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Opportunities and challenges doing interdisciplinary research: what can we learn from studies of ethnicity, inequality and place?

Nissa Finney^a, Ken Clark^b and James Nazroo^c

^aSchool of Geography and Sustainable Development, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, UK; ^bDepartment of Economics, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK; ^cDepartment of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

ABSTRACT

This Special Issue Introduction critically reflects on the interdisciplinary working project on ethnicity, inequality and place undertaken by the ESRC Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity. We argue that CoDE is uniquely placed to undertake this interdisciplinary work and discuss the extent to which the project pushed thinking beyond that of our disciplinary homes to provide innovative insights into the significance of place for understanding ethnic inequalities and identities. From the six papers in the Special Issue, this Introduction identifies four cross-cutting themes on ethnicity and place: processes of exclusion, the importance of temporal context and change, tensions of scale in the way ethnicity and place together shape experiences and inequalities, and the conceptualisation of ethnicity as dynamic, multi-faceted and socially constructed. We argue that the project has succeeded in terms of cross fertilisation of ideas, challenging ontological and epistemological divisions, and facilitating interdisciplinary learning, adaptation and appreciation. We also identify difficulties that were experienced. We suggest that interdisciplinary ideas flourish in an environment where they can fail and conflict, but where failure and conflict does not disrupt the underlying momentum of the work. We conclude in favour of interdisciplinary, democratic and co-produced research as a tool for social change.

KEYWORDS

Interdisciplinarity; mixed methods; co-production; inequality; place

Introduction

The origin of this Special Issue is the initial phase of work of the Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE), funded from 2013 to 2017 by the U.K. Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). CoDE, based at the Universities of Manchester, Glasgow and St Andrews, aims to examine the contemporary patterning of ethnic identities and inequalities and how these have unfolded over time. Using empirical evidence, CoDE's research informs our understanding of social change and its drivers in relation to the meaning and significance of ethnic identities as well as absolute and relative experiences in key social realms

CONTACT Nissa Finney  nissa.finney@st-andrews.ac.uk

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(education, employment, mobility, health and wellbeing, racism, civic behaviour and attitudes). CoDE seeks to make a major contribution to the understanding of these issues and to provide the knowledge and tools to enhance policy and public capacity to address ethnic inequalities.

CoDE researchers are engaged in a variety of methodological approaches including the secondary analysis of a wide range of contemporary and historic survey and census data and historical analysis of key social, economic and political events since the 1950s. Complementing these approaches we have carried out four comparative locality studies in Glasgow, Manchester, Cardiff and London. These locality studies include the analysis of local census and survey data, cataloguing and analysing archived material, interviews and focus groups with key informants and local residents, observation and participation in community activities and innovative qualitative approaches, such as running pop-up shops to share and collect information.

From the outset, CoDE has been an interdisciplinary endeavour with research organised thematically with multiple disciplines and approaches represented within each theme. The shared position and commitment is to understand and address ethnic inequalities in the U.K. CoDE members bring expertise from across the social sciences, from sociology, history, politics, economics, social statistics and geography. This Special Issue is the culmination of a CoDE project on interdisciplinary working on the topic of place, ethnicity and inequality which, via workshops and writing activities, has identified themes and research questions that span the disciplinary and methodological positions of team members. The aim of the project has been to promote, and critically reflect upon, interdisciplinary and mixed-methods working in the context of research on ethnic inequality and how this relates to how identities are constructed, understood and experienced in place. Ultimately, our intention is to augment the degree to which CoDE contributes to knowledge by pushing our thinking beyond that of our disciplinary homes and critically engaging with, and bringing together, different disciplinary paradigms and epistemologies. CoDE is uniquely placed, in its expertise and emphasis on interdisciplinary working, to provide original and innovative insights into the significance of place for understanding ethnic inequalities and identities. By engaging and juxtaposing conceptions of place this project provides new insights into how ideas of places, as racialised spaces, are formed and change through time; and how the nature of these places, in representation and materially, conditions the experiences of those who live in them.

This Introduction to the Special Issue reflects on the six papers included, and on CoDE's interdisciplinary working project. It draws out four cross-cutting themes on ethnicity and place to which the papers speak. It considers whether and how we have exploited the contrasting, often complementary, sometimes conflicting, disciplinary perspectives and methods of a range of researchers across the social sciences to produce innovations in the formation of research questions, research design and interpretation. A further, complementary, objective of this paper is to critically reflect on the challenges and opportunities of interdisciplinary working in the social sciences.

