic understanding as the writer situates himself as part of a shared, Norwegian collective memory. By his use of ‘nation’ (*nasjon*) and ‘country’ (*land*), the writer furthermore indicates a possible dissolution of the division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which was noted in messages collected after the Madrid train bombs in 2004, where immigrants used expressions such as ‘we are one’ and ‘we are all on the same train’ when writing about the victims but ‘they’ and ‘them’ when writing about Spain (Sánchez-Carretero 2006).

Expressions of a civic conception of society, represented by messages from individuals, signal not only feelings of actual belonging to Norwegian society, which are explicit but also feelings that express an apparent need to demonstrate affinity. Explicit expressions are found in the following messages: ‘22 July is the day no one will forget, the day meant to divide a nation. We were not divided, we became a stronger nation and showed that this strengthened us regardless of religion and skin colour’ (female ‘immigrant’ name)/.../; ‘Grief brings this nation together as one where love and unity strengthen democracy and freedom/.../’ (three ‘immigrant’ names); and ‘We will stand together, live together as one people, regardless of background or religion. We are stronger together’ (immigrant’ name). In all three messages, the issue of simply regarding oneself as an integral part of society is

evident. The need to express affinity is demonstrated in a message saying 'Thank you Norway, this is my country too' (male 'immigrant' name). However, what can be seen in the last example as a simple expression of seeing oneself as part of the nation might indicate that even if the individual sees himself as belonging to the majority society, he has to indirectly tell the majority that 'When you look at me you don't think I belong, but I can tell you I do'.

The inclusion–exclusion divide, merely suggested in this section, becomes more obvious when the cultural dimension is explored.

Cultural conception

Among the empirical indicators analysed in terms of the cultural conception and classified as expressions of perceived inclusion, we find both cultural codes well known to majority society and codes probably unknown to the majority but adapted to a mode of understanding that fits well with inclusive interpretations. But, there are also expressions that explicitly problematise the possibilities of belonging to majority society. Several writers of the messages testify that upholding mainstream modes and codes is not enough in order to be included in Norwegian society.

Mainstream modes of understanding are expressed in messages such as, 'Our thoughts go to those affected and wounded' (male and female 'immigrant' names), in a 12-page document from a suburban Oslo girls' football team, sending its greetings to one of its members who was killed at Utøya and a message signed by 13 people from Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria and Somalia, with their names and countries of origin, saying in Norwegian that 'We empathise with you. Many greetings from [names]'. Examples of messages signalling both a mode of understanding a cultural code, well known to majority society, and of incorporating a tradition more unfamiliar to the majority but familiar to the writer's culture of origin, are the lines in the Norwegian saying: 'This is a turning-point in Norwegian history', followed by a further message in Arabic, saying: 'God is great and to him we are going. May they rest in peace' (male 'immigrant' name and 'Norwegian-Moroccan'); and 'Rest in peace, we'll meet one day. Inshallah' (female 'immigrant' name). Patriotism, signalling cultural belonging, recurs in a message, such as 'We love Norway Fond of Norway' ('immigrant' name), and as one among several themes, in the phrasing 'Let your soul rest under Norway's peaceful soil' ('immigrant' name, 'from Turkey'). A more sophisticated cultural overlapping is displayed in two messages in Persian, wherein both writers turn to their cultural roots in order to express what is at stake in this extraordinary situation. One contains the famous poem *Bani Adam* by the medieval Persian poet Saadi, where the initial lines read 'All men and women are to each other/the limbs of a single body/...'.⁴ The poem is complemented by a personal message in Persian saying, 'I show my hatred towards all the world's violence' (Persian name). The second message expresses the specific Persian *ta'arof* form of civility (Maghbouleh 2013). Typically, the phrase 'God will bless your souls' is repeated several times in slightly different formulations, thus using a tradition with strong roots in Persian culture, to express sincere grief (first name, unclear whether man or woman).

