'It Sounds Unwelcoming, It Sounds Exclusive, but I Think It's Just a Question of Arithmetic Really': The Limits to White People's Anti-Essentialist Perspectives on the Nation

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Abstract

Analysing data from qualitative interviews, this article demonstrates how white people's constructions of national identity in England destabilise but ultimately reaffirm essentialist, exclusionary boundaries. The first set of findings presented demonstrate the ways in which normalised associations between whiteness and Englishness are regularly, temporarily unsettled through empirical, experiential and ethical processes of reflection, only to be finally regulated back towards dominant, racialised understandings. The second set of findings presented demonstrate that for a minority of white participants who construct the nation in ways that more effectively challenge and destabilise racialised understandings, they nevertheless still normalise difference in relation to the nation-state boundaries of Britain. While racialised boundaries of the nation are often, to varying degrees, problematised by many white people in England, essentialist nation-state boundaries remain virtually unchallenged in discussions of national membership.

Keywords: *Englishness, Britishness, 'Race', National Identity, Nationalism*

Background to the study

1.1 Although the identity categories 'British' and 'English' are often used interchangeably in England and throughout much of the world, they can mean very different things. From one, categorical perspective, the former refers to a legal identifier of national citizenship and the latter to a category and nation with no legal status. Those who identify with Scotland or Wales – the nations that make up Britain alongside England – and who *also* identify as British, are often particularly keen to draw a clear distinction between their Britishness and the Englishness of their neighbours. The interchangeableness of Englishness and Britishness is also less regularly found among many of the population of England who do not identify as 'white', for whom Englishness more than Britishness has 'systematic, largely unspoken, racial connotations' that underline a national identity associated with whiteness (Runnymede Trust 2000, 38).

1.2 Such associations are supported by findings from numerous empirical studies looking at English identities in contemporary Britain. Back's ethnographic study of a London area demonstrates how Englishness, whiteness and racism can form 'an interrelated ideological triangle' to the exclusion of non-white populations (196, 135). More recently, Byrne's study of white mothers in London describes the 'enduring racialisation of Englishness' (2006, 142), arguing that a performatively constructed whiteness 'lies at the heart of Englishness' (ibid, 166), a pattern corroborated by Leddy-Owen's (2012) findings suggesting that people who do not identify as white in England only feel able to identify as English precariously if at all. For Skey's white research participants, an association between English identities and a sense of ontological security is felt to be disturbed by the purportedly disrupting presence in England of the racialised 'other' (2010, 2011). '[I]n the face of [these] (perceived) challenges' Skey's participants aim to reassert and reaffirm 'the dominant group's identity', and the sense of ontological security they associate with it, through their exclusionary, racialised constructions of the nation (Skey 2010, 730).

1.3 Post-colonial perspectives suggest that these patterns can be explained by the relationship between English identities and the redeployment of racialised, colonial distinctions onto England's population (Tyler 2012). The post-war migration to Britain of the Empire's former subjects, particularly from South Asia and the Caribbean, is often portrayed as a 'discrete moment', a historical rupture which disturbed an

indigenous, white English culture (Hesse 1993, 168), a portrayal that ignores the interweaving history inextricably linking the racialised and national identities of the population of England to the lives of colonised populations (Hall 1997, 147). As Brah argues, post-colonial migration to Britain was 'largely a direct result of the history of colonialism and imperialism of the previous centuries' (1996, 21), and those who take post-colonial perspectives argue that much the same can be said about modern, racialised, English national identities.

1.4 As well as, and often supplementing, post-colonial perspectives, much of the recent literature on English identities can be located within the burgeoning field of 'whiteness studies', a significant strand of which has seen the exploration of intersections between national identities and the unmarked, normative racialised social location afforded to individuals categorised as white. Similar patterns to those found in England of an enduring association between a dominant national culture and whiteness have been demonstrated in Australia (Hage 1998) and the United States (Roediger 1999). In these countries, processes and policies of multiethnic incorporation and multiculturalism, historically and up until the present day, have been accompanied by a shifting yet consistent reaffirmation of racialised hierarchies. In each nation, as with Englishness, the racially unmarked social location which can be categorised as 'white', and which is strongly associated with the marker of white skin, is found to be crucial to an unquestioned sense of identification with the nation.