The argument for interdisciplinary approaches

A substantial and growing empirical literature paints a picture of persistent ethnic disadvantage in the U.K. (see e.g. Jivraj and Simpson 2015). This disadvantage exists along a

number of dimensions including employment (Clark and Drinkwater 2007), pay (Metcalfe 2009), housing (Phillips 1998), physical and mental health (Nazroo 2003), income (Fisher and Nandi 2015) and education (Strand 2011). However, an overall disadvantage for ethnic minority people relative to White British people often masks more subtle patterns and we frequently observe considerable diversity between and within different ethnic minority groups in all of the dimensions described above. This diversity in part reflects differences in endowments of human and social capital and wealth, as well as demographics and differential patterns of migration in time and space. However, it also is the result of different experiences of discrimination, racism and unfair treatment. And, of course, differences in human and social capital and wealth also result from processes of discrimination and racism – a consequence of the ways in which identities are racialised.

A common theme which emerges from the growing social scientific literature on ethnicity in the U.K. is the critical role of ‘place’. The experiences of ethnic minority people are shaped by their proximity to members of their own and other groups, their negotiation of the urban landscape, their experiences of various dimensions of deprivation in their immediate surroundings and the racialisation of space and place. An emphasis on place reflects in part that ethnic minority people in the U.K. are not evenly dispersed across the country and that they are more likely than those from the majority white group to live in poor neighbourhoods, and in stigmatised neighbourhoods. Notwithstanding the debates about categorising and measuring ethnic groups, their geographical unevenness is evident: While 14% of the population of England and Wales is non-white, the equivalent figures are 40% for London, 4.5% for Wales, 8% for Northern Ireland and 4% for Scotland (ONS 2012; NISRA 2012; NRS 2014). At a more disaggregated geography, these disparities are even sharper. ONS (2012) reports that in the Redcar and Cleveland local authority 97.6% of Census respondents were White British while in the London Borough of Newham 16.7% were classified in this group. Jivraj and Khan (2013) note that all non-white ethnic groups were more likely than whites to live in deprived neighbourhoods. The causes and consequences of this degree of concentration and deprivation have been investigated in a variety of studies; some examples include Finney and Simpson (2009), Phillips (2008), Clark and Drinkwater (2002) and Knies, Nandi, and Platt (2014).

Much of this work conceptualises place narrowly as a unit of geographical location. A broader conception sees place as the result of the formation of historical, cultural and social forces, as a product of human activity, a site of human experience and emotional attachment and continuously, dynamically constituted through relations to others and elsewhere at a variety of scales (Lefebvre 1974; Agnew 1987; Massey 1995; Aitken and Valentine 2015). Theorists argue for: the continued social significance of place (e.g. Massey 1995 or Glick Schiller, Darieva, and Gruner-Domic 2011); attention to the processes and significance of social and spatial inequalities (Dorling et al. 2007); space to be conceived as process, as interaction between practice and representation (e.g. Lefebvre 1974; Deleuze 1988); investigation of racialisation of place (e.g. Wacquant 2007); recognition of the messiness of diverse space and place (e.g. Amin 2002) and understanding of the effects of place on people’s lives (e.g. Galster 2008; van Ham et al. 2014).

Ethnicity is one aspect of social and spatial differentiation of places; most visibly, current patterns of residential location for Britain’s ethnic minority groups reflect histories of international and internal migration, which themselves have been shaped by ideas of place. The social and economic lives of minority groups have in turn contributed to the

character of many areas of the U.K., particularly urban areas, and have contributed to the construction of emotional, familial and cultural bonds between individuals, groups and the neighbourhoods that they inhabit and in which they work. Thus understanding how different ethnic groups' experiences, identities and outcomes are shaped requires us to develop a broader and fuller understanding of place.

