

OTHER PEOPLE'S GODS ARE WATCHING TOO

EFFECTS OF CROSS-RELIGIOUS PRIMES ON PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

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INTRODUCTION

- There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that religious situations/contexts/ecologies do have significant prosocial effects, be they expressions of parochial in-group favouritism or extended prosociality (Ahmed & Salas, 2008; 2011; Ahmed & Hammarstedt, 2011; Bulbulia & Mahoney, 2008; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007; Tsang et al., 2012; Ruffle & Sosis, 2010; Ariely, 2012; Bering et al., 2005) regardless of self-reported individual religiosity (Norenzayan & Shariff, 2008).
- Recent experimental studies supported these effects for in-group members, moving these findings into natural settings by using public good games in real-life religious contexts (Xygalatas, 2012; Ahmed and Salas, 2013).

Key research question

- But what are the effects of religious primes associated with an out-group?
- To address this research question, we conducted the first naturalistic study of cross-religious primes on prosocial behaviour, where we compared the effects of Christian, Hindu, and secular contextual primes on generosity among Mauritian Catholics.

Hypotheses & Predictions

- H1:** Only in-group religious primes will have a positive effect on prosocial behaviour.
- H2:** Both in-group and out-group religious primes will have a positive effect on prosocial behaviour.
- P1:** There will be no main effect of religiosity on generosity.

METHODS

- We used a within-subject experimental design, where each participant made economic decisions in an inconspicuous dictator game (Kahneman, Knetsch & Thaler, 1986) in three different locations in counterbalanced order.
- Participants:** 102 Catholic Mauritian Creoles (48 M, 54 F).
- Contextual primes:** (1) an in-group religious prime (a Catholic church); (2) an out-group religious prime (a Hindu temple); (3) a neutral secular prime (a restaurant).



To avoid effects of agency (Bateson et al., 2006) we made sure that the three locations had a similar number of representations of agents (icons, statues, posters of humans).

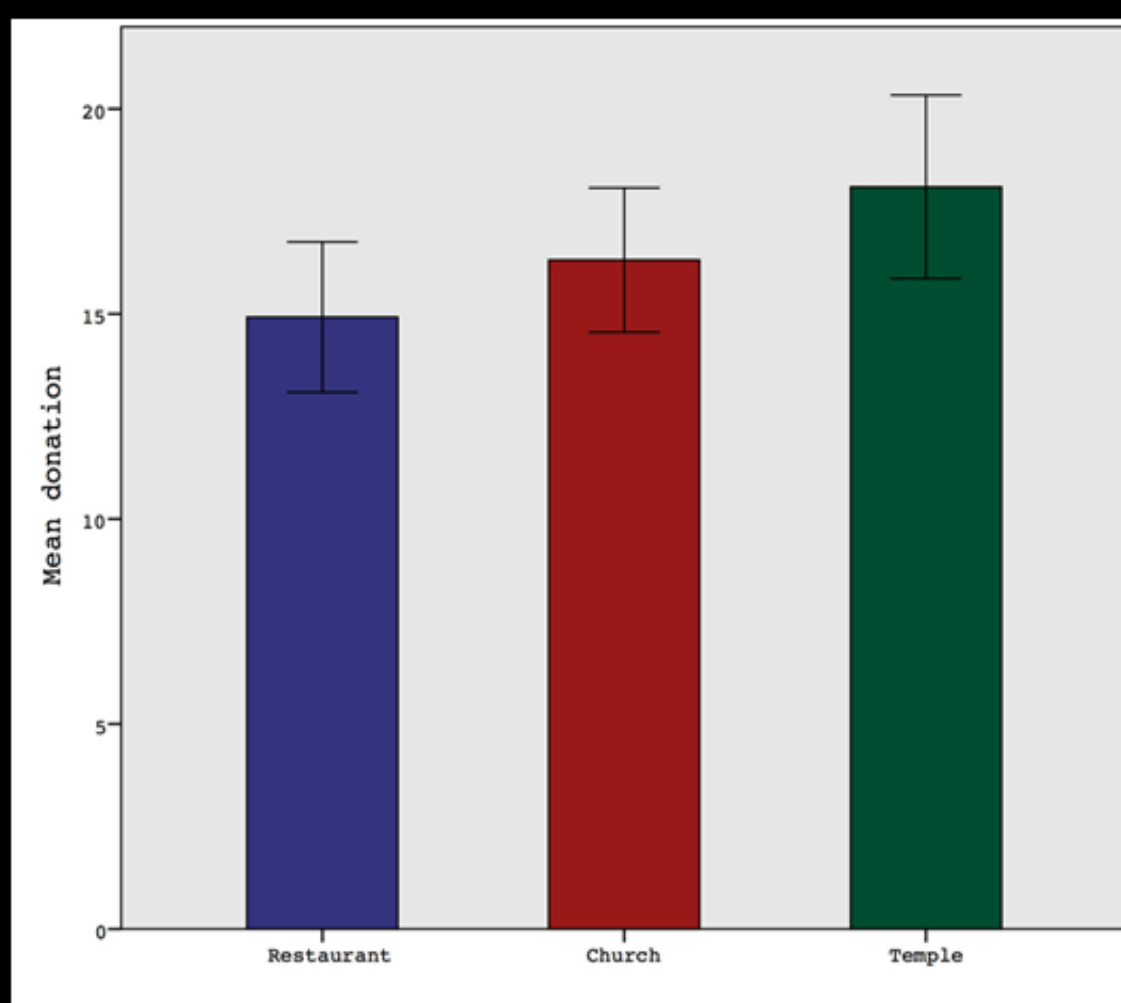
Cover story

- Navigational task:** participants were told that the aim of the study was to test spatial navigation in various settings, and that for each navigational task they finished successfully they would receive 100 Mauritian rupees (MUR) and move to a new location. The task consisted in using a rod approximately one meter long to navigate a paper cup through a labyrinth.
- Charity task:** after completing each task and receiving their pay in the form of 100 single rupee coins placed in a bowl on the table, participants were offered the opportunity to anonymously contribute to those who were not successful.
- Questionnaires:** short interviews were conducted after each task (perceived difficulty of the navigational task) and a questionnaire was administered at the end of the experiment (demographics; religiosity, church attendance, and frequency of prayer).



To avoid anchoring effects of each donation on the subsequent one, we asked participants to allocate coins by handfuls from their own bowl to the charity bowl.

FINDINGS



Donations across the three locations. Error bars represent standard errors of the mean.

- Both in-group and out-group religious primes increased generosity among participants compared to the neutral/secular prime.**
- Mean donation in the restaurant was 14.92 MUR (Mdn = 10, SD = 18.51); mean donation in the church was 16.31 (Mdn = 12, SD = 17.78); and mean donation at the Hindu temple was 18.10 (Mdn = 11, SD = 22.61).
- A repeated measures ANOVA revealed that **the differences in donations across venues were significant when accounting for individual religiosity** ($F(2, 198) = 5.21, p < .01$).
- Planned contrasts revealed that donations in the restaurant were significantly lower than in the Christian church:** $F(1,99) = 8.53, p < .01$; **and the Hindu temple:** $F(1,99) = 6.86, p = .01$. **However, donations did not differ significantly between the two religious locations (temple and church)** $F(1,99) = .12, p = .73$.
- Individual religiosity had no main effect on prosocial behaviour.**

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