

"Don't Turn Your Back" **- A Social Campaign Against Racism**

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I. The Situation of People of Color in Poland

In June 2015 the Council of Europe published a report that called on Hungary and Poland to fight extreme groups of racism and intolerance.¹ Why on Poland? In 2013, Poland was number 7 on the list of European countries where the most hate crimes were reported.² This may not seem like a high number; however, for a country with such a small rate of foreigners and people of color, this is an alarming direction.

In 2014 there were approximately 40,200 people of national or ethnic minorities living in Poland, which makes 1.23 per cent of the population in total.³ With many of this 1.23 per cent belonging to German and Ukrainian minorities, people of color constitute an even smaller minority group in the largely homogenous Polish society, a minority group that can be easily identified. The European Network against Racism notes: "Although instances of racist violence and crimes do occur, racist violence is not drastic and or commonplace. Foreigners visiting Poland more often meet with dislike and xenophobia than racism."⁴ Regarding the exact number of racist and xenophobic assaults, the numbers vary a lot depending on the definition and report authors. According to EU statistics, 30 complaints of racist assaults were reported to Polish authorities in 2014,⁵ while according to Polish government number of cases amounted to 1,062 of new proceedings of racist and xenophobic assaults.⁶ In 2013, the EU noted 95 victims of crimes motivated by skin color,⁷ whereas the Polish government listed 835 cases reported.⁸ Working with the numbers of the Polish government, this marks an increase of 27 per cent. One reason for the very different numbers of racist crimes reported is that the numbers issued by the Polish government also incorporate online hate speech. 46 per cent of the cases tackled in 2014 related to crimes committed using the Internet.⁹

The wide spread of Internet hate speech indicates that racism is more broadly accepted by Polish society. This is emphasized by the fact that even though Poles hold more prejudices against other minority groups,¹⁰ black people are the main target of hate speech on the Internet: 70 percent of young Poles encounter racist sayings on the internet, and 58 percent of Polish youth have heard hateful comments on black people from their friends.¹¹

1 Gotev, Georgi. *Council of Europe criticises racism in Hungary, Poland*. EurActiv.com. 9th of June 2015.

2 European Network against Racism. *Racist crime in Europe. ENAR Shadow Report 2013-2014*. 2015. p. 32.

3 European Network against Racism. *Responding to racism in Poland*. 2014. p. 4

4 European Network against Racism. *Responding to racism in Poland*. 2014. p. 4

5 European Network against Racism. *Responding to racism in Poland*. 2014. p. 14

6 Prokuratura Generalna. *Prosecutors in the fight against racism and xenophobia - report for 2014*. 7th of May 2015.

7 European Network against Racism. *Responding to racism in Poland*. 2014. p. 14.

8 Prokuratura Generalna. *Prosecutors in the fight against racism and xenophobia - report for 2014*. 7th of May 2015.

9 Prokuratura Generalna. *Prosecutors in the fight against racism and xenophobia - report for 2014*. 7th of May 2015.

10 Michał Bilewicz, Marta Marchlewska, Wiktor Soral, Mikołaj Winiewski. *Hate Speech in Poland 2014. Summary of the national opinion poll*. 2014.

11 Michał Bilewicz, Marta Marchlewska, Wiktor Soral, Mikołaj Winiewski. *Hate Speech in Poland 2014. Summary*

However, research on hate speech on the internet against black people in Poland is scarce. When it comes to hate crimes, Agnieszka Mikulska, researcher at the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, notes in her study: "The attacks usually occur in public places, frequently in the presence of third parties – in public transport or at bus stops, on the street, during walks, or public events. Witnesses rarely assist victims. The perpetrators are generally young men, usually acting in a group. The perpetrators and victims are usually strangers, people passing on the street or sharing a public transport. However, in the case of aggression against juveniles, the aggressors are school classmates."¹² Apart from that case study, there is not much research regarding single incidents of racist assaults. A thorough case study was undertaken in 2011 by the "NEVER AGAIN" Association. It lists all incidents that occurred in 2010.¹³

Regardless of the efforts of the Polish government to encourage victims to report racist assaults,¹⁴ many victims refrain from filing a complaint, feeling that the police would be of no help.¹⁵ Furthermore, language barriers¹⁶ stop victims from reporting assaults.

