

Reimagining Englishness: 'Race', class, progressive English identities and disrupted English communities.

Key words: Class, Englishness, National identity, Nationalism, Race.

Abstract

This article explores suggestions made by the contemporary mainstream left in England that reinvigorated English national identities could be an important resource for constructing a progressive sense of social solidarity and community in England. Analysis of semi-structured qualitative interviews undertaken in a South London area finds that English identifiers do associate Englishness with a sense of social cooperation and community. However, for most participants the expectations they have of Englishness are experienced as disrupted. Focusing on white participants' accounts, the article will demonstrate how such disruptions are crucially related to the discourses of 'race' and class that seem to underpin English identities and thus severely if not fatally undermine the progressive potential of English nationalism.

Background

In recent years the mainstream political left in Britain has engaged in a series of discussions relating to questions of national identity. While much of this has related to discussions of British national identity, this article focuses on the discussions of *Englishness* that have accompanied, interweaved and competed with the Britishness debate. Since the devolution of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the late 1990s, survey evidence suggests a significant increase within England of identifications with Englishness over Britishness (Heath et al 2007). As such, many in the Labour Party, fearing a post-devolution, English nationalist electoral backlash, have argued that the mobilisation of British national identity advocated by successive leaders of the Labour Party (Brown 2004; Miliband 2012) should be complemented by a progressively minded reinvigoration of English national identity. In a 2005 speech, David Blunkett, senior figure in Tony Blair's 'New Labour' project, argued that an 'open and pluralistic' (2005, 6) Englishness should be a key component of a reinvigorated Britishness, a perspective recently championed by Labour MP John Denham (2012). This interest among Labour politicians has found support within wider policy circles, particularly from the Labour-leaning think-tank the *Institute for Public Policy Research* (IPPR), which has

produced a series of studies and reports suggesting that Englishness should be engaged with by the left in various cultural and institutional terms (Kenny 2012, Jones et al 2012). Within academia, the cultural historian and Labour Party member Jonathan Rutherford has suggested that Labour needs to develop 'its own vision of England' (2011; see also 2007), and in February 2013 the Labour Party Policy Review hosted a seminar entitled 'Re-imagining Englishness' which saw a panel of academics, journalists and MPs discuss the potential importance of Englishness for the party's electoral fortunes and progressive politics more generally (Kingston University Website 2013). Further removed from party politics and policy debates, but still very much situated on the left or with leanings towards progressive politics, the musician Billy Bragg (2007), academic and sports writer Mark Perryman (2008) and environmentalist and journalist Paul Kingsnorth (2008) have all written polemically in support of the potential for a reborn English national identity.

While these perspectives generally stop short of calling for an independent English nation-state they all share a belief that some form of newly independent, inclusive Englishness would be a basis for a sense of community that could counteract the atomising effects of neo-liberalism. It is even suggested that Englishness would make a more appropriate vehicle for this vision of national solidarity than Britishness which is, in particular through the *British* Empire, arguably more closely associated with a conservative and colonial past (Newman 2008). The desires and aims of such approaches thus echo Krishan Kumar's optimistic suggestion that 'English nationalism... might newborn show what a truly civic nationalism can look like' (Kumar 2003, 273).

These kinds of progressive reimagination of Englishness draw on a long tradition of English left-wing and socialist politics. E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* documents the appeals made to 'Saxon precedent' for the rights of 'freeborn Englishmen' during nineteenth-century campaigns aimed at extending male suffrage and improving workers rights (1963, 84). Prominent nineteenth-century left-wing thinkers 'argued that the "Anglo-Saxon race" had a particular genius for socialism' (Kinna 2006, 86), with William Morris suggesting that the pre-capitalist, pre-modern Englishness of his imagination provided proof that 'socialism resonated with the national character' (ibid, 94). During the Second World War George Orwell famously portrayed 'the native genius of the English people' (2004, 57) which, he hoped, would reveal itself through a specifically English form of socialism following victory over Nazi Germany. Few, if any, on the left in England would deny that Englishness has been subject to reactionary interpretations, but there are many who argue that the symbols and discourses of Englishness have historically been 'at least as

likely' to be drawn on by those 'on the political left as on the right' (Evans 1994 cited in Aughey 2007, 65).