1.5 However, whilst the national identity of those who also identify, and are recognised, as white may not be questioned, the expressive capacities of white English identifiers may, somewhat paradoxically, be experienced as inhibited – even discriminated against – due to their racially unmarked, normative ethnic perspective on society. In a similar way to the 'White Anglo-Saxon Protestants' in the United States or Canada (Kaufmann 2004b), 'the English' can be categorised as the 'dominant ethnicity' in Britain: a category and identity that seems to be 'hidden' (at least to those who identify with it) behind a 'broader nationalist or imperial appeal' (Kaufmann 2004a, 1). England's historical dominance has involved a submergence of Englishness within the folds of Britishness and Empire; and, today, in contrast to the other nations of the Union which gained their own devolved assemblies and parliaments in the late 1990s, there are no specifically English political institutions, such as an English parliament, or any specifically English (mainstream) nationalist parties. An important consequence of this is that while the meaning of British identities can be (and has been) struggled over and redefined more clearly in the public sphere due to the nation-state-derived, institutional and legal basis of Britishness, English identities, in contrast, have little institutional basis outside of international team sports.

1.6 The extent to which English and British national identities are distinct in terms of patterns of racialised exclusion is evident in much recent research. The 2003 British Social Attitudes Survey found that while sixty-four per cent of 'White Europeans' considered themselves to be English, the next highest figure from an ethnic category was thirty-three per cent for 'Asian Indians', followed by seventeen per cent for 'Black Caribbeans' and eleven per cent for 'Asian Pakistanis' (cited in Condor et al. 2006, 134). This can be compared to the substantially higher percentages from the same survey who identified as British: eighty-one per cent of 'Black Caribbeans', seventy-two per cent of 'Asian Indians' and eighty-one per cent of 'Asian Pakistanis' (ibid, 132). To a significant extent, therefore, English and British identities seem to correspond to the distinction between ethnic and civic conceptions of the nation (Smith 1991), with the former based on comparatively closed notions of ethnic, racialised descent and the latter on more inclusive, voluntarist notions of political membership.

1.7 It is also, however, important not to exaggerate the extent to which Britishness and British identities can be characterised as civic or as somehow de-racialised. As Solomos (2003, Chapter Three) has demonstrated, successive United Kingdom immigration and nationality acts since the 1950s have included tacit biases against non-white migration and settlement in Britain, policies which were often justified by government claims that such controls would help to maintain good "race" relations' within the nation. Today, the contemporary ease of migration from most EU countries can be contrasted to tighter restrictions on migration from much of the rest of the world, a corollary of which is an implicit bias in favour of white migration (Fox et al. 2012, 5). Modood (2010), furthermore, suggests that notions of civic national inclusion in contemporary Britain are not equally inclusive for all cultures. In particular, he and others suggest that the Parekh Report's ideal of a multicultural, British 'community of communities' (Runnymede Trust 2000, ix) has been undermined by new discourses of assimilation, a central dimension of which involves the positioning of Muslim citizens' culture as potentially antithetical to British norms and values (Back et al. 2002; Cameron 2011). Therefore, even if the legitimacy of racialised boundaries of national belonging may have fallen significantly in Britain (Ford 2008), much research suggests that exclusionary cultural boundaries of Britishness remain intact.

1.8 As well as, and often intersecting with, such cultural boundaries, survey research also finds a 'fairly overwhelming hostility to...migration' among the population of Britain (McLaren & Johnson 2007, 718-21). Such hostility has seen the political issue of 'immigration' move in political polls 'from a marginal concern of a small minority to one of the...most-frequently named issues' within the last decade (Blinder 2012, 5). These patterns are reflected in much media and party-political discussions of British national identity, in which ideas about an anti-racist and multiethnic Britishness are spoken of in the same breath as statements highly critical of the effects of and future possibilities for migration into Britain (Goodhart 2004; Miliband 2012). Within these discourses, even where the legitimacy of racialised and/or cultural boundaries has been problematised in relation to constructions of the nation, further (often though not necessarily intersecting) essentialist distinctions can be mobilised in relation to the boundaries and exclusionary mechanisms of the nation-state. And whilst the nation-state's 'civic' boundaries of legal citizenship may be more inclusive from some perspectives than racialised boundaries, many would argue that they remain as much in need of sociological explanation and moral justification (Yack 1996; Wimmer 2004).

Researching anti-essentialist national identities

2.1 This article presents findings from fieldwork undertaken in 2010 and 2011 as part of a PhD project. The principal aim of the study was to explore the extent to which English identities are racialised, and the extent to which the racialisation of Englishness is being challenged and destabilised in contemporary England. Fieldwork consisted of semi-structured, qualitative interviews. Forty-one participants were recruited through convenience sampling in a multiethnic area of South London. Eighteen participants took part in second interviews, thus making a total interview count of fifty-nine. There was a particular focus on recruiting people who identify as both white and English due to the associations between Englishness and whiteness discussed above, and twenty-five of the study's participants identify as white. It is responses from these participants that are analysed in what follows, as the patterns presented below, in particular those relating to racialised constructions of Englishness, were only found in the form discussed here among white participants (for a discussion of non-white participants' constructions of national identity see Leddy-Owen [2012]). All participants' names have been anonymised.