In an attempt to do this, this Special Issue adopts Stember's (1991) edict that 'The problems of the world are not organised according to academic disciplines' (2) and thus the papers represent an interdisciplinary set of analyses of the role of place in the ethnic minority experience in the U.K. They can be seen as individually interdisciplinary, but also part of a larger interdisciplinary project that this Introduction reflects upon. Interdisciplinarity is understood as

a collaborative and integrative approach by disciplines to a common object ... the organization of knowledge along interdisciplinary lines is based on the interaction between several points of view, with the issues and problems treated falling 'between' (inter) existing disciplines, being recalcitrant to treatment by a single discipline. (Darbellay 2015, 166)

Such an interdisciplinary approach to ethnicity, place and inequality can deliver benefits including 'creative breakthroughs', the 'outsider's perspective', 'cross-disciplinary over-sights' and the 'unity of knowledge' (Nissani 1997).

Introduction to the papers in this special issue

The paper by Lukes et al., *Slippery discrimination: a review of the drivers of migrant and minority housing disadvantage*, sets the scene for this Special Issue by providing an overview of contemporary housing disadvantage of ethnic minority groups and how this is the culmination of at least eight decades of legislation, and housing and migration policies. Place in this paper is conceived of as the tension between national structures and local experience and agency with the argument being that power to combat housing disadvantage and discrimination is nascent in local areas. In considering ethnicity, this paper argues, migrant history and experience are crucial because of the particular ways that migrant status has, over time, affected housing rights and experience, and how this relates to the racialisation of migrant identities. The review draws on the housing, legal and migration expertise of the authors providing an interdisciplinary framework, but also involves a collaboration between non-academics and academics. Thus, the experience of service delivery of the lead author in housing and migration brings expertise to the paper that would otherwise be absent.

The subsequent three papers all deal with how place is constructed, represented and known. Finney et al. continue the housing theme in their paper *The roles of social housing providers in creating 'integrated' communities*. The paper argues that over a period where responsibility for cohesion has been localised, the roles of local institutions have been neglected yet they shape both the prominence of issues of ethnicity and race and whose versions of the community are promoted. On ethnicity, this paper offers the view of its diminishing importance as an explicit concept or marker of difference in local social policy. On place, this paper illustrates the variability in how ethnic diversity is approached by housing providers, with implications for local residents. Particularly, the historical

context of responses to migration and diversification and localised racialisation of places and practices shapes the work of contemporary housing providers. On interdisciplinarity, this paper represents combined interpretations of locality case study qualitative data in four diverse areas from geographical and sociological perspectives.

Harries et al. delve more explicitly into how different data yield different ways of *how to understand ethnically 'diverse' areas*. Their paper examines how different methodological approaches can produce varied understandings of place using the example of Cheetham Hill in north Manchester. By examining the portrayal of Cheetham Hill using census data, interviews with local housing/regeneration workers and interviews and other qualitative methods with local residents, the paper illustrates different forms of 'diversity talk'. It thereby demonstrates how ethnic diversity can be defined and evidenced, raising questions about forms of knowledge that are the basis for policy approaches to and social and personal understandings of race and ethnicity. The multi-method approach adopted by the paper allows for a direct engagement with epistemological questions of how knowledge is produced and the potential implications of this for who is represented and how. Thus, the question of place in this paper is how and whether a (diverse) place can be known.

Rhodes and Brown engage with a particular type of reputational place, the inner city, and how this has been variously constructed over time. In their paper, *The Rise and Fall of the 'Inner City'*, they take a historical view to demonstrate how this particular urban space has been racialized. The paper traces the material and symbolic processes through which the 'inner city' has been both the subject and object of socio-political knowledge and action. In doing so it exemplifies the interconnections between place and ethnicity in policy and popular practices and imaginations. This paper combines the sociological and historical framings provided by the authors, which results in the identification of three periods over which the construction and racialisation of the inner city can be understood.

The final two papers conceptualise place as having agency, or effect, upon those who live there. Epistemologically, these papers see this as being measurable in terms of estimating how the experiences (outcomes) of residents depend (alongside other factors) on the characteristics of the place in which they reside. Clark et al. consider *local deprivation and the labour market integration of new migrants to England* and argue, using longitudinal analysis of the Labour Force Survey, that living in deprived areas has a negative effect on the wages migrants receive in the period after migration. Ethnicity, then, is interpreted in terms of the ways in which the immigration experience is racialised. This paper is interdisciplinary in the way that the economic question posed is interrogated and interpreted with inflections from the sociological and geographical positionings of the co-authors.

