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Article abstract

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Keywords: whiteness ; class ; England ; immigration ; attitudes ; race

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Introduction

Critical sociology is supposed to make the familiar unfamiliar in order to understand it better. A research project undertaken by a team from the University of the West of England-Bristol[2] in the 2005-2006 period aimed to do just this: by asking what it means to be 'white' in provincial cities in England.

Although there is a vast corpus on 'race' in the British context, a relatively small proportion of this focuses on the ethnic majority, i.e. white Britons. Indeed, in the British context there is no direct parallel with the investigation of white identities that has occurred in the USA, within the multidisciplinary field of 'whiteness studies' (Garner, 2006; 2007a). There is not space here to describe the various strands of the academic endeavour of focussing critically on the racialisation of white identities[3]. However, in order to clarify the following analysis, it should be stressed that this project does not conceptualise a homogeneous white collectivity, in which each member is affected equally by racialisation and derives equal benefit from occupying a dominant structural social location. People can be members of passive groups, or 'series', as Iris Young argues (1994), which are not reflexively organised around mobilising the identity in question. Rather, at certain moments that identity is mobilised, and people thus mobilised then become a 'social group' proper. This idea, as Amanda Lewis (2004) points out, is similar to Marx's distinction between classes *in* themselves (passive), and classes *for* themselves (reflexive and active). I would add that it also overlays Weber's notion of class, where classes are formed *only* around mobilisation for resources on specific markets. The point of this is to assert that when we talk about white identities we are not focussing solely on extreme forms of highly reflexive whiteness like those of

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[1] This article is based on the work carried out under the UK's Economic and Social Science Research Council's Identities and Social Action programme (2004-2008). You can read more about the various projects it contained in these two collections, both edited by the Programme's Director, Professor Margaret Wetherell and published by Palgrave MacMillan in 2009 ; *Identities in the 21st Century: new trends in changing times*: http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?PID=335557 and *Theorizing Identities and Social Action*: http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?PID=335545.

[2] Simon Clarke and Rosie Gilmour (Centre for Psychosocial Studies) and Steve Garner (Sociology).

[3] See Garner, 2007b for a Francophone introduction.

far-right organisations, even if those are interesting cases. Here, we are interested in the mundane discourses of being white.

Neither do I suppose that white people share a consciousness of being white and that this matters *to them* in their lives. On the contrary, one of the effects of being in a position of relative powerfulness (be it in terms of class, gender or 'race') is the normality and goes-without-saying quality of living in that location for the people who do so (Frankenberg, 1993; Phoenix, 1996; Byrne, 2006). Indeed, 'race', like ethnicity, is often linked only with minorities. White respondents in surveys frequently deny that 'race' has anything to do with the way they live. In this article, I hope to establish that in contemporary England, there are a small set of articulations of 'race', class and nation that while engaged in by people from all social backgrounds, are also inflected by class positions. This is because the cultural (ideas, meanings and practices associated with whatever 'race' is) is always anchored in the material (economics and the life experiences of a classed society).

What I have tried to do is analyse how people discursively make 'white' identities in contemporary provincial Britain, in both working and middle-class milieux, and in places where there are fewer BAME [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic] people than average.

In recent years, a series of opinion polls and qualitative surveys have demonstrated a more hostile turn in British public responses to immigration and asylum than was the case in the 1980s and 1990s (Lewis, 2005; CRE, 2006; MORI, 2003, YouGov, 2003, 2004, 2007). Our project was aimed partly at exploring the 'why' and the 'how' in this equation. Why are attitudes to minorities becoming more hostile, and how are they articulated outside the confines of opinion polling, which produces particular types of response to usually very direct questions?

Between January 2005 and May 2006, we conducted 128 interviews with 64 people in four areas (2 in Plymouth and 2 in Bristol). We selected one large estate and one middle-class residential area (chosen according to a variety of socio-economic indicators from the 2001 Census) in each city. We also chose places with below average proportions of BAME residents because the geographical work (Dorling and Thomas, 2004; Simpson, 2004) shows that the vast majority of UK nationals live in electoral wards with fewer than 5 per cent BAME residents.

There were two rounds of interviews, each serving different purposes. The first elicited a life story centring on how the interviewees defined themselves and thought about 'home' and 'community', while the second revisited some of the points raised in the first and then asked broad questions about Britishness, immigration, the European Union and welfare. The findings presented below are primarily taken from the second round of interviews.

Before presenting the findings however, I want to explain the two important contextual factors that have most influenced the parameters on the way English people have been thinking about racialised difference over recent years.

Contexts: the decline of class in public discourse

The use of the concept of class in public policy and discourse in the UK has been in decline since the early 1980s. This has been noted by researchers who point to the 'cultural turn'; the ascendance of postmodern theories for explaining the social world; the collapse of the Eastern bloc; and the domination of neo-liberal ideas in the period since the first Thatcher administration, which took office in 1979. Thatcher's successor, John Major, famously pronounced that Britain was a 'classless society' in 1994. For sociologists, this both presents a problem and comes as a relief. Mrs Thatcher had in 1987 stated that there was 'no such thing as society' (Keay, 1987). At least with Major there was a recognition that society existed! However, a succession of terms, such as 'social exclusion', 'disadvantage' and 'deprived areas', has been deployed in public policy since this period to cover the space where 'class' was formerly used. Simultaneously, and not coincidentally, the long-term trend toward a more equitable distribution of wealth in Britain (1911-91) (Office of National Statistics, 2004) has been reversed, so that the top 10% and the bottom 10% are in the first decade of the twenty-first century, now as polarised in terms of the proportion of wealth they hold as they were back in the 1960s[4]. What would previously have been addressed as class divisions can no longer easily be approached under this heading. Indeed, empirical fieldwork on class identification demonstrates a deep ambivalence about class, in that people readily acknowledge there is a class system, but are less willing to identify directly as belonging to one or other of its component groups (Savage et al., 2001; Skeggs, 1997, 2004). I suggest this is evidence of the success of the neo-liberal project in its British guise. Popular understandings of identity have been saturated to the point where the norm is for identification as an individual rather than as a member of a collective.