However, the most comprehensive text in this category, from which a line in the title of this article is derived, activates the cultural and ethnicity conceptions. In the message, the writer testifies to her not fully successful attempts to become 'a real Norwegian':

I'm 30, born and raised in central Oslo by Pakistani parents. I have been married to a Norwegian, now a single mother. I live

my life as any Norwegian. Nevertheless I feel guilty. Have a need to apologize to Norway and all the affected. It's difficult to be a Norwegian. My country was attacked, that hurts, because of me. That is the worst feeling (female 'immigrant' name).

Although obviously a Norwegian citizen and adapted to the country's lifestyles and cultural codes, besides showing good command of Norwegian, the woman displays reluctance to actually be 'a real Norwegian'. Clearly, the writer's ethnic origin plays a role here; being of Pakistani origin puts her in the position of feeling guilt for the attacks, which had the stated purpose of opposing immigration by physically attacking its alleged advocates and challenges her feeling of belonging. While cultural codes are cited as examples of adaptation to 'Norwegianness' in this example, another example, partly presented earlier in the civics category, shows clear commitment to civic values but with some ambiguity regarding the writer's position in society:

These are cruel times, but we stand together. Don't tell me I'm not a Norwegian. Never before I have thought that I might not belong here. I hope that I will never think that again. I'm endlessly proud of Norway, people, values, democracy, diversity. This is our little country! It is common (female 'immigrant' name).

The ambiguity is related to the possible addressees of the statement. The overall message indicates that the majority society is the addressee, with the writer arguing from a rather secure position vis-à-vis Norwegianness. But in the second and third sentences, the writer obviously addresses Breivik and implies that the attacks have aroused thoughts of non-belonging, which are new to her. If Breivik is the addressee of the second sentence, the writer certainly underscores her belonging, but if this sentence is also directed to the majority, the attacks appear to have created a need for the writer to highlight her belonging. Ambiguity regarding belonging is evident also in the message reading as follows:

I've seen it all on TV, but really haven't experienced the agony the survivors felt. I will just say that I stand with you in good and evil. I support you and will always do so. My thoughts are with the deceased and those who fought for lives. I might not really be a Norwegian, but I was born in Norway and I'd do everything for Norway (unclear signing).

Being born in Norway and expressing full support for the country is obviously not enough for the writer to declare being 'a real Norwegian'. Expressing support for 'Norwegian' cultural codes and civic values in impeccable Norwegian, the writers of the three messages still indicate feelings of not belonging, and this situation makes the whiteness–non-whiteness conception relevant. Skin colour is not explicitly mentioned by any of the writers but emerges as a subtext in the messages. Vassenden's distinction between 'white and non-white Norwegians', allowing for the latter to be seen as Norwegians, does not appear to be perceived by these individuals of minority origin. Such feelings of ambiguity are reminiscent of what interviewees convey in McIntosh's study of Norwegians of African descent conducted in Oslo between 2005 and 2011 (McIntosh 2015). A black man, originally from southern Africa, mentions meeting a number of supposed indicators of successful integration as 'acquiring Norwegian citizenship, speaking Norwegian with native fluency ..., reaching the highest levels of academic achievement in the Norwegian university system, marrying a white Norwegian

woman ...' but still not feeling included in society (McIntosh 2015: 319). McIntosh's grim final comment is that the interviewees 'wonder if successful integration will always remain just out of their reach; and if, in fact, they will never *be* Norwegian' (321), an observation getting some support in conjunction with the events of 22 July, where sentiments of belonging and community are otherwise highlighted. This is in accordance with Gullestad's finding that European, including Norwegian, nationalism is characterised by 'ethnising the state as an expression of collective identity', where 'immigrants' are asked to 'become Norwegian', at the same time as it is tacitly assumed that this is something they can never really achieve (Gullestad 2002: 59).