Interdisciplinarity plays out in a similar way in the final paper from Peters et al. The question of whether *local neighbourhood influences the effects of social networks on ethnic minority poverty* combines the economic, sociological and geographical interests of the authors to examine how an economic outcome is affected by both social and place factors. In common with Clark et al., places are conceptualised as bounded areas characterised by deprivation and it is argued, using analysis of the U.K. Household Longitudinal Study, that living in deprived neighbourhoods reduces the benefit of having mixed social networks in terms of mitigating poverty. Ethnicity is conceptualised as a marker of difference along which this relationship might be expected to differ.

What has been learnt about the relevance of place for understanding ethnic inequalities, and what are the priorities for this research agenda?

From the varied set of papers in this Special Issue, we can point to a number of cross-cutting themes that are important for understanding how place is entwined in the shaping of ethnic inequalities. All of the papers speak to concerns about *processes of exclusion*, of (groups of) people and/or places, demarcated in terms of ethnicity. These processes have been shown as operating via national policies (Lukes et al. 2018), local institutional practices (Finney et al. 2018; Harries et al. 2018), knowledge production and place shaping (Harries et al. 2018; Rhodes and Brown 2018) and spatial ethnic and socio-economic unevenness (Peters et al. 2018; Clark et al. 2018). The concentration of particular ethnic groups in certain geographical areas or neighbourhoods is seen to shape both perceptions of place and perceptions of ethnicity as well as influencing the material circumstances of the groups concerned. Wacquant's (2007) ideas of 'territorial stigmatization', although based on a study of American ghettos and French banlieues, find an echo in the concentrated nature of (ethnic) disadvantage and its wider implications revealed in these papers. As well as illustrating (place-based) processes of exclusion, the papers also provide examples of resistance to these processes within institutions and by individuals in local contexts and examples of how the relations between ethnicity and place are dynamic and constantly (re)constituted.

Indeed, the importance of *temporal context and change* for understanding the interplay of ethnicity and place has been well demonstrated. Lukes et al. and Rhodes and Brown illustrate how taking a view over half a century illuminates contemporary structures and power relations that shape the experience of places and ethnic groups. Both papers emphasise the political response to perceived problems around ethnicity and how that reaction can contribute to disadvantage and stigmatisation. Clark et al. eschew a direct consideration of the political context yet by examining shorter time scales, they too add value by demonstrating diverging trajectories and encouraging questioning of the drivers and consequences of pathways that are distinct by ethnicity, in this case in terms of economic integration. The dynamic focus of these papers emphasises that while place and ethnicity are intertwined – the very theme of this special issue after all – this is not a static relationship but something that evolves in the light of the changing economy and political economy at national and local level. When and why what exists in place stays in place is a question raised by these authors.

A third cross-cutting theme of this special issue is *tensions of scale* in the way relationships between ethnicity and place shape experiences and inequalities. The experiences of people with respect to their ethnicity are simultaneously situated in multiple places – both material and imagined – with differing size, reach and connections. The experiences and processes operating at different scales may differently, and sometimes contradictorily, contribute to inequalities. We might think, for example, of an ethnic minority person's experience being shaped by racialized structures, practices and discourses at a national level and simultaneously lived in a local setting where racialisation is differently imbued and manifested. This is a crude illustration, invoking as it does the dualist thinking of structure and agency, or national and local state, or institutions and individuals. The papers instead have observed a relational, scalar operation of place: Harries et al., for example, show how a relatively small urban area – Cheetham Hill in Manchester – has symbolic power to

represent English multicultural diversity. Though the authors critique the lack of nuance and depth in this construction of Cheetham Hill, its salience does open up to a broad audience the opportunity to question whose voices this imaginary represents. Tensions of scale are also evident in Rhodes and Brown: the symbolic power of the inner city has loomed large in post-war Britain, in part because of transatlantic transmission of understandings of racialized urban space, and this has made 'the inner city' a focus of national as well as local policy. The authors argue that contemporary conceptions of the inner city are deterritorialised and diffused; that the racialisation of urban space is not now bounded in the city core but intertwined across the urban fabric.