The absence of class from the lexicon of public discourse however does not mean that the objects produced in the replacement discourse are different: there is still an 'abject' (Haylett, 2001) strand of the working class that is constructed as dangerous, not respectable, and the 'Other' of dominant middle-class values. Paradoxically, the erasure of class is only possible by finding a proxy: in this case, the cultural pathologisation of working-class behaviour on a number of fronts. This recalls nineteenth-century practices similar to those which characterised colonial

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[4] 'Throughout this period, the personal wealth held by the wealthiest 1 per cent of the population grew as a proportion of the national share (from 17 per cent in 1991 to 24 per cent in 2002)' (Dorling et al., 2007)

people and the urban working classes as dirty, childlike, lazy and immoral. In its twenty-first century forms, this ranges from the televisual confrontation of good (middle-class) with bad (working-class) models of personhood in reality television shows (Skeggs and Wood, 2008); to the othering of white working-class students as less valuable agents of capital vis-à-vis BAME children in school selection (Reay et al., 2007), and the development of the figure of the 'Chav' (Tyler, 2008). The term 'Chav' now stands where the term 'underclass', drawn from the American context, used to be. It is a mechanism for projecting contemporary anxieties about disorder onto white working-class bodies. One longstanding aspect of this projection is the idea that the working class are more racist than the middle class, and intrinsically so, because of lower levels of education. The trailer for the BBC's March 2008 season of films called 'White', showed a series of foreign words literally being inscribed on a working-class man's face, until it disappeared, obliterated by foreignness. The films showed exclusively working-class people, as if there is no need to examine middle-class attitudes, or that integration and the tensions around it, only happen and should only happen, in working-class residential areas.

Context: the failure of multiculturalism

The second important context in which our work takes place is the so-called failure of multiculturalism. This failure, or indeed the success of multiculturalism, remain untested by any objective criteria. However, since the London Bombings, it has become almost a cliché to refer to multiculturalism as having failed, particularly in popular discourse and in sections of the print media. In fact there has never been a consensus in Britain around exactly what multiculturalism is: a set of practices or a set of aspirations? A conservative framework for managing difference, or an emancipatory one for recognising difference? In his seminal evaluation of multiculturalism, Michel Wieviorka (1998) notes that multiculturalism varies from one intellectual tradition to another, and from one political context to another. I think this starting point is preferable to one which immediately adopts a universalist tone. Left-wing and liberal Critiques of multiculturalism in Britain have ranged from the left to the right and focused on its prioritisation of ethnicity over class and gender; over its communitarian rather than egalitarian philosophy (see. Barry (2000), Vasta (2009)). The right has generally focussed on the outcomes of public policy supposedly favouring minorities over the indigenous majority and thus constituting some form of 'reverse discrimination'[5]. Moreover, multiculturalism's champions are not a homogenous group either (Parekh, 2000; Modood, 2007). Even the chair of the (now defunct) Commission for Racial

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[5] The term 'reverse discrimination' goes back to the early 1960s and critiques of Civil Rights legislation in the USA. One of the fullest summaries of its arguments can be found in Sowell (1990).

Equality, Trevor Philips (2004), had been criticising multiculturalism as merely the celebration of diversity since 2004, and later argued that multiculturalism should be dropped because it preserves difference at the expense of equality' (Phillips, 2006). However, whatever position one holds regarding its nature or its application to British governance, what is undeniable is the sea change in focus in the discourse since 2005. After the July 2005 bombings the discourse on multiculturalism in the UK has been transformed into a discourse about whether or not Muslims can be integrated successfully into British society (Allen, 2007)[6]. The old recognition of difference basis of multiculturalism, linked with the municipal Left ('steel bands and samosas') has been reconfigured as a way to return the burden of proof to minorities. The implication is that people live substantially different lives, governed by substantially different values, in substantially different settings. The 'difference' generated by minorities is therefore the problem to be solved by public policy. Yet this dominant discourse co-exists with that of conviviality (Gilroy, 2004), which argues that in some urban centres, ethnic and racialised difference do not bear the power to hurt in everyday interactions that once they did. This is also illuminated by Harris's (2006) study of British Asians teenager's language use[7].

How does this shift manifest itself in our interviews? The assumption behind opinion polling and government policy in recent years has been that working-class people are more likely to express racist ideas and their communities are more likely to be won over by the Far right's messages. Electoral successes of the British National Party in specific areas of the North, and in Outer London (Cruddas et al., 2005; John et al., 2006), which had given the party a representation of around 50 local councillors and 2 MEPs by June 2009, may well have made government concerns about managing white responses to immigration more acute. Indeed, the Commission on Integration and Cohesion's commissioned MORI attitudinal survey (CIC/MORI, 2007), one sample group is effectively labelled 'Far Right Target Group'. The socio-economic groups most vulnerable to the BNP (Cruddas et al., 2005; John et al., 2006) are C1, C2 and D (skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers), and this might be considered a good enough basis for considering the white working class as ripe for an intervention. However, further analysis of the polls suggests firstly, that the difference between working and middle-class responses is much more relative than absolute, and secondly, that the traditionally liberal graduates who comprise a chunk of the Labour vote are becoming less liberal on immigration (McLaren and Johnson, 2007). It was clear from the responses to our questions posed to both middle and working-class

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[6] Using google search with parameters set for 2006 onwards, I challenge the reader to find more than a handful of references to multicultural and multiculturalism in Britain, that are not about Muslims /Islam.

