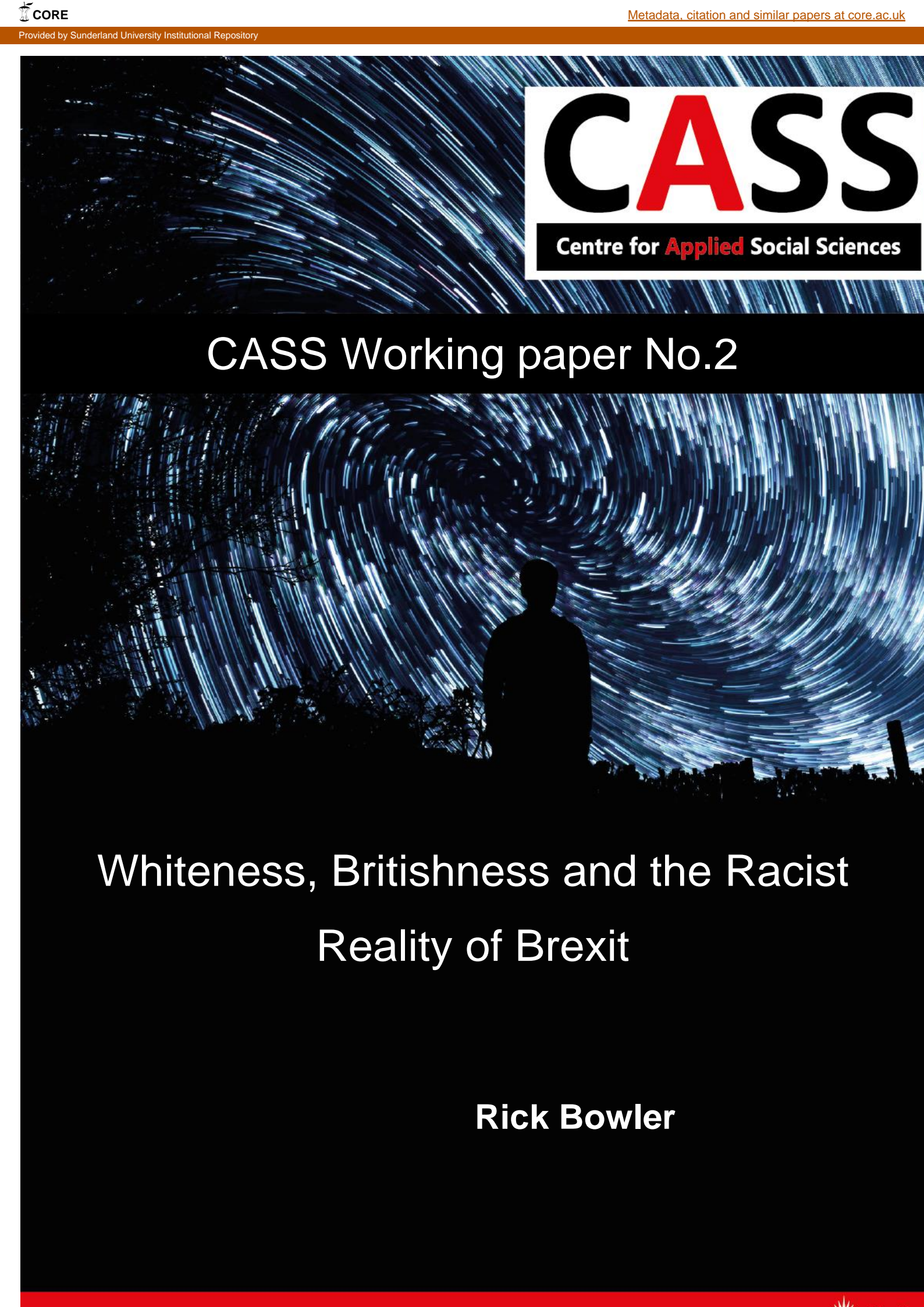


The logo for the Centre for Applied Social Sciences (CASS). It features the word "CASS" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The letter "A" is colored red, while the letters "C", "S", and "S" are black. The logo is set against a white background with a black border.