2.2 Those recruited represented a suitably wide and varied cross-section of views in terms of class, gender, generation and sexuality. Each of these intersecting dimensions of identity are crucial for the study of racialised and national identities and were a key element of the wider analysis of the data. Their relationship to the findings demonstrated in this article, however, will not be discussed as the patterns analysed below did not seem to be significantly variable along any of these dimensions. It is also recognised that the urban location for the study will have influenced the findings discussed and that localised discourses can be crucial for discussions of racialised and national identities (Tyler 2012), but this kind of place-based analysis is not undertaken in this article which is more concerned with a generalised discussion of national boundaries.

2.3 Systematic coding of the data was carried out in ways recommended by Mason (2002). Analysis was concerned not so much with *which* symbols or discursive frameworks were drawn on by participants but, rather, with *how* participants constructed the nation and what it meant to them. Therefore the analysis involved a more process-oriented approach (Zimmer 2003) concerned with how discourses and symbols were drawn on and utilised rather than an approach that took particular discourses and symbols, such as those of purportedly 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalisms, at face value.

2.4 Interviews focused on questions relating to whether participants identified as English, what Englishness meant to them, and whether they thought 'anyone' can be English. Responses were analysed in relation to how the boundaries of Englishness were constructed and in relation to who was constructed and positioned as the non-English 'other'. As the study developed it became clear that even where boundaries of 'race' were problematised by participants, further essentialist boundaries relating to the nation-state were being constructed, though often with reference to Britishness. From a progressive political perspective concerned with inclusion and the critique of essentialist identities, I felt that the value of participants' constructions of a de-racialised Englishness was somewhat limited if they constructed alternative essentialist national boundaries. Therefore, as well as analysing the racialised boundaries of Englishness, further, potentially de-racialised yet essentialist, constructions of national boundaries, in particular relating to the nation-state, were also coded and analysed. While the study overall was concerned with Englishness, something reflected in much of the data analysed below, this article is concerned with the ways that the boundaries of the nation in England more generally, whether English and/or British, were constructed by participants and at the extent to which these constructions could be characterised as anti-essentialist.

2.5 Turning to this notion of anti-essentialist national identities, it is of course true that, as with all social identity categories, national identities are bound to be exclusionary in some way; for example, in relation to an affinity to particular cultural practices or symbols which are identified with the nation and which many globally will not share. Therefore, national identities are always to some extent 'delimited in advance' and exclusionary; but this does not mean that they must be '*determined* in advance' (Butler 1997, 139; emphasis added) in relation to racialised hierarchies or fixed notions of who can identify with the national category. An anti-essentialist national identity would therefore invoke exclusionary boundaries of some kind, but these would be fluid, open to voluntary adoption and, crucially, based on what Harding describes as 'mere differences'; that is, 'the cultural differences' that do not necessarily relate to 'differential power positionings' and that 'would shape different knowledge projects even where there were no oppressive social relations between different cultures' (1997 cited in Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). Such a perspective would also require the nation to be effectively separated from the state (Kaufmann 2000), thus divorcing national identities from any privileged position relating to hierarchies of legitimate belonging within that state. An anti-essentialist national identity in England (whether English, British or any other nationality) would thus fundamentally problematise the construction of a nation in relation to the exclusionary racialised and nationalist discourses forged during colonialism and the development of the modern state; it would be constructed in relation to particular practices and symbols associated with a nation, but these would need to be 'open to...further and unexpected delimitation[s]' (Butler 1997, 139) rather than fixed.

2.6 This article explores two key patterns relating to the construction and problematisation of essentialist boundaries, drawing on the responses of a small number of key participants, the views of whom nevertheless reflect the broader response patterns of the study's white participants. The first section of findings looks at the ways in which racialised boundaries of the nation are troubled yet reaffirmed, and the second section looks at the ways that some of those who more effectively problematise racialised boundaries nonetheless construct essentialist boundaries relating to the nation-state. The article is not attempting to provide an exhaustive perspective on these boundaries and their intersections. Rather, it provides a view of how these boundaries were found to be constructed in importantly distinct ways by this study's research participants. It is also important to note that the analysis in the article, particularly

the first section, is not directly concerned with the relationship between the boundaries participants construct and questions of national *belonging* per se. This caveat is made in recognition of Condor (2000) and Mann's (2012) findings suggesting that the racialised boundaries of the category 'English' may not necessarily coincide with the ways in which boundaries of belonging within society in England or Britain more generally are constructed. The conclusion to the article, however, will touch upon some consequences of the findings that relate to questions of overall belonging in England and Britain.