[7] Harris and Rampton also have a chapter in the book (Wetherell, ed., 2009) from which our report is derived.

interviewees that the perceptions and language are shared to a large extent. Importantly, there is also a readiness, across class and gender lines, to use Muslims as the primary example of a non-integrating problem group. So the contexts referred to here, the decline of class in public discourse and the decline of multiculturalism, are not so much the background but part of the foreground to our conversations in the 2005-06 period.

Our qualitative fieldwork took place against a backdrop of wider attitudinal trends identified in large Europe-wide surveys such as the Eurobarometer (since 1988) and European Social Survey (ESS) over the past decade. Simply put, despite national variations, these polls demonstrate an increase in the significance of immigration as a public policy issue, and a rise in hostility to immigration and immigrants. Relevant data contained in the *International Social Survey Program* (ISSP) show education, religion and married status as key predictive variables for the degree of attitudinal hostility (Todd Jewell et al., 2009). There are always cultural problems involved in cross-national comparison (SORA, 2001), and the logic and framing of the questions, as well as the use of proxies when no survey question corresponds directly to the one being dealt with theoretically (Citrin and Sides, 2007) could also be critiqued. However, it is clear that while there are national distinctions, there has been a broad trend toward the expression of more hostile attitudes toward minorities and especially migrants (for the UK, see Crawley, 2005; Ipsos-MORI, 2009).

The kinds of question posed typically address perceptions of the consequences and reality of migrant presence, and attitudes toward social change. Kessler and Freeman (2005) stress attitudinal factors such as political ideology and assessment of the EU, while Card et al. (2005: 41) who are closer to the mainstream in their analysis, note both the range of national profiles drawn from the ESS, and regular patterns of response (by age, educational level socioeconomic position), arguing that:

> '... attitudes toward immigration are shaped by (and possibly shape) views about a variety of different channels through which immigration affects the economy, national culture, and the social status of natives. Views toward immigrants are also shaped by (or possibly shape) underlying attitudes about social homogeneity and the desirability of social contact with other people'.

Indeed, Hainmueller and Hiscox's paper (2007) on the ESS, seems to sum up the principal contemporary quantitative arguments: the key variable is education, which explains other cultural preferences.

However, Citrin and Sides' analysis of the 2002-03 ESS, building on Sniderman et al. (2004) identifies a very pertinent issue for this article: the perception of cultural threat. They argue that

individuals respond in a more hostile way to immigration when they prioritise cultural homogeneity as a national asset (i.e. they define the nation more in ethnic than in civic terms), and that this is statistically significant in all 20 of the countries researched (Citrin and Sides, 2007). This variable is more significant than the size of foreign-born population (contra Quillian, 1995) in predicting levels of antipathy, for example. How does this insight engage with our fieldwork? By seeking to assess whether non-economic issues are pertinent in the construction of anti-immigration opinion. There is a small literature (Fetzer 2000; Jackman and Volpert 1996) in which hostility toward immigrants is posited as closely linked to rising levels of unemployment, and people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale are also seen as more likely to be hostile because they are more likely themselves to be in competition with immigrant labour. One element of this equation which is not really addressed in the quantitative literature is the elasticity of the terms 'immigrant', 'minority' and 'national' in the context of these national discourses. It emerges from our qualitative work as well as that of others (Lewis, 2005), for example, that interviewees usually conflate immigrants and asylum seekers, and frequently conflate non-white nationals with immigrants and asylum seekers, leading to the phenomenon of grossly overestimating the proportion of foreigners in a given space (local or national) (Citrin and Sides, 2007: 487). However, analysing perceptions of the cultural threat enables them to reach a conclusion that is echoed in our work:

> 'The small explanatory role played by country-level factors suggests that attitudes towards immigrants have become increasingly divorced from social reality as the issue has become politicized; that is, people's perceptions of immigration and immigrants come to rely more on vivid events (at home and abroad) and messages from politicians and media, and less on the demographic and economic conditions that have been the main focus of research to date' (Ibid.: 501).

I think this intersection provides an excellent example of critical qualitative and quantitative work. It has long been assumed that people's opinions are based on logical and rational conclusions based on economic and material realities. The conclusion above interrogates this starting point. Moreover, it is evident from listening to our interviewees that their grasp of numbers, who is actually who, and what the competition in which they are engaged in actually consists of is often very tenuous: the space of discourse on minorities, as we will see below, is one dominated by an absence of information (which incidentally, is another of Citrin and Sides' variables). We turn now to some of the interview material and a discussion of the findings.

Class, whiteness and the 'Other'

The second round of interviews produced material on the othering process engaged in by White UK nationals. We note here some of the patterns this process threw up. What we found was that working and middle-class interviewees were often concerned about similar things; i.e. competition for resources and what they see as the (negatively) changing face of British society on a number of levels. However, the emphases and the ways in which these topics were brought up are classed. Typically the working-class interviewees' opinions were framed by first-hand experience of competing for benefits, housing and/or skilled and semi-skilled employment (not necessarily with minorities). They were more likely to have or have had family members who in the same position. This does not grant an insight into whether the perception of minorities getting unfair advantage is borne out, but it does constitute knowledge of the relative powerlessness of being in that situation. Indeed, the question for me is why are minorities so frequently transformed into the only or the major competitors in such discourse?