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A long-exposure photograph of a starry night sky, showing curved light trails from stars. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a person stands looking up at the sky. The overall color palette is dark blue and black, with bright white and blue light trails.

Whiteness, Britishness and the Racist Reality of Brexit

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ongoing reality of British Racism as exemplified in the 'theory of numbers' (Mullard, 1973). This theory racially marks the immigrant body and has been a reoccurring fiction woven into national debates since its justification for the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act (Dummett and Dummett, 1982; Miles and Phizaklea, 1984). The Brexit debate is identified as the latest example of how the absence of public education about Britain's colonial legacy leaves institutionalised racism and the whitewashing of English /British identity outside of an explanatory frame (Paul, 1997). This absence alongside the political choice to perpetuate the theory of numbers leaves, in the public imagination, false explanations that retain an ongoing belief in fictions about 'race' and immigration. These stories about race and immigration told by the primarily white middle class men leading the Brexit debate obfuscates the reality about the lack of political planning for social and economic infrastructure to meet demographic change. This paper challenges the racial fictions woven into the Brexit debate and argues that Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers an important viewpoint from which to trouble the privileging social system of whiteness (Feagin, 2013) and its white nation fantasies (Hage,1998) about class, nationhood and identity.

KEY WORDS

Brexit / Whiteness, English / British Identity / Nationhood / Racism

Introduction

'Whatever else Brexit means or does not mean, it certainly means racism'

(Sivanandan, 2016:2)

'Dissecting political whiteness is paramount to understanding how racism operates in Britain. So often positioned as invisible, neutral, and benign, whiteness taints every interaction we'll ever engage in'

(Eddo-Lodge, 2016: 17)

This paper challenges the racial logics enmeshed within the Brexit debate and primarily narrated to the public by a privileged group of white middle-class men (Jack, 2017). Their voices about whether to remain or to leave the European Union reproduced the logic of 'race' through the discourse of immigration underpinned by the ideological belief in the '*theory of numbers*' (Mullard, 1973:49). This ideological underpinning also posits whiteness as an essentialist component of Britishness (Paul, 1997, Schwarz, 2011) and connects racial logics to ideas about entitlement (Garner, 2016).

'Whose country is it?' is a crucial question and the dominant narration throughout the Brexit debate appeared to foreground a form of Britishness that was wrapped up in the exceptionalism of English Nationalism (Thomas, 2011). Whose country was being taken back carried within it the reality that race remains a 'floating signifier' (Hall, 1996: 473) attached to banal symbols of national identity (Billig, 1995). This is the racial reality the paper addresses.

This paper does not argue it was a good/bad or sensible/foolish decision to vote to exit the European Union. The paper posits the view that irrespective of how the public voted, the logics of race were clearly at work in the debate itself. Furthermore, this paper argues that the absence of a public education programme identifying the British State's racial reality leaves public knowledge about Britain's nationhood, history and culture to be imagined through fictions wrought out of white nation fantasies (Hage,1998).

The reproduction of blame attributed to the immigrant in British political discourse was foundational to the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act and established the

idea in the public imagination that British racism was not systemic and therefore not the 'problem' (Mullard, 1973; Miles and Phizacklea, 1984). The 'problem' was narrated by the white elite of that time as embodied within the 'immigrant' and in simplistic terms, the greater the numbers of 'them' the bigger the problem for 'us'. The 'us' in their formulation was the people they defined as white (Schwarz, 2011). This end of empire fiction enabled the white English/British elite to narrate the 'immigrant' – the alien body of the other – as the causal problem in all matters related to race–relations (Dummett and Dummett, 1982).