Religious conception

Messages expressing religious aspects are, as expected, particularly frequent among the messages collected at the cathedral's Silver altar. Seventeen out of 22 messages classified as 'religious' are from this site. Fourteen of the 22 are identified as written by Muslims and the remaining eight by followers of different faiths. The contents of the messages are very similar, regardless of religion, expressing messages such as 'Rest in peace' or 'May God take care of you'. A message explicitly emphasising similarities between religions reads as follows: 'God's words from the Koran are in line with Christianity when it comes to the meaning of life: it has to be for the glory of God' (signed 'fellow human beings' and male 'immigrant' and female 'Norwegian' name). One interesting difference, however, is that some of the texts written by Muslims mix Norwegian and Arabic, where Norwegian is used to express more 'secular'⁵ messages and the Arabic part is pronouncedly religious. This can be explained by the particular position of Arabic in Islam, which implies that individuals, whether Arabs or not, often express religious beliefs in Arabic. A critical event of this scale can also affect important personal decisions, as expressed in a Silver altar text in Swedish: 'Hesitated to enter the church because of *Ramadan*, but felt that I had to. Thoughts to the victims and their families! This religious and cultural overlapping in practice is accompanied by a less-dramatic text underlining similarities between different deities: 'Norway for everybody. May Allah (God) take care of everyone in heaven' (female 'immigrant' name).

But being a Muslim also appears to be suspicious by definition and a source of collective guilt, as one writer puts it:

Message came that it was not organized by Islam. What a relief and joy in the midst of it all ... It would have been shameful to say that I am a Muslim ('A greeting from inmates at Oslo prison').

Being a Muslim appears, in this case, as a more negative important marker than the writer's obvious belonging to society as expressed in his perfect command of the Norwegian language. Most of the examined texts represent a positive sample; they have been placed there by non-Christians who have decided to enter the Christian shrine. Partial explanations for this are that the Lutheran Church of Norway has been involved in interreligious dialogue for a long time and has repeatedly supported Muslims being unjustly attacked by right-wing politicians (Leirvik 2014: 20-22), as well as the central location of the Oslo Cathedral in the urban cityscape. Still, this shows that the Cathedral can be a place where people of different faiths, not the least – Muslims, choose to express their feelings. In so doing, similarities between Christianity and Islam are emphasised.

Combined with the mix of Norwegian for the 'secular' parts of the text and Arabic for the 'religious', this can be understood as a way to justify a non-Christian's use of the church and to mark affinity across religious boundaries.

Ethnic conception

Among the empirical indicators of the ethnic conception analysed, the feelings of perceived inclusion dominate. Still, there are also expressions that problematise belonging to the majority society. Interestingly, several writers make use of an inversed version of the domestic-alien metaphor used by ethnic Norwegians to explain Breivik's exclusion from majority society.

Formulations indicating belonging and related to the ethnic conception category are especially evident in messages from groups or organisations since several of these were written in the name of or on behalf of immigrant organisations or groups. In the earlier-cited text from The Democratic Youth Union of East Kurdistan, this explicitly political organisation connects to central values in Norwegian politics and society by emphasising democracy, anti-racism and anti-discrimination. While such explicit political expressions are rare, several organisations and individuals highlighting their ethnicity connect their country of origin with the new homeland by displaying the national flags of the two countries. Markers of ethnic origin are made into symbols of inclusion into the new nation. Examples of this are the Albanian flag as used in one message and the Palestinian flag in another, with 'We LOVE this country' written across them.

An 'ethnic' message indicating ambiguity regarding belonging, reads as follows: 'On behalf of the nation's immigrants I express relief that the perpetrator was a "blonde Norwegian."' The statement can be understood in terms of the whiteness–non-whiteness conception. The perpetrator's 'blondness' becomes evidence that he cannot be of immigrant origin. The relief experienced implies what minority individuals – with the 'wrong' ethnic appearance – expected to have happened, perhaps based on the incidents of verbal and physical harassment, which occurred on the evening of 22 July before it was known that the perpetrator was not a Muslim, if the perpetrator had been of an origin other than 'blonde' and Christian. In earlier terror attacks such as the 1995 Oklahoma City case, where the perpetrator obviously belonged to the ethnic majority, the domestic-alien concept was used to dissociate the culprit from majority society by emphasising the 'alien'-part of the concept (Linenthal 2001); the terrorist was portrayed as so deviant that he simply could not be part of the majority. Here, minority individuals, by stressing the concept's 'domestic' part – the terrorist's blondness and, thus, apparent Norwegianness – can show that he does not belong to the minority.