Adam (20s, WC)[8] for example, is becoming aware of the difficulties accessing decent employment and housing in Bristol, which is an expensive city.

> 'Well, if you're a British citizen, as a British citizen, yeah, if you are a British citizen, then you should ... I'm sorry ... At the end of the day, if you're coming over from another country, you've got to understand how our country works, do you know what I mean, so you know, you should respect and understand what our law … you know what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. You can't come into another country and then get everything handed to you on a plate. I'm sorry, I just don't agree with that'.

Adam thus conflates cultural integration with entitlement to welfare, a recurrent discursive association in our interviews. In Mary's case, her confrontation with Bristol City Council housing officers draws on images gleaned from media:

> 'There was a case about an Indian family staying in a hotel and they just kept paying for them. And I said to them, if I was black or wore a sari and had half a dozen kids, I said, you'd put me in a place right now. They said, that's not very nice, Mrs. Butler [name changed]. I said, no it isn't, but that happens to be true … And I'm not prejudiced, but we should come first, we are British, we are born here'.

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[8] Throughout the interview excerpts, the interviewees' names have been changed. We also denote their class identities by 'WC' (working class), and 'MC' (middle class).

As can be seen from 'Mary's claim, an association we frequently found linked two groups that were, *a priori*, undeserving of the priority accorded them: migrants/asylum-seekers (or whoever were thought to fall into those categories), and, to a lesser extent, 'indigenous' white British who are not pulling their economic weight (e.g. young single mothers and people getting benefit when they should be working). 'Mary's reference: 'if I had six kids' is to single mothers. She and her husband live next door to one, whose boyfriend burgled their flat. They are dismissive in their interviews about the ease with which young single mothers access housing and boyfriends.

'Les' (50s, WC) here talking about his estate in Bristol, takes up the theme of the undeserving white poor:

> Q How do you feel about things like the welfare system or the benefits system in Britain?
>
> A 'There's definitely more going out than goes in to it. There's too many people on it, for a start. I see them in this area, people who shouldn't be on it, but they are. … I'm not on about the older ones who have retired. I'm on about the young ones who've never tried to get a job and things like that. It's too easy to get now.'

This heightened sensitivity over entitlement is more acute for these working-class respondents than their middle-class counterparts, whose different life experiences allow them the distance to evaluate social problems from the outside. However, what we might call a discursive 'hinge' between working and middle-class accounts is the use of 'scripts' (Edwards, 2003) and 'commonplaces' (Billig, 1991), such as the 'when-in-Rome' argument. We found respondents from across the spectrum using 'when-in-Rome' as a clinching argument for why people should assimilate into British culture. This is predicated on the idea that if the speaker (a British person) went to one of the countries that problematic immigrants originate from (almost always an Islamic one in our sample, although James (below) also uses Japan), then he/she would not be able to pursue aspects of British culture. Typical examples given are to do with dress codes and religious worship.

> 'I feel to a certain extent that if people are going to be here, they should play by our rules rather than we should bend over backwards to let them play by their rules. I wouldn't expect to go to a foreign country and totally live out my culture if it wasn't the way people did things there (…) I just think it is the way the world works. You know, if I went to Japan I would expect to take my shoes off or whatever it is when you go into somebody's house, the same way. I think if people want to embrace our culture, they should embrace our culture and if they don't want to, then don't live here. It's simple' (James, 50s, MC, Plymouth).

The establishment of a reasonable set of expectations regarding cultural adaptation is a device for highlighting the illegitimacy of non-integrating behaviour. Yet the parallel is a false one, depending on the status of white UK nationals abroad being equivalent to that of the groups they are comparing themselves with; generally non-white migrants. This erases an entire history of colonial encounters (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009) and the relative privilege currently bestowed by holding an EU passport in the contemporary world (Garner, 2007c). While the middle-class sample shared this framing device, these individuals usually had little experience of being on housing lists or of understanding themselves as competing for employment with migrants and other minority groups. They were principally home-owners with professional careers (although some had retired). Their concerns were more abstract, analytical and remote; cultural segregation, population density and its consequences for the tax base were those most frequently raised:

Barry (20s, MC, Bristol) sums up the argument:

> 'I suppose I feel we're a small country trying to accommodate a lot of people. And I feel there must come a limit to how many people we can accommodate without everything going to pot without losing the benefits of living in the country we have, not so much from an identity point of view, but more from the point of view of sustainability of resources'.

Another of the middle-class immigration topics is the development of linguistic and cultural segregation, as Martin (60s, MC, Bristol) asserts:

> Q What does the word immigrant mean to you?
>
> A 'Not necessarily an ethnic thing. Basically someone from another culture who's come into our culture and who should adapt to our culture (...) If they want to integrate, they have to learn English. The idea of, you know, great swathes of people in Bradford or Southall or Birmingham or Bristol or wherever, not speaking English is absurd, if you're going to have integration. Otherwise, you do have cultural and racial ghettos, which is no good to anybody'[9].