II. Our Campaign “Don’t Turn Your Back”

In our social media campaign, we are targeting the problem identified by Agnieszka Mikulskas report: "Witnesses rarely assist victims." The goal of our campaign is to target bystanders and to raise awareness. We are calling for civil courage and call on the Polish majority to include people of color. After seeking advice from Jacek Purski from "NEVER AGAIN" Association – an influential NGO that works in awareness raising and monitoring incidents of racism and hate crimes in Poland – we have decided to promote the message, reflected by our slogan: "Don't Turn Your Back // Nie Odwracaj Się Plecami". It is targeted at young people, aged 18-28. To emphasize the personal address to young people as potential bystanders, we have incorporated silhouettes and real people into our logo and main campaign image.

We chose Facebook as our main platform due to the kind of content that we are posting and type of audience that we want to access. We have also cooperated with other fellows and HIA Polska, asking them to promote our campaign on their Facebook pages and YouTube channel.

Our slogan is: Don't turn your back on racism! It's up to you to show your true colors!

of the national opinion poll. 2014.

12 Mikulska, Agnieszka. *Racism in Poland. Report on Research Among Victims of Violence with Reference to National, Racial, or Ethnic Origin*. 2010. 2f.

13 Kornak, Marcin. *Brown Book 2010*. East Europe Monitoring Centre "NEVER AGAIN" Association. 2011.

14 Report Racism Campaign. *Report Racism*.

15 Mikulska, Agnieszka. *Racism in Poland. Report on Research Among Victims of Violence with Reference to National, Racial, or Ethnic Origin*. 2010. 4.

16 Report Racism Campaign. *Report Racism*.

The logo of our campaign looks as follows:



And this is our main image, used also as a background picture on our Facebook Page:

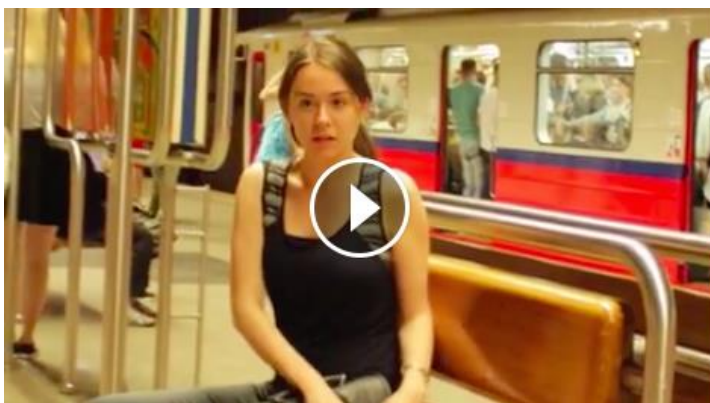


One source of inspiration for us was a movie that tackles prejudices by the Australian NGO "Beyond Blue", called "The Invisible Discriminator".¹⁷ Furthermore, the movie "Never judge people by their appearance"¹⁸ encouraged us to tackle racism and discrimination in day-to-day situations.

In a series of videos, we have attempted to show discrimination occurring on a daily basis by the example of a person of color wandering in the streets of Warsaw. Filmed from his perspective, the first two sequences show examples of alienation and isolation. In the first video, a woman - upon seeing the person from whose perspective the video is shot - is scared that her handbag might be stolen. She closes her bag and then hurriedly walks away.

VIDEO 1. Who is this woman scared of? Kogo ona się boi?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9nU7jBMbTv4>



In our second video, a group of young people stare, whisper and take a picture in the street. The

17 <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/resources/for-me/stop-think-respect-home>

18 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hAhxYXrHrSE>

example of taking a picture as a form of isolation and racism was inspired by the article of Elliott Hester, a black journalist from the US, who experienced a similar situation when he visited Poland in 2005.¹⁹ Up to this point of the video series, it is still unclear from whose perspective it is shot - this does not only serve to build up the suspense and generate more followers for our campaign, but also to show the viewer how hurtful isolation and alienation feels. The viewer suddenly finds himself in the situation of being stared at and turned away from. Quotes at the end of the videos enforce the discomfort of the viewer.

VIDEO 2. Who is this group staring at? Na kogo oni się gapią?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MptKBb2fQpE>



The last video of the series takes racism and discrimination to an extreme: The person of color is beaten up in the streets; at the end of the scene it is revealed that this happened to him as a result of his skin color. We decided to include this drastic situation into the video after consulting a report of "NEVER AGAIN" Association,²⁰ which lists incidents of racism and xenophobia from 2010. Amongst these incidents are also incidents of violence, such as beatings.

VIDEO 3. Whom are they attacking? Kto został zaatakowany?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_v1Yf7rMvmA



19 Hester, Elliott. *A black American in Poland discovers a 'different' racism*. 16th of October 2005. The Chicago Tribune.