The racism of the English/British production of 'the immigrant problem' re-emerged in its current formation in 2011 when the Conservative led Coalition Government set up their 'hostile environment working group' (Burnett, 2016). This group was designed to make hostility the migrant experience of life in Britain.

The creation of the hostile environment working group was exposed by the Liberal Democrat MP Sarah Treacher during her announcement to stand down from Parliament (Aitkenhead, 2013).

The Brexit referendum result in numbers was an overall 48% remain and 52% leave vote (Rushton, 2017). These numbers are of course only one way of calculating the relationship between the British State, its constituent parts as well as the European Neighbours/Partners we voted to leave. The percentages in Scotland differed from those in Wales and Northern Ireland and across the categories of age, gender, locality and ethnicity. The numbers as with the meanings embedded in the stories about national control, immigrants, character and belonging are a complex mix that rubbed alongside a Eurosceptic and racially infused right wing project (Knight, 2016). I am therefore not arguing that numbers do not matter but the meaning given to them by dominant frames such as the 'theory of numbers' require critical attentiveness.

The political arguments about the post-Brexit phase in the British State's relationship with others, including its own citizens, is now unfolding and may prove to be not the simple outcome offered to us all during the referendum debate. In a recent report about race and class post-Brexit, the debate was identified as moving 'from inadequate to toxic' (Khan and Shaheen, 2017: 3). This paper argues that the inane

and coded rhetoric that 'Brexit means Brexit'¹ alongside the arguments about limiting immigration made by middle-class white men in leading roles for the remain campaign, were primarily narrated through 'white talk' (McIntyre, 1997: 45). White talk is a means of communication that (re)produces, consciously or dysconsciously, the idea of race as innate and deterministic. It is a discursive practice that enables white people to (re)produce uncritical beliefs that inhibit their ability to self-reflect about the ideological, structural and cultural forces of whiteness and racism in society. This paper therefore challenges the underpinning logic embedded in everyday white talk and sets out my thinking about how the racially charged Brexit debate and the pending negotiations defining the actual terms of leaving the European Union, create further division in mono-cultural spaces. I draw upon previous research work from my doctoral studies (Bowler, 2015) and earlier work (Bowler, 2006) to offer a critical commentary about the on-going elite and everyday racisms impacting upon the post-industrial and post-colonial North of England geographies.

Thinking about Racism, Whiteness and Brexit

The theoretical framework known as Critical Race Theory (CRT hereafter) underpins the arguments in this paper. CRT is an anti-essentialist compound theoretical approach that acknowledges racism as 'systemic' (Feagin, 2006:2), and 'unmasks its routine, taken-for-granted yet murderous character' (Gillborn, 2009:78). CRT also recognises the reality of intersectional praxis (Collins and Bilge, 2016) and this frame enables whiteness to be viewed not as an essential identity but as an unstable political construct that privileges 'all white people' whether they desire this or not (Quraishi and Philburn, 2015:23). Therefore, this paper offers a critique that exposes the banal nationalism entwined inside the Brexit debate and the English British exceptionalism that dominated it (Gillborn, 2009; Thomas, 2011; Bowler, 2013; Burnett, 2016).

In his intersectional work on 'race', class and whiteness, Preston (2009: 193) argues for a shift away from white as identity to a consideration of the 'political choices' and 'racial strategies' white people make within the bounds of the contexts in which the identifications of their racial realities take form. This explanatory frame on racism

¹ The now everyday usage of the language of Brexit as if it has a singular clear definition is itself important to trouble. The nativist coding of Englishness and Britishness are rarely troubled when Brexit is stated. Without a critical lens on race it leaves the British element of Brexit as an agreed homogenous white identity.

moves away from simplistic and essentialist claims that all white people are racist to an exploration of the multiple forms of racisms and the contextual choices and strategies made by people in any given moment within a systemically racist society.