Empirical, experiential and ethical challenges to racialised boundaries of Englishness

3.1 This section explores the 'moments of questioning' (Frankenberg 1993 cited in Tyler 2004, 291) in which racialised boundaries of Englishness are challenged but ultimately reaffirmed by white participants. In the below excerpt, Andrew reflects on the question of whether 'anyone' can be English.

[Englishness is] like trying to have an overall word to describe lots of different things which are variable... Because I could say...I'm English because I speak English. Well that's logical but a lot of other people who are not English speak English...so it's a very subjective term really isn't it? [...] You can...choose and go and...take up another culture...you know, say 'okay, I want to go and be French'... go and live in France and...cultivate and acquire things that [are] French... It's semantics really... But whether they are really [French]...I mean...in an academic sense [someone who acquires Englishness] can't really be English... If people weren't born in England of English parentage and of English grandparents...then they're not really English.

3.2 For Andrew, Englishness is 'a very subjective term', it is a 'name', and whether someone is considered English is a question of 'semantics'. The possibility of pinning down a definite meaning for the category is challenged by these inherently subjective and unstable foundations. Andrew illustrates the subjective complexity of national identities with the example of someone not born in England who has developed a command of the language, and with the example of someone who might move to France and 'cultivate and acquire' a national identity. However, Andrew then introduces a counter argument in which he states that the boundaries of Englishness – 'in an academic sense' – might more accurately be based on ancestry, suggesting that 'if people weren't born in England of English parentage and of English grandparents...then they're not really English'. At this stage it is unclear whether Andrew holds either of these perspectives to be more valid. Later in the interview I ask Andrew whether he thought one of the two broad patterns he had constructed – open/semantic or closed/ancestry – was more convincing.

From my personal...I mean me as an individual, I suppose...if you're a member of the indigenous population, proved to be here for centuries...[then] you're the people of England.

Andrew retains the earlier openness to some extent by emphasising that he is putting across a 'personal', 'individual' perspective which therefore need not be seen as a generalisable truth. However, despite the earlier evidence of flexibility in relation to the subjectivity of Englishness, by ultimately arguing that to be English requires proof of 'centuries' of ancestry in England, Andrew suggests that, in his view, a more authentic Englishness is reliant on centuries of descent. Later in the same interview, Andrew initially suggests that his 'Celtic DNA', discovered during a DNA test, might be problematic for his authentic Englishness, before describing this as 'a fly in the ointment' that is 'best to ignore' as certain 'parameters' are ultimately required when adjudicating over the validity and authenticity of an English identity.

3.3 In each of these examples drawn from Andrew's interview, therefore, a process of reasoning and reflection in relation to the semantic fluidity of identity categories thus finally makes way for a highly exclusionary construction of Englishness by which millions of residents of England whose ancestry cannot be traced back as 'indigenous' for centuries are considered to be less authentically English, if they are English at all. Andrew thus demonstrates a tension between a relatively open, voluntarist, culturally constructed Englishness characterised by fluidity on the one hand, and a racialised Englishness on the other. Ann Stoler argues that while its meaning and symbolic content may shift, essentialist thinking remains 'resilient and impervious to empirical, experiential counterclaims' (1997, 104). Through reasoning and reflection, Andrew critiques and temporarily destabilises the association between Englishness and racialised boundaries, only to finally adjudicate in favour of a perspective premised on an essentialist, racialised understanding.

3.4 While Andrew demonstrates how racialised boundaries can be challenged through a general, relatively abstract process of reflection and reasoning, further participants demonstrated how this kind of critique is also encouraged in everyday social experience. In her first interview Helen argued that whether someone is English depends on the number of generations their family has been resident in England. For Helen, an individual can only truly be considered English if they have a family history of 'three or four' generations of residence in England. At three or four generations the timescale for the attainment of Englishness might be measured at over half a century, thus denying Englishness to the vast majority of post-colonial migrants and their descendants. This pattern helps to reveal the invisibility of white migration histories in Helen's construction of the boundary of 'generation' (a pattern found among several further white participants in the study). While Helen at no stage questions the authenticity of her own English identity, elsewhere in her interview she makes reference to her Irish grandparents, a heritage that could, by her own criteria of 'three or four generations', render her own Englishness inauthentic (see Mann 2012, 119; and Leddy-Owen 2012 for further examples of this pattern). As the below excerpt from her second interview demonstrates, seemingly contradictory associations between Englishness, generation and whiteness were problematised during discussions Helen had between interviews with a white colleague of hers called Andy.