20 Kornak, Marcin. *Brown Book 2010*. East Europe Monitoring Centre "NEVER AGAIN" Association. 2011.

Visuals and Graphics

Apart from showing harm and effects of alienation and isolation, our campaign also incorporates visual elements and graphics that aim to inform our followers and potential bystanders about the situation in Poland. We want to raise awareness about the fact that hate speech against black people on the Internet is still more widespread than hate speech against other minority groups - even though it is less accepted by young Poles.



Aside from raising awareness, we also provide resources and case studies on how to combat discrimination. We encourage people, who have witnessed hate speech – be it online or offline - to react and report it. This will be achieved by providing examples and possibilities of how to react on our Facebook campaign page. We'll thus try to increase awareness of organizations that tackle those issues in Poland: among them are HejtStop, a campaign that paints over insulting graffiti, and the No Hate Speech Movement.

III. Implementing the Campaign

One of the main obstacles that we faced in the beginning of the campaign is the sensitivity of the topic. It is not easy to talk about race and color, especially when these two topics are mostly avoided in the public discourse or are mentioned with caution and a feeling of discomfort. In addition, being international fellows, we were not well informed about the situation of colored people in Poland and had to learn about the topic as we were designing and launching the campaign. We have received a genuine support from HIA members and fellows, who helped us to translate the sources and we also have found reports about racism and hate speech in English. Meeting with Jacek Purski from "NEVER AGAIN" and representatives of the *La Mama Restaurant* (a restaurant in Warsaw which is run by a chef from Nigeria and aims to bring people from different cultures and backgrounds together) has helped us to understand the situation better. We understood that the problem is complex and multifaceted, because it reflects experiences of different people. While some people have experienced alienation and isolation, others have become a subject of direct verbal abuse or even physical attack.

In our campaign we decided to reveal these different instances of discrimination and racism. Our video series, which don't reveal the subject of discrimination till the very end (and even in the end you can only see a part of the subject's face) deals with the topic carefully, while still providing statistics and facts that highlight the existing problem and suggestions on how to combat the issue. We

have also included personal stories from Nigerian people we met in *La Mama Restaurant* on their experiences and what they think Polish society shouldn't "turn their backs on".

Regarding the promotion of the page, our team member Nora was actively contacting Polish NGO's and organizations through email and their official Facebook pages, which has helped us to increase our visibility and engage with Polish speakers as well as international groups. We so far have contacted around 100 organizations through their Facebook pages and, while only several organizations responded to us, our active engagement has helped us to reach 8 800 post reach. On the fifth day of our campaign we have received more than 40 likes from Polish speakers. We have also paid for an advert on Facebook, which has generated 30 likes. In total, we have reached 227 likes up to now. This shows that promoting the page organically can be as effective if not more effective than the paid options, if you include engaging and informative content.

IV. Lessons Learnt

One of the things that we realized while doing the project is, that there is still a tremendous amount of work, which needs to be done both in terms of research about the experience of colored people and anti-racism law enforcement in Poland. Our one-week campaign was just a "tip of the iceberg", but it nevertheless expressed our view – everything starts with personal actions. As none of us will be staying in Poland, we hope that our campaign, or at least its concept, can be kept alive and people will be encouraged to take actions against discriminatory acts that they witness both online and offline.

Conducting interviews with people who have actually experienced hatred and violence made us realize the weight of responsibility that one takes when working on the social campaign. The stories that you hear can be sensitive and sincerely vulnerable and by exposing them for a good cause you take on the responsibility for any effects, including the unexpected ones. Therefore, ensuring privacy and safety of your interviewees is really important.

V. Conclusion, Recommendation, and Moving Ahead

As it would be a pity to freeze the campaign, a voluntary from HIA will continue raising awareness and maintaining the Facebook page. For example, the series of videos could be continued to include also other situations from daily life. Furthermore, a next important step would be a tutorial of how to act against different forms of hate speech and hate crimes directed at people of color. Don't turn your back! But what do you do instead? Best practice examples as well as contacts to organizations should also set a focus on online hate speech, as this is a big problem, as outlined in the beginning of the report. Furthermore, there is a lack of research analyzing cases of hate crimes that occurred after 2011 . Those cases should be evaluated to come up with new trends and possible measure of counteraction. For now, the visibility and outreach of the campaign has decreased slightly after the end of our fellowship, because we couldn't maintain the page as regularly as during the fellowship. However, two posts have been added which tell the stories of two Nigerians we met at *La Mama Restaurant*. Our team member Thuy Anh had collected their stories and pictures, because we felt it is very important that the voice of people of color in Warsaw is incorporated into the campaign. In the future it would be nice to keep up this idea and present more personal stories.

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