If members of the British establishment² hold onto white supremacist view-points they are (re) producing 'hegemonic whiteness' which is the cultural process out of which white people come to form their understanding of white identity (Hughey, 2010: 1289). This acculturation process is described by Hughey (2010: 1289) as containing two interlocking actions where:

'racist, reactionary and essentialist ideologies are used to demarcate inter-racial boundaries, and [...] performances of white racial identity that fail to meet those ideals are marginalized and stigmatized, thereby creating intra-racial distinctions within the category 'white.'

At the core of whiteness is the performance of demarcated inter-racial boundaries through the racist constructions of the 'us' – 'white British people' - and 'them' - the 'immigrant other' - at the heart of much of the Brexit debate. These demarcated positions order the extent of belonging within the unspoken boundaries of English/British citizenry. The acculturation process of whiteness also enables a distinction to be made about who is incorporated as a 'proper' white person and who is 'off' white or 'not' white enough (Alcoff, 2015). Whiteness should therefore be understood as a social system with its origins in the racial science of white supremacy and as operational through 'the white racial frame' (Feagin, 2013:10). It should not be understood as being an attribute of all white people and should not 'be reduced to individual pathologies' (Preston, 2009: 112). It is however 'implicit and central to all

² Oliver Letwin and David Starkey are two recently exposed examples of white establishment racism. They exemplify how back stage ingrained racist belief systems slip into front stage talk. In 2011 there were a series of inner city disturbances beginning in London and arising from the killing of Mark Duggan, a Black man from Tottenham in London, by the Metropolitan Police. Following this a white establishment historian David Starkey made a racist speech building on ideas from Enoch Powell about the erosion of white English character supposedly being caused by deficiencies embodied in Black culture. He specifically suggested that white 'chavs' who were involved in the rioting had done so because they had become Black (Merrick, 2011). Starkey, after a series of public criticisms, made an apology. In 2015 a senior Conservative politician, Oliver Letwin, who held the posts of Minister of Government Policy and Chancellor to the Duchy of Lancaster from 2014-2016 apologised for his racist views after they were exposed in private papers released about the 1981 inner city disturbances (Dathan, 2015). These middle-class white men have never publicly discussed how they came to hold these racist views. Likewise, they have never explained since their apology how they have come to challenge and change the white supremacist logics that they both had clearly learnt.

choices made by white people' (Preston, 2009: 79). Whiteness as a system of power works because it 'operates as a group identity' (Alcoff, 2015: 188).

CRT also utilises counter story telling as a mechanism to illuminate the racial logics at work within everyday meaning attributed to the white identifications attached to English / British identity (Paul, 1997, Preston, 2009). CRT storytellers identify these as stories from the margins and they use them as an example to expose the systems of power and privilege that operate at the centre. My own personal experience in encountering the racial whiteness underpinning 'the stories telling British people who they [are] were' (Schwarz, 2011: 112), left me not so much thinking about prejudice, but feeling fear. My personal experience of British racism is formative to the choices I have made as an English born British citizen. These experiences of racism positioned and began a discussion within me about belonging, nationhood and my relationship with English/British identity. My racial literacy (Twine, 2010) has enabled me to hold a vigilant 'eye' on the racial reality that despite being an English born British citizen my birth certificate was invisibly stamped with the warning that a not white mixed-race baby might embody the mark of a '*dangerous other*' (Shilling, 2012: 59).

How whiteness is hidden as if outside the everyday discourse of the Muslim, the immigrant, the asylum-seeking other, leaves systemic racism outside of critique yet formative to everyday meaning making processes. Whiteness as a privileging social system positions BME and White people unequally (Khan and Shaheen, 2017). It also narrates everyday human relationships as if they always relate to 'race'. When this social system of whiteness is exposed the logics in its arrangement begin to fracture and the connections that appear to be natural between whiteness and identity are troubled allowing all who challenge it, to 'make whiteness ordinary' (Alcoff, 2015: 189).