In the BBC's (BBC/MORI, 2005) poll, 90 per cent of Muslims, compared to 82 per cent of the national sample agreed with the statement, 'Immigrants who become British citizens should be made to learn English'. The argument put forward by Martin and many others therefore seems a false one: the acknowledgement of the need for English is a majority one, among Muslims and non-Muslims. More pertinent might be the means to rapidly acquire English, and the

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[9] Bradford (W. Yorkshire), Southall (W. London) and Birmingham (Midlands) are towns and areas known to have relatively high proportions of British Asian residents.

acknowledgement that older people outside the workforce do not necessarily need it to function. However, the assumption of linguistic non-integration *by residential district alone* is a highly problematic one.

Integration

With Martin's observations, we move into the territory of integration, which was a term the research team deliberately avoided using in questions (as we did with 'multicultural') in order to allow respondents to use their own categories and vocabularies. The example above shows one of the recurrent themes: self-segregating immigrants. In the British context, work on how residential segregation develops (Hussain and Bagguley, 2005; Phillips, D., 2006) seems to suggest that it is a much more complicated phenomenon than this, with inter-related economic and cultural dimensions[10]. Moreover, Simpson and Finney (2009) argue that over time, there is less segregation rather than more, but that the vast majority of White UK nationals still live in electoral wards with fewer than the national average of minorities in them.

I have noted that concerns about integration diverged due to classed experiences. Additionally, there emerged a shared (mis)understanding of integration. The policy term has been around for a decade and a half (Castles et al., 2002), and is usually loosely defined as involving a two-way process[11]. However, it is clear from our fieldwork that the popular understanding is much closer to 'assimilation'. Individual integrators, for example, are held up as models by which the collective non-integrators are measured. Integration in this perspective is achieved by *not* trying to be different. James's friend is:

> 'going up to Liverpool on a stag weekend that he's organised because he's a passionate Everton fan, he's a second-generation Asian, but you just wouldn't know it because he's a Scouser [a native of Liverpool], and he waves the flag for England for the cricket (...) That's my kind of immigrant. If everybody was like that, there would be no problem, you know, but they aren't. They want to have, they want to import somehow too much, and it's not their culture, it's their religion, and that's the problem'[12].

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[10] See Massey and Denton's (1994) work on segregation in the USA, which shows the extent to which white flight, informal exclusionary practices from lending institutions and real estate agencies contribute to levels of black/white segregation.

[11] For example, European Council on Refugees and Exiles (2005). No degree of movement is stipulated but it is safe to assume that more is given by incomers than given up by those already in place. However this is distinct from the model of 'assimilation', based differently on the US and French examples.

[12] A 'Scouser' is a term for a native of Liverpool. Everton and Liverpool are the two famous football clubs based in the city.

The question of religion is important here, and means that the problem is not skin colour, which James is at pains to do throughout. However, James' positioning of his friend simultaneously as an 'immigrant' as well as a 'second-generation' Asian reveals some of the ambivalence around this distinction. This Scouser is not actually an immigrant at all, and his role as a model for integration is thus unclear. Moreover, the role of sport (enthusiastic local football supporter and follower of the national cricket team) and national identification through the flag bind him into an arena of competitive, masculinised imagined community[13]. Denise (30s, MC, Plymouth) on the other hand, has two model women in mind:

> 'My husband's cousin is Indian. Her family are Indian and have been here nearly 40 years, but they're very westernized. They don't, you know, they do wear their saris at special occasions and things, but they're not here demanding to bring a bit of India or, you know, to be Indian in this country… The children's godmother is from Jamaica … Janine is just as English as I am because. Well, she was born here, but not because of that, because she's not, you know, they're just the same as me and anybody else. They're not trying to be different'.

Minorities perceived as 'trying to be different' generate frustration among our sample. Jane (60s, MC, Bristol,) forcefully expresses the comments of a number of respondents:

> 'And I still get that feeling of anger sometimes (…) and I think, *is it not because you disenfranchise yourself by demanding to be different?* You know, with Muslims, for example, they want their mosques, they want to keep their women at home, they want their girls to wear burqas and God knows what for school, well, okay, we've said they can do that, and then they say, we're different, you don't accept us, we're not integrated with you, and you think, well, just hang on a minute, you know, *you want your cake and eat it*, either you want to integrate and be part of the way this country lives or you don't'. (our emphasis)

This form of logic sees integration as a set of individual choices, agency, and failings, rather than taking into account any systemic discrimination or obstacles placed in the way of it. It is also an entirely culture-focused view that ignores the patterns of economic and educational disadvantage of UK Muslims[14]. In its US incarnation, this type of explanation (for racism, poverty

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[13] This raises a lot of interesting questions about identification and sport in contemporary Britain such as the meaning of the 'Khan Army' (followers of English boxer Amir Khan), who combine wearing the Union Jack with Pakistan replica cricket shirts; the white English cricket fans who regularly go to international matches dressed as Monty Panesar (the first Sikh to represent England at cricket), complete with false beard and headgear. See Burdsey (2007) for a discussion of Khan's place in this discourse.

[14] The National Youth Agency has collected relevant statistics:

http://www.nya.org.uk/uk-muslim-community-statistics

and gender inequalities, for example) has been labelled 'power-evasive discourse' (PED) (Frankenberg, 1993). Such discourses, it is argued, have become the hegemonic ones for explaining the social world. These 'frames' are much more freely available to individuals than those involving references to structural disadvantage. While in the US fieldwork (Lamont, 2000; Lewis, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2006) it is minorities who are more likely to hold counter-hegemonic understandings of structural impediments, they are not immune to the prevailing 'PED'[15]. Very few of our sample saw integration as anything but a simple choice.