Despite such historical associations between the left and Englishness, however, others dispute this characterisation of a politically equivocal, potentially progressive Englishness. In *The English Tribe* (1996) Stephen Haseler argues that increasingly popular ideas about liberty and democracy led to the nineteenth-century English elite inventing a 'non-ideological ideology' formed not in relation to popular principles but in relation to deeply conservative power-relations constructed around a trinity of 'land, class and race' (Haseler 1996, 20-23). Echoing the importance of class to this trinity, Tom Nairn's *The Break Up of Britain* (1977) similarly suggests that the stifling class hierarchies of modern England constrained English nationalism's potential for a popular politics of liberty and equality, instead supporting the formation of a 'patrician political' state and 'government by gentlemen' (cited in Aughey 2007, 68).

These historical perspectives on a fundamentally divisive, classed Englishness have been validated in recent empirical research undertaken by Robin Mann. Mann's (2012) findings drawn from interviews with white research participants suggest that the ways in which English identities are constructed are fundamentally classed, as is evident in the binary division of an Englishness often associated with ideas about working-class 'ruffians' and 'hooligans' on the one hand, and with ideas about an upper-class dominated, rigid and outdated class system on the other; a combination which severely inhibits the potential for the development of popular, cross-class English identities.

As well as the relationship between Englishness and class, since the 1980s much sociological literature has lent support to the importance of the 'race' element of Haseler's 'trinity'. From post-colonial perspectives it is argued that national identities in Britain have been constructed in relation to the racialised distinctions associated with European colonialism (Gilroy 2004; Hall & Rose 2006). From these perspectives, even where there have been radical constructions and interpretations of Englishness historically, in many accounts the importance of the colonial background has been obscured. Paul Gilroy, for example, suggests that E.P. Thompson's history of nineteenth-century working-class Englishness forgets that 'the ideology of the "freeborn Englishman" was itself a product of the struggle to differentiate slave from slave-holder' (Gilroy 1982, 148). Into the twentieth century, many scholars of 'race' have analysed how constructions of Englishness following post-War, post-colonial migration are bound up with a redeployment of the racialised boundaries of colonialism 'at home' (Gilroy 2004; Tyler 2012), and in recent years a wealth of literature has

emerged demonstrating strong associations between Englishness and whiteness up until the present day (Mann 2011, Skey 2011, Leddy-Owen 2012).

Research suggests that these associations between Englishness, class and 'race' have led to a rejection of Englishness by some, both white and not white, in favour of individualist, cosmopolitan or multiethnic, 'syncretic' local identities (Back 1996, 158; Byrne 2006, 165; Fenton 2007); or in favour of more inclusive, 'civic' conceptions of *Britishness* (Mann 2012, 494-6). However, the literature also suggests that English identities remain important for many in England, perhaps particularly for working-class white people. Michael Skey suggests that for members of the population who are more vulnerable to 'the increasingly punitive demands of a flexible economy...established social formations' are more highly valued than among those, particularly middle-class people, whose sense of self may feel more secure (2011, 164); and ethnographic research in predominantly white working-class areas of London has indeed found that racialised white English identities can be mobilised in relation to a desire for social recognition influenced by multicultural ideals of group-centred, cultural and political identities (Hewitt 2005, Evans 2006). However, at the same time, Bridget Byrne's study of white mothers in London finds that for some middle-class participants who have experienced some form of loss in classed status their grievances are similarly articulated in relation to racialised ideas surrounding the problematic 'state of the [English] nation' (2006, 144). It is therefore important to note, as Tyler does, the evidence suggesting that white middle- and white working-class perspectives on 'race' are distinguished more by a 'differing content of ideas' than by any fundamental disparity in the extent to which they are racially prejudiced (Tyler 2012, 212; see also Skey 2011, 164).

From many critical perspectives, therefore, English identities, both historically and today, are characterised as being constructed in relation to intersecting classed and racialised power-relations which help to essentialise social distinctions and inequalities. These perspectives would suggest that while historically there may have been configurations of Englishness that have been resistant and oppositional to structures of domination, modern English identities are constructed on foundations supporting classed and racialised hierarchies. While some argue in response that Englishness remains 'a contested identification...or [that it] at least...should be' (Perryman 2008, 27), others such as Stuart Hall suggest that the constraining effects of English history make any 'contemporary radical appropriation' difficult to effectively re-imagine for progressive political ends (cited in Derbyshire 2012).

The Study

This article evaluates this debate in relation to a study undertaken in 2010 and 2011. The 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 in a highly diverse, multiethnic area of South London. Both the participants and the research site, which will be referred to as Southton, have been anonymised. Recruitment took place through ethnographic involvement in a variety of community organisations and through subsequent 'snowballing', with the final sample representing a suitably wide and varied cross-section of backgrounds in terms of class, gender, generation and sexuality.