The recognition of a relational, scalar operation of place does not necessarily negate the relevance of conceptualisations of place as discrete. In Finney et al., for example, the practices of housing providers are clearly rooted in localities bounded not only by administrative remits but also by local identities. In Clark et al. and Peters et al., the definition of places follows administrative and statistical boundaries (local authorities and output areas) and these are characterised in terms of their levels of deprivation. This approach is not an argument for official boundaries representing the lived experience of neighbourhood, but it does effectively demonstrate that the context in which we live has identifiable implications, be that in terms of economic security and status (Clark et al. 2018), the ability to gain from social networks (Peters et al. 2018), or otherwise. As one might expect from interdisciplinary work, place, scale and the interconnections of places are conceptualised in several different, and some may say opposing, ways in this collection of papers, yet each can usefully speak to the concern of understanding ethnic inequalities.

A question that emerges from the papers in this issue is the meaning of ethnicity. All the papers, and this Introduction have successfully evaded defining ethnicity. This may well be seen as problematic when this is the framing concept of difference that unites the papers and will be frustrating for those looking for a neat definition, yet it also allows a flexibility to emphasise different facets of ethnicity. Indeed, what the papers demonstrate is that for understanding inequalities it is important to conceptualise *ethnicity as dynamic, multi-faceted and socially constructed*. Thus, race (and particularly colour) is prioritised as an important facet of ethnicity by Rhodes and Brown, ethnic mix (diversity) is emphasised by Harries et al. and Finney et al., Lukes et al. and Clark et al. focus on immigration experience/history as a characteristic of ethnic minorities and Peters et al. approach ethnic minority experiences in terms of how they are differentiated by wealth. Yet for each of these papers, it would not suffice to focus on the facets of ethnicity that they prioritise in isolation. The fuzziness of ethnicity's definition can be an asset rather than a hindrance because it inherently recognises the complexities of ethnic identities and how they are racialized, and enables the concept to be flexible to different emphases and contexts. Moreover, allowing ethnicity to have multiple and shifting facets is a recognition of its socially constructed nature and draws attention to the process, causes and consequences of it being a marker of differential experience (inequality). The papers in this special issue adopt this approach; they do not see ethnicity itself as causal but the causal effect, the driver of inequalities, coming from the ways in which it is constructed and racialized. This conceptualisation of ethnicity is present in the papers, to a lesser or greater extent, despite their epistemological and methodological differences. That is not to say there were not differences among participants in this project about the conceptualisation of ethnicity, a point that we consider below, but that they shared a desire to

understand patterns and processes of ethnic inequalities. Given this goal to address (reduce) ethnic inequalities, which is indeed a stated aim of CoDE, what pointers do these papers provide?

Emphasising the deprived, stigmatised nature of the locales in which ethnicity often plays out in the U.K., the papers in this volume support the idea that redistribution of resources and opportunities needs to take account of the complex, evolving nature of the relationship between ethnicity and place. The more quantitative papers discussed here identify numerically the extent to which deprivation impacts on the life chances of individuals; equally the more qualitative papers address, *inter alia*, the symbolic consequences of material forces and the, often clumsy and belated, efforts of governments to intervene. That scarce public resources should be targeted is uncontroversial, but should resources be targeted at groups or places? Clark and Drinkwater's (2002, 2007) analysis of labour market outcomes for ethnic groups concluded that ethnic concentration means that area-based policies could provide an efficient way of targeting resources at ethnic groups insofar as measures designed to reduce deprivation between areas would likely disproportionately benefit those from ethnic minority groups. This approach is supported by experimental evidence that majority white voters are more likely to support policies which are targeted at class or income-based groups than policies targeted specifically at ethnic minorities (Ford and Koostra 2017). However, the clear and present dangers of this approach are documented by Rhodes and Brown who note how the gentrification of the inner city can displace individuals or render a place inhospitable for them within a context where 'diversity', as noted by Harries *et al.*, becomes commodified.

The work by Lukes *et al.* points to the potential advantages of basing policy on the co-production of knowledge by practitioners and scholars. In many areas of policy, those who are tasked with the formulation of policy and its implementation are consumers of research. Lukes and her co-authors demonstrate the advantages of a much closer and mutually beneficial relationship, as co-producers, between the two. While their research is on housing policy the lessons are more general: ground-level knowledge of how policy works (or doesn't) could profitably shape how research into various dimensions of ethnic disadvantage is conducted and contribute to the (co-)production of better policies. For example, it has now been more than 10 years since the Blair government's Ethnic Minority Employment Task Force was commissioned; the evident labour market disadvantage that remains in the U.K., as documented in Clark *et al.*, suggests there remains room for new approaches to research-driven policy.