One element feeding into the overall confusion around integration may well also be the lack of understanding of the different statuses entailed in the positions of people as labour migrants, asylum-seekers, refugees, and UK nationals who are not white. In our interviews, these groups tend to be amalgamated, or the lines between them blurred. As we have already seen, James's model integrator turns out to be a friend of his, of Asian origin, but actually born and brought up in Liverpool. As in the case of Denise's friend (above), born in Manchester of Jamaican parents, the generation for whom integration begins seems confused. Why think first of other UK nationals when giving examples of integration? Surely it is incoming people who are supposed to integrate? Other people draw lines in different places, like Eric (30s, MC, Bristol), who prefaced the following comments with the statement that there were a lot of Somalis in Cardiff:

> 'It (the word 'immigrant') conjures up spongers, people living off us who are not destroying our way of life, but having an effect on the British side, I suppose (…) This is why we're partly being diluted. It's not being diluted by Indians or Pakistanis who've been here for 55 years or whatever. It's by people coming in, and I've noticed it, I go to London once a month, and I do find it, I'll be honest, mildly irritating because you hardly see what you would call a normal white British person on the street, because it is just full of foreigners, Foreigners in inverted commas, sorry …'

Indeed, in the talk about immigration and Britishness people regularly ended up with stories of first or second-hand encounters with racialized Others. Some were nuanced but many others showed no evidence that the object of conversation were migrants, merely that they were not white. This slippage is a pattern, borne out in Miranda Lewis's fieldwork (2005), in which people repeatedly lump all non-white people into the category of 'asylum-seeker'. There are major information deficits around what the distinctions are between 'EU migrant', 'non-EU migrant', 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker', and what these means practically in terms of rights. It is absurd for example to expect asylum-seekers to contribute through taxes when they are prohibited from taking paid employment, yet few know this condition is attached to that status. There is now an

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[15] See Bonilla-Silva's (2006) chapter on minorities and color-blind racism.

increasingly complex range of identifications of who migrants can be. Many recognise that migrants could now just as easily be white Europeans as brown-skinned non-Europeans. The problem lies where colour is read – unproblematically – as mapping someone into any of those categories without considering that they might also be UK nationals: this happens frequently. Whole towns and areas (Martin's 'great swathes' of Bradford, Southall, Birmingham and parts of Bristol) are read as *codes* for non-integration because they have relatively high proportions of BAME residents, a minority of whom do not speak good English.

To recap, we deliberately chose places where there were less than the national average BAME populations because we wanted to see how white identities function in those urban settings, where whiteness is the overriding norm, rather than in more explicitly multicultural ones. In the following section, we turn to look at the identifications made by the White English respondents.

Who ticks the 'big box'?

'You know that big box for ticking 'White British'- it's as if you don't have to be analysed quite as much as everybody else does' (Lucy, 20s WC, Plymouth).

Lucy's upbringing as a white child in Asia has given her experience of being a minority: she did not call England home until she was already 12. She has not grown up with the taken-for-grantedness of whiteness in Britain which we were trying to unpick in this project. She was now living on a small part of the estate in Plymouth where a lot of ideological labour had been expended in actively creating a sense of community. Indeed, in our exploration of community, it was the localness of the scale of people's identifications that was most striking. Understandings of community were focussed on relatively small units.

In three of the four areas in which we worked, the ideal size of community seemed to be the 'village'. Indeed while one of the middle-class areas heavily self-identified as a village, this idea overall was not class bound. On one of the large estates, the constituent residential areas were seen as having their own identities (cf. Rogaly and Taylor, 2007), and the area in which a lot of pro-active community-making had been going on was based on this model (annual fete, community events, a welcome pack for new residents). What is so attractive about this model? Is the attachment to ideas of village-ness that was identified in all four of the sites (some more than others) part of a yearning for a more coherent past, turning away from what some might see as the confusion and uncertainty of multiculturalism and Britain's declining place in the world? There may well be an emotional investment in a community whose members are known, even if only by sight. When asked for their thoughts on what a community should be, people's 'imagined' communities involved buildings and institutions (schools, churches, community centres) as well as

friendly people and good amenities. Yet the qualities people sought were safety and trust. These may be better encapsulated in a geographically smaller area.

This focus on the local links articulates with the way people seem to be evacuating from a British identity into an English one. The point of the nation as an 'imagined community', in Anderson's phrase (1983), is that there is an act of faith: you will never meet everyone else in that community because it is too big for that to be feasible. What we found was a nostalgic turn toward a smaller-scale community that does not have to be 'imagined' (of course 'England' is no less feasible than 'Britain' in this regard). The nostalgia emerged in some ways as what Les Back (1996) calls a 'Golden Age' that people refer to as having preceded the kind of social fragmentation forming the core of contemporary understandings of Britain: a time when you didn't have to lock your door, where people took care of other people's children, looked out for each other as a norm, and of course when non-white people were very few and far between. Nostalgia is never a neutral recollection of facts, and this influences the way people conceptualise their national identities, as we will see below.

From British to English: Englishness as a beleaguered identity

The way in which Britishness is evoked by our interviewees is paradoxical. The direct question about what Britishness means elicited relatively little in definitions of Britishness *per se* and some degree of indifference (cf. Fenton, 2007). People generally agreed that it was not something they had thought much about, apart from at very significant moments of national history, such as during WWII, or in the days following the 2005 London bombings, or when they were abroad and had to define themselves nationally. Yet there was more identification at sporting events (the Olympics, football, rugby, cricket) at which point the locus was Englishness rather than Britishness. On one hand, there are few accounts of substantive Britishness (giving the world the English language; wartime resilience; independence), but a strong narrative of whatever 'British' meant having been weakened in the post-war period. Britishness seems to be defined more by what it is not. Several people expressed embarrassment about the behaviour of British people abroad and anti-social behaviour at home. From this theme of lowered standards came the thread that inspired most comment. People tended to talk more about the ways in which belonging to the nation related to feelings of injustice, a finding to which we shall return later.