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. Twenty-five of the study's participants identified as white, and twenty-two of these identified as English. Seven out of sixteen participants recruited who did not identify as white identified as English. The importance of 'race' to the construction of English identities has been explored in-depth in another article drawn from the same study (Ledy-Owen 2012) in which it is demonstrated that whilst, for participants who identify as white, English identities are constructed performatively as if a taken-for-granted part of the self, for the minority of non-white participants who *do* identify as English their English identities are constructed as precarious in relation to associations between Englishness and a normative whiteness. These racialised perspectives on Englishness are paralleled in the findings discussed in the present article, which demonstrate notions of an English sense of community which are only found among those white participants who feel able to identify unproblematically as English. The subsequent findings sections will therefore focus on the perspectives of white participants.

During interviews participants were asked whether they identify as English, what Englishness means to them, and whether they thought 'anyone' can be English. Eighteen participants took part in second interviews, thus making a total interview count of fifty-nine. Systematic coding of the data was carried out in ways recommended by Mason (2002) with broad themes developed from an intensive process of interpretive analysis. This article draws on the responses of a small number of key informants whose views nevertheless reflect the broader response patterns of the study's participants. Although the racialised and classed perspectives on Englishness that emerged during

interviews were highly complex and diverse, variants of the core racialised patterns and interrelating class alignments discussed below emerged in relation to all but one of twenty-two white, English identifying participants.

The English community and 'race'

Discussions of Englishness among white participants involved the description of an English community defined in relation to purportedly English values and dispositions. For these participants, Englishness is defined in relation to behaviour and practices associated with notions of morality and basic cooperation. Sometimes practices discussed by participants, such as 'politeness' or queuing etiquette, might be commonly associated with Englishness in the popular imagination, but participants also drew on less obviously 'English' practices relating to social norms that would be recognised as important within most, if not all, national cultures. Thus one participant, William (white, sixties) portrays Englishness as representing 'respect for each other and...for the environment', associating a basic level of social cohesion with an Englishness marked by what he terms 'pleasant' behaviour. These sociable and convivial representations of Englishness are often associated by participants with friendly behaviour in relation to their locality, for example in relation to people who are willing to 'chat to anyone' or make 'light of unfavourable conditions' on a rainy day in Southton.

As with Mann's similar findings, therefore, 'for many people, English and Englishness referred to community and togetherness' within a locality (Mann 2011, 121). For white participants in the present study, the representations and meanings of Englishness they discuss and the 'values' they ascribe to Englishness are positively framed in relation to ideals of social cohesion and solidarity within a community in which they are situated, and in relation to everyday situations within that community. They construct a community categorised as 'English', characterised by common patterns of behaviour and strong social bonds; an English 'collectivity that supports a set of ethical parameters' (Malesevic 2006, 119), a moral community in which they can locate themselves and others around them. In terms of political content no particular perspective – right or left, conservative or progressive – predominates in the data, suggesting that English identities might, as those on the left hope, have a potential to be contested, reimagined and resignified for progressive ends in relation to communitarian values.

However, this begs the question as to *who* is included within this community; and for a majority of white participants the English community was seen as having been disrupted by the racialised 'other'. In the following excerpt, William (white, sixties), who was quoted above, demonstrates this pattern. William is a retired public sector worker and has lived in Southton for all of his life.

There is still a...core of [Black] people which, either they don't want to demonstrate Englishness, they have the inability to absorb Englishness or become part of society or [the] community, or because of their social deprivation or financial deprivation they can't fit in.

For William, notions of 'society' and 'community' in England are associated directly with Englishness, and *not* being English is associated with Black people. William does discuss the potential impact of social or financial deprivation on this purported distance from social norms, thus perhaps suggesting that his interpretation may be primarily socioeconomic. However, elsewhere in the interview, when asked if *white* people who might not 'fit in' for similar reasons are still English, William replies that while there are 'a few bad pennies', they nevertheless 'are still English'. Therefore, for William, regardless of the extent to which they approximate to English social norms, white people are default members of the community due to their taken-for-granted, white Englishness. Black people, on the other hand, are suspected of having an 'inability' to become normative members of this community. William's positively-framed expectations surrounding an English community are thus disrupted by the presence and purported character of a racialised 'other', suggesting that the moral community he envisions has white foundations.

In the following excerpt Guy (white, forties) demonstrates how perceptions of a disrupted English community can be particularly mobilised in relation to the locality of Southton. Guy grew up in a rural area in the South East of England before moving to London twenty years ago. He identifies strongly as middle-class and currently works in a senior position for a financial company in the City of London.