Lukes *et al.* also draw attention to how, in a fragmented policy framework, a role is opened up for local actors and residents to shape policy relevant to their place. As the next section discusses, the voices of ethnic minority residents are relatively absent in these papers (although they do appear in other CoDE work) and it is possible that this absence leads to us neglecting important aspects of the relationship between ethnicity and place. Perhaps this omission masks a more positive, activist, a resistant element of the behaviour of ethnic minority groups and we risk portraying them as the passive recipients of the consequences of political and economic change. An overarching conclusion might be that the need for sensitivity to the relationship between place and ethnicity is easy to say and harder to do, but in practice making audible the voices of those whose lived experiences are the most affected by the material and symbolic manifestations of race and place should be an essential component of policy development.

What has been learnt about interdisciplinarity and what are priorities for this research agenda?

Here we attempt to be reflexive on the processes and products of interdisciplinary working. The papers in this Special Issue pose questions that would not have been posed without an interdisciplinary setting, develop framings that would otherwise not have emerged, and, we hope, through being brought together in this journal, reach audiences that otherwise would not have been reached. In this sense there has been the creativity and integration that Nissani (1997) suggests is possible and the troubling of existing categories and assumptions that Mason (2011) advocates. Borrowing from Facet Methodology (Mason 2011), the interdisciplinary approach to these papers bring flashes of insight that would not otherwise have been garnered, individually and as a set of work. These insights run through the research process, in the framing, design, operationalisation, data collection, analysis, interpretation and writing, and they are not always, or easily, evident in the final product. So, let us point to a few.

The connections made between legal changes in housing, migration and citizenship would not have been brought together and connected to contemporary evidence for housing disadvantage of migrants and minorities in Lukes et al.'s paper were the three authors, representing different sectors and expertise (housing and migration law and practice, sociology, geography) not collaborating. The partnership in this authorship across academic and policy/practice sectors raised questions about the nature of evidence and particularly how the first hand, extensive experience of the lead author should be incorporated in an academic paper. The style of this paper in places deviates from standard social science practice and this deviation has intentionally been retained and itself forms part of a co-production approach to knowledge creation and dissemination.

In Peters et al., the question posed about the relationship between neighbourhood, social networks and poverty was a direct result of interdisciplinary conversations between the authors, representing geographical, sociological and economic perspectives. The methods too developed as an amalgam of disciplinary norms, for example in the combination of the 'neighbourhood effects' approaches popular in some fields of geography with the detailed and careful operationalisation of income that is necessary in economic studies. The production of the paper by Finney et al. required the geographically oriented authors to engage with sociological literatures and the sociologically oriented authors to engage with geographical literatures.

Rhodes and Brown's paper represents interdisciplinarity in its combination of a historical narrative approach, characterised by a linear timeline and the identification of distinct periods in the development of the concept of the inner city, with an interpretative framework wherein the historical events are understood in the light of sociological theories of materiality, symbolism and power. Whilst, intentionally, falling short of a grand, unifying theory of the historical development of urban spaces (an endeavour beyond the constraints of a single journal paper) the meshing of disciplinary approaches provides a stronger, more watertight consideration of the phenomenon in question, with the historical development, both of the inner city and academic arguments around the inner city, exemplifying the generality of sociological thought in this area. That thought, in turn, binds and moulds what might otherwise be a descriptive account of sequential events into a stronger lens through which to view ethnicity and place in urban areas.

In Clark et al. the empirical techniques applied are most typically used in economics. However, empirical social science has witnessed increasing use of more sophisticated statistical models across all disciplines over the last two decades. In current social science practice it is often less the precise methods that differentiate disciplinary perspectives (although terminological variations exist) than the interpretative framework in which the questions are framed, developed and the results discussed. An interdisciplinary conversation can ‘clear the air’ around the use of contested terms (e.g. integration or assimilation) revealing where differences are more semantic than material, but also make transparent where genuine differences of approach make real differences to the questions asked and how the answers to those questions are used to advance understanding.