There is an awareness that Englishness is seen and historically experienced by other groups as oppressive. 'I'm of an age', recalls Theresa (60s, WC, Plymouth), 'that can still remember the British Empire, and when we were at school, there was lots of pink on maps or atlases of the world, so in some ways, I'm a bit old fashioned in that respect, but again we exploited all these

countries going back then, not that I feel in these days ... that's history and we shouldn't have to be apologising to everybody all the time for what we did'.

We encountered ambivalence about the legacy of these historical relationships. Some agreed with Theresa, that the history of oppression should be ignored completely, left in the past, or the positive side of British history stressed more. Others felt Britain still erroneously sees itself as more powerful than it really is. However, the historical legacy haunts people's statements about the desire for a more tangible and substantial Englishness in the face of the 'dilution' of Britishness. Martin (60s, MC, Bristol) has adopted a long view:

> 'I think English is somewhat purer or somewhat filtered, I suppose.... I would say that English goes back to, you know, Norman times, whereas British might be a British subject from the Caribbean or the Far East or whatever. One is not making racist judgements, one is merely saying that English has a longer history in this island that British does (...) Yeah, I just feel that English is somewhat older and somewhat purer and somewhat more filtered.'

Indeed, in post-devolution Britain, celebrations of Welshness, Scottishness and Irishness are viewed enviously by many who feel caught between the acknowledgement that the St. George's Cross and the Union Jack have become symbols linked to the political right[16], and the perceived political correctness that involves not celebrating Britain and England's imperial past for fear of giving offence. It is interesting that much of the anger expressed about 'political correctness' derived from the administrative banality of filling in forms and not having anywhere on them to stipulate an English identity[17]. Denise (30s, MC, Plymouth) angrily recounts the story of how her son had brought a form home from school. It was:

> '... some census that they're doing and it had every nationality, every denominal (sic.) mixture, anything that you could possibly think of, except English. And I just think, the Scots can be Scottish, the Welsh, you know, they're Welsh, but we have to be British. And it is just because of everything else. I had never bothered about it before, but I am bothering about it now.'

A key focus for the emotional identities of our group was the question of fairness, and this was invoked around resources (benefits and culture). Much of the resentment was expressed toward the idea of non-UK nationals accessing resources and benefitting from cultural preference (as seen

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[16] Although the St.George's Cross' exposure through international football tournaments since Euro 1996 might well have successfully dispelled some of this.

[17] This theme has been picked up by the right-wing lobby group Civil Liberty, which started a petition to have English included as an option on the census form.

in the previous section). There is a clear strand of hostility toward people not pulling their weight, as Janice (60s, WC, Plymouth) comments, when talking about who should be let in as immigrants:

> 'I suppose if we've got a shortage of skills and they want to come here and work and again, it's being useful members of society, innit? And let's face it, there's plenty of white English people, or not just saying white, but English people in this country, or British people in this country who really, if you set the criteria of not being useful members of society, you'd kick out of the country anyway....'

The annoyance, frustration and sense that the celebration of Englishness is judged according to different criteria permeate the interviews. There is a real sense that being (white) English is a social location of relative weakness that now has to be defended[18].

In general then, the preference for developing Englishness as a point of reference seems tied to a sense of identity injustice and deficit compared to other more 'identity privileged' groups, which of course includes the 'culture-rich' BAME. Perhaps this sense that English culture is somehow 'weak' drives the feeling some people have that it is being over-ridden. Denise again:

> '... I think that, you know, we should allow for different religions, but not when their religion takes precedence over ours, because we certainly can't go to a Muslim country and have the same rights. And to call, I think, was it in Leicester? I'm not sure ... the Christmas lights (were called) 'winter lights' because of an offence, see, and it's that that's becoming really annoying to most people that I have spoken to lately anyway'.

The ever-present external force of 'political correctness' is used as a shorthand to articulate a variety of English anxieties about losing ground, both economically and culturally vis-à-vis other groups. The retreat into Englishness and the repeated reference, even by secular people, to Christmas as a festival that has to be defended, cropped up in the narration of distinctions between the majority and minority communities.

Analysis: the entitled nation

The racialisation of white identities (as with all other racialised identities) occurs unevenly: 'white' is not a homogenous group, and not all its members are affected the same way by the relative privilege accruing to whiteness on a societal level. Here I have tried to identify both distinguishing features and common characteristics of contemporary discourses about belonging emanating from the White UK group. Moreover, I have stipulated that white identities are not the

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[18] Cf. Karyn McKinney's (2004) white American undergraduates' narratives of whiteness as ethnic handicap.