I didn't even know that Andy was half Hungarian [...] He does fully [describe himself as

English], he doesn't even think about it... He's English it's as simple as that, but actually he's half Hungarian... I was saying [in the first interview that] English people have to be... third generation for me, well actually in a way he is, but his Dad's Hungarian so he's not, so...it's totally open for debate

3.5 Helen describes Andy elsewhere in the interview as 'a wildcard' due to his role in upsetting her assumptions about the number of 'generations' required for someone to be considered authentically English. Andy 'doesn't even think about' being English, and neither it seems had Helen prior to this incident, perhaps by virtue of his apparently obvious, white Englishness. Now that Helen is aware of Andy's – by her definition – non-English ancestry, he nevertheless remains English in her eyes, apparently because he considers himself to be English and Helen had previously presumed him to be so. However, he is only English 'in a way' because he is also *not English* due to his Hungarian ancestry. The process of reflection about and engagement with questions of national identity between interviews thus exposes Helen to the complexities of individuals' backgrounds and the ways that boundaries such as those of generation simplify such complexities. Helen confronts the relationship between Englishness and deterministic, essentialising discourses, a process which renders questions of who can be English 'totally open for debate'.

3.6 Despite this empirical and experiential troubling of the racialised boundaries of Englishness, later in the same interview Helen revalidates her earlier constructions of who can be English.

CLO: Have your ideas [relating to whether anyone can be English] changed?

Helen: Erm, no... My...built in, imprinted take on what makes someone English is still there [...] For me it's still a generation thing, absolutely definitely...I just think English is English.

Any apparent destabilisation of the association between Englishness, whiteness and the number of 'generations' is re-stabilised in relation to what Helen describes as an 'imprinted take' on who can be English. Andy's 'wildcard' status does not finally trump or overturn the logic of the game; it is, rather, for Helen, merely an unrepresentative outlier. Despite the complexities evident from the discussions of Andy's Englishness, and despite the destabilising of the essentialised boundaries of ancestry and whiteness that has taken place, the process of critical reflection only goes so far, and Helen's initial 'take' on Englishness, predicated on a concept of 'generation' is 'still there'.

3.7 Empirical and experiential challenges to the veracity of the racialised boundaries of Englishness, were often accompanied by an *ethical* questioning of the legitimacy of these boundaries. In the following excerpt Lizzie suggests that she finds the racialised boundaries she is constructing to be ethically problematic.

Lizzie: Maybe [Black people] don't see themselves as English because Black people didn't originate from England?... These are hard topics, I'm listening to myself, going 'oh my God' [laughs] [...] [Later, towards the end of the interview] I feel slightly violated [laughing].

CLO: Really? [...] In what way?

Lizzie: Well talking about race and Englishness, things that you shouldn't really talk about [almost whispering, sounds ashamed].

CLO: [...] Do you feel violated by the interview situation?

Lizzie: No, by what I'm saying. It's like 'oh, is that what I really think?'

3.8 Lizzie suggests that Black people might not see themselves as English 'because Black people don't originate from England', therefore suggesting that someone who is Black is somehow not indigenous to England and thus not authentically English. However, on voicing this racialised perspective, Lizzie immediately expresses anxious, moral concern about the boundaries she is constructing. Lizzie seems surprised by what she has said and quickly problematises her argument: 'I'm listening to myself, going "oh my God"'. Later in the interview Lizzie again suggests that she is surprised and even ashamed about what she has said, asking herself, 'is that what I really think?' Lizzie is concerned that what she is saying is morally questionable and seems to find the realisation of this to be surprising and akin to being 'violated'. These expressions of surprise suggest that Lizzie is constructing racialised boundaries habitually, 'below the level of calculation' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 128), only to find this habitual construction ethically problematic and requiring a process of anxious impression management (Goffman 1956, 268).

3.9 This pattern was found among several further participants who consistently expressed concern that they might 'sound' racist when constructing boundaries of Englishness. Similarly problematic expressions of national identity are found in Condor's research, the findings of which suggest that many white research participants 'routinely' treated 'talk about "this country" as a normatively accountable matter-of-prejudice' (2000, 181). In Condor's study, even for those who felt positively about Englishness, 'it was quite common' for their accounts 'to be prefaced with disclaimers, or to be expressed as if apologetically' (Condor 2000, 189). Many white participants in the present study seemed similarly, sincerely opposed to racism in principle, to the extent that they were embarrassed, ethically anxious, and/or even surprised, when during an interview they took perspectives that drew on boundaries commonly associated with racism in popular discourse. And it was from the evident gap between their views in principle and their views in practice that this surprise and sense of embarrassment and moral anxiety emerged; is this, in Lizzie's words, what they 'really think'?