Conclusions

The critical event of 22 July is a particularly significant case, which for some time shifted the dominating understanding of what it takes to be a Norwegian in the direction favouring a 'colour-blind' position (Muller Myrdahl 2014). This shift, in turn, suggests the accuracy of the observation that white respondents living in multicultural settings do not perceive whiteness *per se* as important to 'being Norwegian' (Vassenden 2010). But, while Muller Myrdahl builds on the study of mainstream media, and Vassenden on interviews with white people, the present study views the issue from the perspective of those who

are supposed to be included in majority society. Their expressions of non-belonging are not dominant but recurrent and imply that the obstacles to inclusion are greater than what the results of Muller Myrdahl and Vassenden indicate. However, given the size of the examined data and the obvious presence of civic values, the expressions should not be exaggerated but are still important since they are formulated in a context where unity and concord are the totally dominant societal norms. Identifying such expressions is all the more important given that anti-Muslim narratives have, in recent years, increased in Norway, on social media platforms and in mainstream media (Bangstad 2014).

The expressed feelings of belonging identified in the analysis section show that the dominant civic conception is not enough to analyse the layers of meaning embedded in the messages. Although expressions of affinity with Norway and civic values are prominent in the messages, the ethnic and whiteness–non-whiteness conceptions at play indicate that even during the window of opportunity, identified by Muller Myrdahl, minority individuals expressed that feelings of belonging partly depend on ethnicity and skin colour and that ‘the notable whitening’ of the public discourse taking place during the months before the 2012 Breivik-trial (Muller Myrdahl 2014: 492) was never really absent even in the immediate aftermath of the attacks and that Vassenden’s distinction between ‘white and non-white’ Norwegians, allowing for the latter to be seen as Norwegians, can be problematic seen from the perspective of the minority.

Religion also plays a role here. Analytically, the separation of religion from the cultural concept offers several advantages when interpreting messages from minority individuals of Muslim background. First, religion becomes yet another area where opinions and values can be highlighted. Second, the concept is used to indicate how secular and religious beliefs inspired by different cultural spheres are mixed and used to mark grief and solidarity as well as to embrace secular values such as democracy and openness, at least on a general level. Third, a focus on religion highlights the dramatic effects of a critical event on the individual, as shown in the cases of the hesitant Muslim who decides to enter the Christian shrine during *Ramadan*, and the man who expresses his relief that the attacks were not ‘organised by Islam’, thus exempting him from, in his own words, ‘the shame’ of being a Muslim (‘A greeting from inmates at Oslo prison’). The expressed importance of the religious affiliation underpins Naguib’s (2002) observation of the emphasis on religion before original national and ethnic affiliations among many Muslims in Norway. Hence, the analysis of ‘Norwegianness’ and, most likely, other examples of ‘nation-ness’ can be more specific when considered with religion as a separate analytical concept.

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The proximity to the terror attacks offered by the snapshots of reactions give insights into mixed feelings of belonging at a moment spatially and temporally close to an extremely critical event in a nation’s history. This mix indicates that, in a situation that calls for consensus and expressed affinity with the affected country, even individuals of minority background, acculturated to Norwegian lifestyles and cultural codes, express doubts regarding their belonging to majority society. Given that critical events can be seen as significant cases regarding the ways individuals conceive themselves, others and society at large, the Norwegian case provides valuable insights regarding immigrants’ feelings of belonging in Western societies characterised by diversity, but also by increasing xenophobia and anti-Muslim narratives.

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Notes

1. In 2013, the major groups comprising immigrants and Norwegian-born ones with immigrant parents came from Poland, Sweden, Pakistan, Somalia, Lithuania, Iraq, Germany, Vietnam, Denmark and Iran (International Migration 2014).
2. All messages from Archive Register (2012).
3. I am indebted to Oddbjørn Leirvik for this suggestion.
4. Here is used Richard Newman’s interpretation published in *Selections from Saadi’s Gulistan* (2004). Full translated poem available at Newman (2015).
5. ‘Secular’ is here understood not as the antithesis of ‘religion’ but as ‘a concept that brings together certain behaviours, knowledges and sensibilities in modern life’ (Asad 2003: 25).

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