The rhetoric of whiteness narrated by the current crop of white middle-class male leaders during the Brexit debate fed into a rise in English nationalism (Thomas, 2011) suggesting that this national identity (Englishness as Britishness) carries within it a stratified, 'pure white', embodied identity. All those not identified as English/British by this narrow group of whitewashed English/British nationalists appear as mere guests in the national home. Thus, the racism that gave meaning to 'race' and underpinned its stratifying logic lives on because the complex realities of Britain's racial reality are

barely discussed and rarely challenged from within. Feagin argues that in relation to the history of the USA the truths about racisms' past are 'not included in the official tour' (2006:1). I would argue that this is equally true in relation to the dominant narrating of Britain's own historical legacy. The British state has ostensibly adopted a silent approach to anti-racist public education over the past 50 years with municipal anti-racism given political leadership during that period for about 2 years (Gaine, 2000). In the current moment, the State absents stories about British racism from its history, and denies that racial logics play any role in current policy³.

Accordingly, *the* 'race conscious approach' (Zamudio et al, 2011: 2) to uncovering 'an ideology that justifies and legitimates racial inequality in society' (Zamudio et al, 2011: 3) set out by CRT offers an opportunity to explore and explain the continuities in the British State's racial history as well as the ways that whiteness appear as an ordinary not outstanding aspect of everyday nationhood and identity.

Myths and Realities of Brexit and Britain

In the period leading up to the referendum there were many different voices and positions including those concerned about the ongoing environmental and social disaster of hegemonic neo-liberalism (Korteweg, 2016; Lucas, 2016). In this there were voices from the margins that spoke to warn about global arms sales, American imperialism, trade agreements that would create legal powers to ignore opposition to corporate ownership of food production, and the privatisation of the National Health Service. These alternative voices from the margin connected by a belief in the aspirations for democratic ideals of freedom, equality and justice were barely heard.

The Brexit debate was dominated by dehumanising narratives about Muslims, asylum-seekers and immigrants (Burnett, 2016). It is a reminder that when the State absents its racist history from public scrutiny, authoritarian populism underpinned by essentialist logic carry on never far from the surface (Fekete, 2012). The referendum decision to leave the European Union - Brexit - also appears to be part of a wider reactionary movement driven by protectionism and nationalism (Gregory, 2017).

³ It is worth noting here the point about whiteness and racism made by Garner (2016:8) that, currently, there is no noticeable Government policy for anti-racism in the UK.

The myths and realities of Brexit resemble Gilroy's (2004) idea that Britain is caught between post-colonial melancholia and the rich diversity of convivial⁴ culture. One a desire to return to mythical times reifying Britain's greatness and the convivial other of an actual reality in which diversity enriches the cultural body of the nation. It appeared to me that the function of the slogan 'take back control', with its underpinning racist imagery connecting immigration with swamping and alien cultures (Miles and Phizacklea, 1984), was to offer an old, false, memory of certainty to a white working-class body living a precarious existence (Standing, 2011). The Brexit vote brought to the fore two important contextual cross-cutting concerns relating to class and race (Khan and Shaheen, 2017). The first is the legacy of post-industrial decline where rising inequality produces fear within the precarious state of the working-class body (Standing, 2011; Dorling, 2013). The second is the rise of popular racist nationalism (Fekete, 2012; Burnett, 2016) as xeno-racism⁵ exemplified by UKIP in Britain, The Front National in France and the Presidential victory of a billionaire businessman in the USA whose campaign rhetoric is supported by the Klu Klux Klan (Holley, 2016).

In keeping with the past, politicians in the present moment have taken to blame white working-class bodies for perpetuating British racism, as if they are its carriers 'backward looking, bigoted and obsessed with race' (Jones, 2012: 8). This invoking of race through marking the white working-class body as deficient to the norm – one assumes a white middle-class norm – requires an explanation that recognises how class intersects with race through the language of whiteness. White working-class people are no more homogenous than the contention that all white middle-class men are overt racists is accurate. The privileging social system of whiteness is more complex than this.