3.10 However, as with the empirical and experiential concerns discussed earlier in this section, this reflexive, ethical concern with the potential for racialised exclusion did not lead to a sustained challenging of the racialised boundaries of Englishness constructed. As has been demonstrated elsewhere, such ostensible rejections of race can also involve the construction of *tacitly* racialised perspectives in which boundaries of 'race' are *in principle*, outwardly, and often apparently sincerely, rejected, yet then *in practice* constructed as normative (see Leddy-Owen [2012] for examples of this in relation to Englishness, and Frankenberg [1993] or Bonilla-Silva [2003] for this pattern in a US context). Although Lizzie and others' constructions of racialised boundaries of Englishness were portrayed as ethically problematic, they were not decisively destabilised. As with Helen's earlier reaffirmation of an Englishness formed in relation to several generations of residence, Lizzie, despite her anxieties about the views she shared in the interview situation, did not finally suggest that a normalised association between Englishness and whiteness was one that can or should be transcended.

3.11 Therefore, whether problematised in relation to empirical, experiential or ethical challenges, for the majority of white participants any troubling of the essentialist boundaries of Englishness is not sustained. These are temporary disruptions, and the moments of questioning provoked by reflection and experience do not lead to a consistent and thoroughgoing reassessment of the association between 'race' and Englishness. Despite the ethical questions raised and the evident contradictions, inconsistencies and apparent irrationalities of the boundaries these participants construct, a final adjudication about what seems normal and correct sees the racialised boundaries of Englishness reaffirmed by participants; and given the long-term socialisation of individuals into this kind of understanding of the social world, this should perhaps be of no surprise. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to explore the reasons for this in great depth, I would suggest that Skey's (2010, 2011) recent findings suggesting an association between Englishness and a sense of ontological security provide a possible explanation. During discussions of Englishness, the association between a secure sense of self and secure racialised boundaries may mean that any perceived disruption or troubling of these boundaries can encourage a process by which, despite the inconsistencies and irrationalities encountered, white participants construct and reaffirm the racialised norms in relation to which these boundaries are constructed. A regulatory effect thus sees participants finally construct Englishness in relation to the normative exclusionary discourses from which they briefly seem to depart.

The unsettling of 'race' and the construction of nation-state boundaries

4.1 Rowan was one of a minority of white participants who discussed questions relating to the boundaries of Englishness in ways that were more effectively critical of racialised boundaries, both in principle *and* in practice.

I think a lot of people...who were born here, maybe their parents were born here, even their grandparents [were born here]...are not really allowed to call themselves English, and probably don't want to anyway, because of all this negative stuff that's connected with it...so we need to relax the whole idea...of Englishness.

4.2 For Rowan, 'the whole idea of Englishness' needs to be relaxed, and although he does suggest that birth in England is a pre-requisite for Englishness, there is no evidence from his interview that he puts a different weighting on who is legitimately English in relation to racialised distinctions (if we consider 'race' to refer in some way to 'different types of human bodies' [Winant 2000, 172]). Rowan's wife is of South Asian heritage and he suggests elsewhere in his interview that he is particularly critical of associations between 'race', Englishness and general notions of belonging in England as a result of the racism that his two children have encountered. His reflection on these experiences, and on the exclusionary, racialised character of Englishness in relation to them, has contributed to a more consistently critical perspective that seems to destabilise the normative association between Englishness and whiteness. However, as the below excerpt demonstrates, for Rowan the question of who can belong in England is delimited in other ways.

I mean the government says that...English people are going abroad [i.e. emigrating], overseas and there's a balance [in terms of migration inflow and outflow], but I don't think there is a balance... It sounds unwelcoming, it sounds exclusive, but I think it's just a question of arithmetic really.

4.3 Rowan suggests that a process of 'arithmetic' by which an economic 'balance' of the population can be calculated helps to answer the question of whether someone should be allowed to enter, and thus by extension belong within, Britain. While the legitimacy of an association between 'race' and belonging within England would be rejected by Rowan, it would seem that the boundaries of the nation-state are constructed as legitimate in helping to delimit both who belongs and who can be the member of a privileged national in-group. Therefore, although Rowan has constructed a view of the nation in which 'race' does not seem to matter, through the normalisation of *nation-state* boundaries he constructs a highly exclusionary and essentialised perspective on national inclusion. Furthermore, in clear contrast to the way that he reflects on boundaries of 'race', Rowan does not reflect in the same way on the essentialised nation-state boundaries he constructs. Due to the purportedly common-sense character of national distinctions, the economically-framed exclusion he legitimates is 'just arithmetic' and not, for him, 'really' a process of exclusion; and crucially, this reasoning apparently neutralises any ethical concerns. While Rowan suggests that his perspective may '*sound*...unwelcoming', this form of nationalist exclusion is not, he suggests, *actually* unwelcoming or exclusionary due to the purported neutrality of nation-state boundaries. Rowan thus feels able to express such views in a mundane, matter-of-fact way (it is '*just* a question of arithmetic') while obscuring the normalised distinction between a nation-state's 'own citizens and all other human beings' (Poggi 1978, 100).^[1]

4.4 For all participants who constructed this kind of de-racialised but nationalist boundary, the migrant 'other' and the potentially damaging effects of migration on national society are central. In what follows, David is responding to the question of whether housing should be allocated differently depending on whether someone is English.