This Introduction can in itself be considered an interdisciplinary endeavour, with a Geographer, Economist and Sociologist attempting to together synthesise the implications of findings from CoDE’s work, and from the ways of working. Undoubtedly, this is made easier by a common identification with contemporary social science, by shared substantive interest in the broad goal of understanding and addressing ethnic inequalities, and by a degree of understanding of disciplinary differences deliberately developed through the relatively long research collaboration.

The collection of papers in this Special Issue reflects a great deal of learning and adaptation in working practices that are largely absent from the accounts in the pages of this and other journals. Languages of common understanding have been developed to enable ideas to be shared and discussed, and each paper is written differently here than it would have been for a disciplinary specific journal and, we argue, were each paper not authored by scholars of at least two social science disciplines.

This process of learning, adaptation and appreciation has not been an easy one. It has required supportive institutional frameworks (Darbellay 2015), including from funders, and CoDE has undoubtedly benefited from a U.K. funding environment which (unlike elsewhere) has promoted interdisciplinarity and knowledge exchange in recent years (Lyll, Meagher, and Bruce 2015). The process has also taken considerable time: CoDE has been running for four years at the time of writing, was two years or more in development prior to funding, and the development of interdisciplinarity is ongoing. An interdisciplinary approach requires deliberate planning, design and effort, which in this case have included regular meetings and focused initiatives, to achieve the ‘sustained and intense communication’ between researchers that is seen as a prerequisite for interdisciplinary work (National Academy of Sciences 2005).

Moreover, an interdisciplinary approach has required the commitment of colleagues and a willingness to not be protective of ideas or approaches, to resist disciplinary forces to protect areas of expertise. It also requires a willingness to accept and manage conflict, to incorporate tensions and their resolution into working practices. As Yeh recognises (2016, 39), successful interdisciplinary working ‘may require a degree of not just learning, but also active un-learning, by all involved’. Within CoDE conflicts exist theoretically and epistemologically and these have been played out internally and occasionally externally. The response has required negotiation of disciplinary boundaries, but also of power relations within the group which includes PhD students, postdoctoral fixed-term researchers and tenured staff from lecturer to professorial level. The highly political nature of CoDE’s subject matter in itself has potential to engender conflict and necessitated discussion about the degree to which dissemination of CoDE’s work could

incorporate politicised opinion. In not wanting to deny differing positionalities, or curtail expression of contrasting interpretations, the online blog was found to be a useful outlet for individuals to present their arguments.

The subject matter also affects the potential and effectiveness of interdisciplinary working. Our focus on ethnicity and inequalities lends itself to an interdisciplinary approach as these concepts are ones being grappled with across the social sciences. In terms of dissemination of this work, interdisciplinary outlets such as this journal are crucial because in their remit they do not prescribe epistemological, theoretical or disciplinary perspectives. Fora such as the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* support interdisciplinary work but also provide potential to transcend disciplines (Darbellay 2015).

Though we argue that much has been learnt from our interdisciplinary approach, the question of the benefit of interdisciplinary working and how to demonstrate this remains. The creativeness of the approach may well have led to findings (knowledge) that are different from what would have otherwise been produced, but by what gauge do we assess whether this is better knowledge? Some suggest, and we would concur, that there is much discussion to be had about how interdisciplinary processes are evaluated and learnt from (Lawrence 2015; Lyall, Meagher, and Bruce 2015). Mason (2011, 85) suggests that answering this question involves 'thinking about generalisation as an art as much as a science, where part of the test is the extent to which our insights are evocative and resonant'. We would add that not only should such insights resonate, so reflect new broader/deeper insights that connect with/challenge people's understanding, they should over time provide new ways of thinking about solutions.

In literature on interdisciplinary (and particularly in recent thinking on transdisciplinarity), there is considerable emphasis on the advantages of these approaches for achieving social transformation (Lawrence 2015; Mitchell, Cordell, and Fam 2015). This connects with increasing interest in inclusive research, co-production and democratisation of research (Edwards and Brannelly 2017) which has not featured strongly in the work presented here. We proffer that inclusive and democratic approaches would be an ambition of many, perhaps most, members of CoDE and that social transformation is a common goal, but that in our attempts to both realise and enact the precise nature of these aims we remain in the early phases. Certainly, social transformation does not come from evidence alone and, if CoDE's first phase has been characterised by generation of evidence, the ambition of social transformation can only be achieved through an explicit emphasis on this in future phases of the research.