The explanation for many white voters seeking a solution to their current precarious life-chances by voting to leave the European Union to 'take back control', was caused by the dominant groups' choice to make post-colonial realities an explanatory frame for post-industrial decline. The most prominent argument repeated every day in the

⁴ See Nayak, (2017) for an excellent nuancing of the complexities of how conviviality is contained by and acts as a challenge to whiteness.

⁵ This configuration of racisms is best understood as connecting anti-Muslim, anti-Asylum seeker and anti-Migrant racism that combine the deterministic and essentialist logics of racial science with newer formations of cultural racism.

media and written onto the side of buses, linked post-industrial decline and the apparent inevitability of austerity with the pressure on limited resources by immigrants. Many claims were made including such fictive stories that £350 million would be saved and given every week to the National Health Service or that Britain was at breaking point in terms of the numbers of immigrants with a possible 5 million more coming from Countries that to-date, are not even in the European Union (Lewis, 2016). Such '*fact faking*' (Alexander, 2000: 243) by the political elite (re)produced racial logics for the public.

The mainstream Governmental campaign, focusing on remain, offered arguments that the economy is safer within the European Union underpinned by their narrative that leaving should be feared because of the economic disaster it would bring. However, for working class people such economic disaster was already being lived through the policies of austerity. The Brexit voices were drawn from a mishmash of far and centre right ideologues. They narrated an old colonial story given an image make-over to a public, educated and mis-educated within the British system. This old colonial story persisted in suppressing the racial reality of its own history. The focus of the Brexit debate gave the appearance of speaking to white British people as if they were a beleaguered minority. The focus of the Brexit debate was almost entirely on the deficiencies of the 'off-white' foreigner and 'problem' migrant through a discourse about entitlements (Garner, 2016). The reality of the conviviality of mixed Britain where 'an organic, grassroots form of integration and multiculturalism' blooms (Bates, 2012: 116), was not to the fore in taking back control but became the focus for the violence of the now, year-long hate crime spike (Burnett, 2016; England, 2017).

Challenging hostility in Post Brexit Britain

The establishment of a hostile environment working party by the Home Office during the Conservative-led Coalition Government in 2011 and the subsequent intention in 2012 by Teresa May – the then Home Secretary and now Prime Minister – to create 'a really hostile environment' in relation to immigration (Burnett, 2016: 10) arguably generated the ground for a violent xeno-racist culture to flourish (Fekete, 2012). The post-Brexit spike in various forms of hate crime within this context reveals British racism's everyday inclinations to violence (Burnett, 2016).

The picture is of course complex and contradictory. Age was a clear marker of difference with 72% of 18-24 year olds voting to remain with 59% of the 65 and above age group voting to leave (Bloom, 2016). Young people also come out of attitude surveys generally in a favourable light when asked about their beliefs on 'immigration' or 'ethnic diversity'⁶ and this is likely to be a result of them being the most ethnically diverse group (Ford, 2008). However, Ford (2008: 609) also identified that despite a greater diversity coupled with a reduction in prejudice amongst the younger generation, 'significant pools of [*white*] hostility to ethnic minorities remain among less qualified, working-class young men'. The research undertaken by the organisation Show Racism the Red Card (SRTRC) identified that less well educated white young people over-estimate the numbers of migrants and Muslims living in Britain⁷ and the researchers believed this was due to the persistent messages from the media and politicians focused on anti-immigrant, anti-asylum-seeker and anti-Muslim stories (SRTRC, 2015).