If we're going to call ourselves [an] inclusive, tolerant, accepting society, then you can't build in exclusivity to public resources...it sort of flies in the face of what you're trying to say you are... Having said that [laughs]...I think if someone...rolls off a train...or whatever [laughing]...and rocks up in a town and goes to local [council] offices, 'Yeah I've just moved here, I'd like a house', 'Are you English?', 'No'... 'But you want a house?', 'Yeah', 'Okay, here you go'. That seems [pause] weird.

Throughout his interview, as with Rowan, David holds to principles that are strongly critical of associations between Englishness, 'race' and a sense of privileged national belonging. Consistent with this perspective, in the above excerpt David argues that it would be morally questionable to privilege English people in the allocation of 'public resources'. However, this seemingly universalist perspective quickly shifts in relation to apparently common-sense arguments relating to nation-state membership. For David, the idea of equality of treatment in terms of public housing provision, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, is initially seen as morally normative before being literally laughed off and its prospect described as 'weird' in relation to the idea of a non-*nation-state* member's access to state resources. This is particularly achieved in relation to the stereotypical figure of the welfare-abusing migrant, positioned as making unreasonable and unfair demands on the state. Within a few phrases a gap thus arises between apparently inclusive, anti-essentialist thinking regarding the fair allocation of resources and an ultimately essentialist and highly exclusionary perspective which is nonetheless perceived as neutral, sensible and ethically non-affective.

4.5 In this way, participants such as Rowan and David, who thoroughly problematise the legitimacy of the racialised boundaries of Englishness, demonstrate far fewer, if any, 'moments of questioning' (Frankenberg 1993 cited in Tyler 2004, 291), whether empirical, experiential or ethical, in relation to nation-state boundaries and the migrant 'other'. How this ethical normalisation of national difference is achieved is suggested in the below excerpts from Lynn and Sam.

Lynn: When you're looking at refugees...you don't want to turn people like that away... It would take a far more strategic brain than mine to sit down and work out how the hell you do it [i.e. decide on how immigration is controlled]...but I don't believe that anybody would honestly say, yeah any old bugger can come in...and not work.

Sam: I think that...England and Britain are only in the position they are in the world because of three or four hundred years of robbing the shit out of smaller, less industrialised countries... Some controls [on immigration are necessary] as a matter of common sense....[Such controls should be concerned with] whatever we ought to do out of a sense of humanity and then what's good for keeping the economy ticking over I suppose. It's the kind of thing I switch over when it comes on the news.

Both Lynn and Sam demonstrate sympathy towards disadvantaged and deprived migrants. Lynn suggests that decisions of who should be allowed into Britain require a 'more strategic brain' than hers, though in relation to this the stereotype of the welfare-abusing migrants is mobilised as an evidently serious problem. Elsewhere in her interview, Lynn expresses thanks that she 'isn't a politician' so that she does not have to deal with such issues directly. Lynn thus seems to suggest that she does not feel the need to concern herself ethically with questions of migration in detail and thus bear any moral responsibility for what is a technically-framed process of exclusion. Sam similarly argues that immigration policy should be sympathetic towards global, historical inequalities, that it should reflect a concern for colonial history and a universalist 'sense of humanity', but that this needs to be balanced with a 'common sense' concern 'for keeping the economy ticking over'. Immigration does not worry Sam generally, and like Lynn he feels glad to be able to 'switch over when it comes on the news' and remove himself from considering it in greater depth.

4.6 For these participants, economistic, technical and legal arguments in which politicians and bureaucrats are charged with managing migration and keeping the 'economy ticking over' seem to legitimise, in both the moral and juridical sense, the construction of essentialised difference and exclusion in ways that do not seem to be or feel ethically salient to these participants: as Zygmunt Bauman argues, '[t]echnical responsibility differs from moral responsibility in that it forgets that the action is a means to something other than itself... The result is the irrelevance of moral standards for the technical success of the bureaucratic operation' (1989, 101). Crucially, this kind of technocratic, legalistic argument is framed by (and perhaps relies upon for its construction as legitimate) the normativity of nation-state discourses; and a key pattern that emerges is that, in clear contrast to participants such as Lizzie who demonstrated anxieties, self-doubt and self-critique in relation to boundaries of 'race', participants who draw on nation-state boundaries demonstrate a comparatively diminished affective responsibility with regard to the processes of exclusion they legitimise. The perceived neutrality of nation-state boundaries, when combined with economistic discourses relating to the 'balance' of the population and the portrayal of migrants as welfare-abusing and damaging to the economy, thus helps participants to avoid any potential feelings of ethical accountability for their exclusionary perspectives.