same as minority ones. There is a relative power relationship based on what whiteness means in terms of unquestioned entitlement: to resources and membership of the nation. In the case of these provincial English interviewees, they see themselves as members of the entitled nation: owed decent access to a variety of resources ahead of others, who fall outside those parameters. In that latter category fall both migrants (too little time here, too culturally different) and individual whites who do not satisfy criteria of having first made a contribution. The devil is in the detail: migrants are suspected *collectively* of non-entitlement until they prove otherwise individually, while white UK nationals are assumed to be entitled until they prove otherwise individually. It is in this discursive movement, I suggest, that the vast majority of our respondents make themselves white. In other words, they move from a 'series' of people who, amongst other sources of identity, are racialised as white, to a 'group' (Young, 1994), who reflexively see this aspect of their identity as important in a specific context. The further complicating factor is that the group *actually spoken of* is British / English nationals rather than Whites *per se*. Given the context (with the emphasis on English rather than British; the talk of immigrants who are actually British-born but happen to not be white, etc.), I understand this to be a way to produce whiteness without explicitly naming it. After all, even the textual campaigning materials now utilised by the far-right British National Party (albeit not the images they use) do not specify whiteness, but rather allude to it through focussing on minorities and migrants as problems, and 'British nationals' as the victimised group. When juxtaposed with their images, it is clear what category of person 'British national' corresponds to, but this does not detract from the point that even in a context where multiculturalism is referred to publicly as a failure and the basis for ethnic segregation, it is still not acceptable to organise publicly and explicitly around whiteness.

In terms of class, it has been noted that the self identification of many is now fraught with ambivalence. Economic indicators were used to identify areas in which to conduct fieldwork, and with one or two exceptions in each of the four areas, interviewees matched those broad indicators. In the specific arena of attitudes, there is much overlap between middle and working-class concerns and expression of those concerns. This is not the picture that usually emerges, which is generally that of a dichotomous situation: working-class racism v middle-class tolerance, as is portrayed in the media and implicitly in academic studies (why else focus entirely on working-class communities, and why use primary indicators such as educational levels as key variables in quantitative surveys of attitudes?). The areas of concern about integration and immigration draw on the same culturally racialized resources, but are expressed differently, around classed experiences and inflected by personal biographies. Not only is there a large area of overlap in terms of what the concerns are, but also in terms of saying who the outgroups are, and therefore simultaneously saying who 'we' are. In the event, 'we' are hardworking, honest,

respectable and have contributed to the social security system, therefore we should be first in line for its benefits. Indeed I have no doubt that the people we interviewed were all of these things. Yet the sociological point is that in imaging that 'we' necessarily conjurs a 'they' who are the opposite. The readiness to attribute this opposite set of negative characteristics to a collective (migrants, minorities, etc.) rather than to a set of identifiable individuals (some white people known to the speaker who the latter asserts falsely claim unemployment benefit, for example) constitutes the discursive movement. This takes place against a backdrop of concerns about the secondary effects of immigration and the discrediting of multiculturalism as a unifying force. I am trying to convey the sets of associations I am using to come to my conclusion that this is about whiteness as much as anything else. It is inadequate just to argue that whatever white people do and say is whiteness.

Leading on from this is the final part of the puzzle I wish to present here: the material context. In their talk about Britishness and immigration, people tend to focus on elements relating to both culture and the economy. It is not purely a question of fearing cultural takeover, and the encroachment of unmanageable difference, it is also social and economic competition. However, in the way people talk about these topics one does not to me seem more significant than the other. That is a matter of interpretation. What is not possible however is to ignore one of these two parts of the whole. 'Race'-making involves both cultural and the economic dimensions. Moreover, if we tried to historicise the residential spaces where these interviews occurred we would be obliged to take 'race' into consideration to explain the racially homogenous patterns of residence, alongside those that help us understand how class-based social segmentation of the housing market takes place. The South West of England has a smaller proportion of minorities than most regions, and is less urban than most. There is immediately a clue: the vast majority of BAME migrants settled in urban centres on arrival in the UK and their descendants have not generally strayed far from this background.

Conclusion

While the white working-class has recently become an actor of sorts again in the government's thinking about community cohesion (CIC, 2007), and individual ministers may acknowledge publicly that class still matters (Russell, 2008), this policy focus is still excessively narrow. The white working class is constructed as fragmented, dispirited and abject, rather than progressive, unified or dynamic (Sveinsson, 2009). This construction stands next to a space from which the middle-class ostensibly seem to have been evacuated. We spoke to people representative of the vast majority of White UK nationals, who live in areas with very small proportions of BAME

neighbours. People from the middle as well as the working class are enmeshed in the kinds of racializing discourses identified here, but they emphasise different aspects of it that correspond to their own experiences. In the identity talk captured in our interviews, a number of anxieties arose: the place of the English within a devolving UK; the place of the ethnic majority in an increasingly diverse nation; the shortage of public resources. There are points where these anxieties cross class lines, and it is more the immediacy of the experience than the actual themes that distinguishes working from middle-class respondents in this respect. Fairness and unfairness are the major themes in self-identifying as English and beneath this lies sensitivity to what is perceived as losing 'our' place, as the old certainties of welfare provision, a level of civility and a more homogenous society are understood to be disintegrating.

The scenarios of allegiance thrown up are complex but rely heavily on the local. If that local area is overwhelmingly white, this does not mean there is an absence of racialization, but that it happens in a different way than it does in multicultural places where encounters occur frequently enough to reach the critical mass at which conviviality seem to assume its own life. For the time being, with mixed neighbourhoods developing so slowly outside of a few urban centres, white English attitudes toward Others will be formed in the types of geographical context referred to in this work. Moreover, it will require a major shift in thinking to enshrine the idea that *this in fact is the majority experience*, and that policy initiatives developed for mixed inner-city neighbourhoods do not necessarily address the issue of provincial cities. The other major shift is for policy-makers and academics to imagine the role of the invisible middle class in these policy areas and stop piling further responsibilities onto some of the more vulnerable white working-class communities whose capacity for development and leeway for manoeuvre are already slim.

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