One area that we have not succeeded as hoped in the papers in this Special Issue is in the integration of data, particularly of the rich qualitative with quantitative data that CoDE has gathered and produced. Several of the papers in this Special Issue started with this ambition but, for reasons of design, time and other resources, and the epistemological challenge of doing more than aligning different data side by side to discuss a research question, this has not come to fruition. Yet this process, this struggle is not evident in papers themselves when, arguably, it should be (Lawrence 2015). The quantitative studies (Peters et al. 2018; Clark et al. 2018) may be viewed as reductionist by some, for example in the categorisation of ethnicity in bounded, prescribed groups, but what is not evident is how the work reflects interdisciplinary conversations that have shaped the categories and analyses used. These conversations have disrupted the quantitative–qualitative binary that might too easily be used to describe the contrasting methodological approaches in the

papers of this Special Issue. Synthesis of data and methods might not have been achieved but cross fertilisation of ideas has, and ontological and epistemological divisions have been challenged. As Darbellay (2015) and Lawrence (2015) argue, there has been a considerable advance in interdisciplinary social science over recent decades but there is still much to develop and debate about the potential and methods of such approaches.

Conclusion

The establishment of CoDE presented a unique opportunity to advance our understanding of ethnic inequalities through an interdisciplinary perspective. The size of the wider research team and the number and diversity of disciplines represented is unusual in modern social science and (probably) unique in the area of ethnicity studies. Through establishing a critical mass of interdisciplinary scholars CoDE has initiated a programme of work that will make a lasting impression on the research landscape. This volume, and more specifically this Introduction, represents our attempt to reflect on understandings of ethnicity and place from interdisciplinary perspectives; and on interdisciplinary working.

The six papers represent a variety of disciplines and methods across the social sciences as well as drawing on a practitioner perspective. Quantitative methods feature heavily in some papers, qualitative methods in others. There is a strong historical focus in two papers, which document timelines of the development of policies and how these shape the nature, representation and racialisation of places. Insights and interpretations are drawn from economics, sociology, history and geography. Throughout, however, there is an attempt to openly and respectfully engage individual disciplinary perspectives in a common and shared endeavour to provide a multi-faceted understanding of the question at hand, the role of place in ethnic inequalities. This interdisciplinary approach, we believe, promotes an understanding of ethnicity and place and the implications for ethnic inequality which is more cohesive, fuller and richer than that which would result from a mono-disciplinary approach.

Our work identifies a number of cross-cutting themes around ethnicity and place including the way processes of exclusion of ethnic minority people operate within and through the material and symbolic properties of places. Across the range of dimensions studied we also identify that this is not a static picture but a relationship where the conceptual elements co-evolve through time, whether that timescale is long or short-run. We also find that there exist tensions around the scales at which place is conceptualised, racialized and works to situate and shape ethnic inequalities. In illuminating the processes through which inequalities exist and persist the papers demonstrate the value, rather than detriment, of a flexible conceptualisation of ethnicity that allows for its dynamic and multi-faceted nature and places an emphasis on processes of racialisation.

We are grateful for the support that CoDE has received from funders, collaborators, publishers and our institutions, and we hope that we have repaid their confidence by adopting a truly interdisciplinary perspective in this Special Issue. It is clear that interdisciplinary work does not 'just happen' when academics from different subjects are placed in the same room. A creative, positive, respectful space can only be achieved where there is the confidence that collaborations will be more than short-term and where there is a recognition that interdisciplinary ideas emerge in an environment where they can fail and

conflict, but where that failure and conflict does not need to disrupt the underlying momentum and group dynamic.

In that vein, we believe our interdisciplinary project has revealed challenges and directions for development. In particular, the ambitions of the research are not satisfied by the evidence and working methods produced thus far if these are not translated into identification of avenues for change to address ethnic inequalities, and advance along those avenues. The potential for this is ripe given current political concern with inequalities and cohesion, and the devolution of governance and responsibilities regionally and locally. The challenge lies in developing approaches to research that are inclusive, co-produced and democratic and engendering support and capacity for this within academic careers, academic institutions and broader regulatory and funding frameworks.

Geolocational Information

Research of the ESRC CoDE is undertaken using data for England, Wales and Britain with case studies of Cardiff (Wales), Newham (England), Manchester (England) and Glasgow (Scotland).

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