4.7 The data presented in this section thus suggest that the widespread social acceptability of legally and economistically conceived nation-state-derived reasoning, and the acceptability of stereotypes surrounding the figure of the migrant, can be contrasted to more publically problematised and socially

questionable – and, as a result, potentially more ethically affective – racialised discourses and stereotypes. All of the participants discussed in this section maintain a commitment to de-racialised notions of Englishness while at the same time invoking a framework of civic entitlement associated with the state. This is sometimes associated by them with Englishness, though more often with Britishness or a vaguer national 'we' defined in relation to state boundaries; or, on occasion though less commonly, with the borders of the European Union. Each of these civic discourses constructs an essentialist, privileged perspective of a national (or in the case of the EU transnational) in-group, curtailing the moral obligations felt towards the excluded 'other'; and it may be that this kind of privileged perspective, premised on essentialism and exclusion, is further obscured and legitimised by these participants' adoption of anti-racist perspectives on the nation.

Conclusion

5.1 Condor finds that 'the ways in which' participants in her study 'typically went about expressing... opinions [on Englishness] indicates a widespread awareness of the possibility that they might be held accountable for [racist/xenophobic] sentiments' (2000, 194). While this pattern was also demonstrated in this article, it was also found that for most white participants any sense of accountability was limited and temporary. Despite empirical, experiential and ethical counterclaims, the majority of white participants in this study continued to construct Englishness in relation to a normative whiteness. For these participants, such disruptions were ultimately regulated back towards this racialised norm, a process that can be linked to Skey's (2010, 2011) findings suggesting an association between a secure sense of self and the maintaining of racialised national boundaries. While discussions about the extent to which the racialised boundaries of Englishness are linked to wider discourses of belonging in Britain (Condor 2000; Mann 2012) are beyond the scope of this article, I would nevertheless suggest that this kind of exclusionary, fixed, racialised identity has a clear potential for social exclusion and social harm.

5.2 As discussed in the second empirical section of the article, some white participants *did* consistently and more effectively challenge the racialised boundaries of Englishness. However, these participants constructed difference in relation to essentialised *nation-state* boundaries for which there were no comparable examples of reflection or processes of challenging in empirical, experiential or, perhaps most notably, ethical terms. Therefore, in the instances where the racialised boundaries of the nation *were* problematised by white participants, other forms of essentialist and exclusionary nationalist difference remained untroubled.

5.3 It is important not to play down the differences between racialised and nation-state boundaries, or the potentially positive impact on society of the kinds of 'civic', de-racialised nationalist discourses discussed in the second findings section. Nevertheless, I would suggest that a key finding of this article is that even in the relatively rare instances where national categories are de-racialised, nation-state frameworks may continue to legitimise forms of essentialist, nationalist exclusion (and/or potentially *transnational* forms of exclusion in an EU context) which, whilst potentially conceptually distinct from racialised perspectives, are ultimately no less arbitrary in character. Through nation-state discourses, the differential treatment of categorised individuals based on frameworks of citizenship and legality can be legitimised and normalised in common-sense ways by people otherwise committed to critical, inclusive perspectives premised on equality of treatment. Notwithstanding intersections between 'race' and nation-state boundaries, it is perhaps nation-state boundaries that are more central to debates and decisions surrounding the distribution of state resources in Britain today; and it may be that they are becoming increasingly more important than racialised or cultural boundaries in legitimating constructions of national belonging, something perhaps demonstrated in the coalition government's recent policy announcements surrounding EU migrants' access to benefits (Meredith 2013). Indeed, the findings in this article suggest that the kind of 'perfectly legal and internationally sanctioned exclusion' legitimated by nation-state discourses 'represents perhaps the politically most stable form of ethno-national dominance' (Wimmer 2004, 42) in Britain today; and within the wider context of increasing anti-migration rhetoric and feeling (Blinder 2012), it may be that the legitimacy of essentialising nation-state distinctions is becoming entrenched, perhaps even strengthened. While discourses of 'race' are far from being transcended, these patterns lend support to Les Back's prediction (after Du Bois) that while the problem of the twentieth-century may have been 'the colour line', 'the problem of the twenty-first century' may be 'the problem of the "immigration line"...the proportions of which are only just beginning to emerge' (2007, 31).

Notes

¹Poggi's argument is only partly tempered by the transnational form of citizenship provided by European Union membership which has highly restrictive and discriminatory rights of entry and settlement for individuals from most non-EU states.

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