Dorling (2013:5) argues that the increasing wealth inequality in Britain creates fear which 'brings out the worse in people' because 'people can be taught to fear and hate immigrants'. The demand to take back control (Wilson, 2017) was a call to emotion and 'when false beliefs are invested with powerful emotions' (Ioanide, 2015: 17) [...] 'feelings possess the unique ability to trump facts' (Ioanide, 2015: 15). The myths about swamping the nation with dangerous cultural ideas supposedly brought to Britain by immigrants, asylum-seekers and Muslims, (re)produced a racism that enabled people to shout out their 'surplus anger' at a system that appeared to have failed them (Bauman, 2007: 48). That surplus anger then spilt into the Brexit Britain hate crime spike that has occurred alongside evidence of a rainbow nation of conviviality (Bates, 2012).

Rushton (2017) identifies how the City of Sunderland, because of its white working-class, was identified by dominant voices in the leave and stay camps, as a container for aberrant people. The marking of aberrant through the Brexit City label appears as

⁶ I would argue that when the terms 'ethnic' and diversity are used in official governmental and media publications it is a means of speaking about 'race' through a prism that attempts to avoid the messiness the logics of race carry. This always means that racism is never critically discussed.

⁷ 35% of the young people believed that Muslims were taking over the country and 60% of those surveyed believed that asylum seekers and immigrants 'steal' the jobs of British workers.

a codification by mainstream politicians and media outlets, denoting the white working-class as abject (Tyler, 2013), as if they make choices outside of their contextual location. In earlier times the use of the concept of aberrant was utilised against the New Commonwealth Immigrants as a political strategy in the 1960s to obfuscate the reality of a deeply embedded white British racism (Dummett and Dummett, 1982). In Sunderland, the marking of aberrant was identified in a reflective consideration of youth work and racism, by an anti-racist intercultural project established in 1998 following an extreme violent racist attack (Bowler, 2006). Sunderland has been identified as a place where 'non-white communities can feel misrepresented and 'not wanted' due to their skin colour' (Saeed, 2007: 163). In the People Respecting Others Understand Difference (PROUD) project the white working-class young people who voluntarily engaged in the anti-racist intercultural youth work were as richly complex as their BME male and female peers. One of their difficulties was the lack of critical forms of education within the city itself (Bowler, 2006).

One of the findings from the empirical research undertaken for my doctoral thesis identified that in white spaces, white people can miss the importance of racism as a structural system of power and a cultural marker of difference (Bowler, 2015). This absence of experiencing racism blocked from white people a conscious consideration about the everyday normative power of white to operate as if it were not a racial identity. This absence limited the ways that white people came to know their white identity and thus left whiteness to occupy the norm, showing that an awareness of context was a critical factor in developing racial consciousness.

One important finding from the research was that racism operates not only at the interpersonal level of contact in public places but that it is also performed in everyday institutional cultures where white standards prevail because 'Whiteness as the dominant marker of the norm is left untroubled by a particular silence that needs opening up for critique' (Bowler, 2015: 360).

Many of the white young people worked with by anti-racist youth work education projects enter that terrain believing their entitlements to societal resources have been taken from them by immigrants, asylum-seekers and Muslims (Bowler, 2006; Cattle and Thomas, 2014; SRTRC, 2015). The continuing repetition of this fictional story by elite establishment figures such as those leading the Brexit debate must be

challenged. It is likely that one reason this challenge to racist myths was silenced during Brexit was 'the policy of Austerity' [*which had*] 'negatively impacted upon young people and youth services' (Bowler, 2015: 108). An alternative racially conscious explanation is needed to enable all young people to engage critically in challenging the myths of Brexit.

This is important for those of us concerned about the education of our future generations. In my own study about racism, whiteness and youth work in the North of England it was clear that there was a contestation across the region illuminating Gilroy's (2004) post-colonial melancholia and multicultural conviviality (Bowler, 2015). This contestation appeared to be between social forces seeking to thrive on ideas about whiteness and English/British exceptionalism and an emerging progressive alliance exploring anti-racist intercultural possibilities (Bowler, 2006, 2013; Cattle and Thomas, 2014). Despite the reality that Austerity has decimated youth work with young people the Post Brexit experience has begun to open these different world views to critique. This is an important moment because 'Britain appears paradoxically as both a racist and a progressive state' (Bowler, 2015:379).

Conclusion

I have explored how the mythical dominant meaning of Englishness/Britishness as an imagined white identity remains a hook for many mono-culturally educated citizens. This enactment of whiteness is an essentialist construction of national identity and is a legacy of the homogenising, white-washed colonial history (Paul, 1997). Despite this, we know that identities including national identities are not fixed because they are always 'flexible, shifting and contested' (Phoenix, 2008: 107).

The challenge for critical educators is to get to know these racial fantasies and fictive stories about whiteness and expose how they have come to be banally attached to discourses of Englishness/Britishness and immigration (Billig, 1995, Paul, 1997). It is (re)productive of racial logic to identify white as an identity without publicly maintaining its connection to the privileging social system of whiteness and its long history in the perpetuation of racism. The dominant story told by the elite about the white working-class as 'inherently' racist persists as a 'truth' only if it is narrated outside of a critical contextualisation of racisms' reality (Preston, 2009).

Whiteness as a privileging system is not impenetrable because it has always been resisted but the history of this resistance is mostly unknown to the British public. This has left whiteness to appear as if it is the norm. I have argued in this paper that whiteness plays an organising role in perpetuating the racist politics of immigration. Therefore, it is necessary for educators to critically expose it. This can be done by moving beyond the limitations in the politics of identity where whiteness has become meshed in with English/ British character and follow the advice of Preston (2009) to foreground the political choices white people make to collude with or counter racist ideas. It is these choices and the 'racial strategies' people make (Preston, 2009: 193) that need to be at the forefront of the critical educator's praxis.

The reality of racism's reach cannot be understood outside the intersecting identities embodied in convivial culture. These diverse voices inform us that there is no uncontested return to singular notions of national identity. The dominant 'idea that a nostalgic form of 'white Britishness' (Khan and Shaheen, 2017: 27) is sustainable in a changing global landscape is counter intuitive to Britain's multi-ethnic realities (Gilroy, 2004). In my explorations of whiteness in relation to the Brexit debate I have attempted to set out how the banal coding of racism was sutured into the ideas about English/British exceptionalism. These dominant messages are being contested as can be seen by the shifting sands in the recent General Election (Topping, 2017). Whiteness appeared for much of the Brexit debate as a gentleman's club seemingly bereft of critical reflection. These socio-cultural formations of whiteness have long roots but they are 'leaky' (Wander et al, 1999: 15) and this is the ground where critical educators must work.

In trying to explain the racial realities enmeshed into Britain's post-colonial and post-industrial state I have sought to make sense of the English/British attachment to empire days and the emergence of diverse convivial cultures to cast an eye over the divisions illuminated by the Brexit debate. It is arguable that the certainty voted for by many of the white working-class Brexit voters was a desire for a return to less precarious times. Unfortunately for those who have come to believe the narration of English/British nationalism, the melancholia for a return to better times is unlikely to become a reality in the post-Brexit future (Allen, 2016).

Therefore, it is important for educators, irrespective of background to recognise that the strategic rhetoric of whiteness (Nakayama and Martin, 1999) leaves all invocations of Englishness/Britishness requiring a vigilant lens to trouble the masking of its historical and contemporary racial reality. The ground breaking work by Twine (2010) showing how white British mothers developed their racial consciousness to help their black children build up resilience to everyday racisms tells us that whiteness is not fixed. The stories of the white mothers inform us that whiteness can be resisted and racial literacy developed, because how a person gives meaning to their white identities is a choice and racial realities do not live outside of the wider intersecting forces in society (Twine, 2010). This is an important lesson for post Brexit Britain and if conviviality is to be sustained we need to engage with the on-going struggle to challenge hegemonic whiteness.

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