I am unashamed to admit to being white, middle-class English...and a large part of the area that I live in has become essentially overrun... This [area i.e. Southron] is [has become] [names country, withheld here to prevent identification of the area], and I don't like it... I'm very concerned about the way that, again I have no personal experience of this...about the way that the...Islamists...seek to impose their own things... This is my country not their country and I think it should reflect my values not their values.

Guy feels that Southton today ‘has become essentially overrun’ by non-white Muslims from another nation, a process which has unsettled the Englishness of the area. This disruption of Englishness involves a breakdown in Guy’s belief that the local community should be an *English* moral community; he is ‘very concerned’ that *his* country should reflect *his* values as an Englishman and not ‘theirs’. The presence of the non-English in Southton is seen to disrupt the local sense of Englishness to the extent that an area that *was* England now ‘*is* [another country]’. In this way, Guy and several further participants portray another side to the associations between Englishness and the localised, convivial everyday situations discussed above, instead portraying a negatively-framed, disrupted Englishness within a racialised, socially divided locality. At its core, the sense of disruption to Guy’s expectation of an English community in Southton appears to be predicated on a perceived disruption to the normativity of white, possibly Christian, Englishness in the area. Guy even – remarkably frankly – admits that this disruption is not based on any negative personal experience involving the people he describes; he readily admits to having had none. The absence of actual negative experiences with this population therefore suggests that Guy’s response is a habitual reaction based entirely on the physical and symbolic presence of the non-English ‘other’.

Notions of an English moral community are thus unsettled by the localised, racialised non-English who are perceived to be transgressing social norms and/or perceived as simply visibly, ‘racially’ different. These perspectives have clear parallels with Conservative MP Enoch Powell’s four-decades old invective railing against incompatibly alien people and cultures transforming England into an ‘alien territory’ (1968). Although Guy and William were relatively explicit in their construction of racialised binaries, for most further white participants associations between a normative whiteness and an English moral community were evident in more subtle, tacit ways; as was the potential from these perspectives for the racialised ‘other’ to disrupt the sense of community (see Leddy-Owen 2012 for further analysis of the tacit racialisation of Englishness). This suggests that the historical and contemporary relationship between Englishness and whiteness engenders an *inherent* potential for the disruption of a sense of English community, particularly in an ethnically diverse area such as Southton, even – as in Guy’s case – where no *actual examples* of disruption to an individual’s life are evident outside of the purely symbolic sphere.

The implications of these findings are clearly highly problematic for an inclusive and progressive Englishness. The following sections will demonstrate how class and other dimensions of the social

world further undermine the progressive potential of Englishness, and particularly at how class crucially interrelates with constructions on 'race' and nation.

White working-class participants' unsettled English identities

In contrast to Guy, for many further white participants whose notions of English community were disrupted their concerns seemed to be linked to actual rather than imagined perspectives of social marginalisation, most commonly in relation to issues of class and gender. Joanne's (white, forties) excerpt below exemplifies this pattern.

What I see of England is struggling... I see young men who are struggling now with visions of what it means to be a man...not knowing what their role is...and I see young women trying to be everything to everybody, and...I want for those people to be proud to be English because that is a strength... I do personally have a problem with feeling overwhelmed by not living amongst my own people. So if my street, for example, was to suddenly...become completely Black...I might choose to move away from it... I've been on a night-bus coming home...and I've heard every other language in the world spoken on that bus except English, and I felt really alone... I do think there are...English people who feel disenfranchised because they're not allowed to feel proud of themselves.

Joanne feels afraid and angry with regard to what she sees as the unsettling of a more stable social order. She links this sense of disruption to notions of 'struggling' young people and disorientating shifts in gender relations as a result of which men and women do not know 'what their role is'. An absence of direction, of self-esteem and pride, is associated by Joanne with an absence of legitimate English identities, which she in turn associates with issues of migration and ethnic diversity. Joanne describes how she sometimes feels uncomfortable among people who are not speaking English and among Black people, suggesting that she can feel 'overwhelmed' and 'alone' in multiethnic London. The disorientation associated with not living among her 'own people' is linked to the perceived disenfranchisement and silencing of English people like her who are 'not allowed to feel proud of themselves'. For Joanne, therefore, the purported breakdown of social bonds and a sense of community, and in a patriarchal, gendered sense of order, is associated with the disrupting presence of the non-English, migrant and racialised 'other'. A reasserted pride in Englishness would, she feels, help to enable the development of the kind of 'strength' and self-knowledge that could help to re-

establish a sense of purpose and order that has been disrupted; arguments which are thus very similar at root to those of several Labour politicians and associated policy thinkers discussed in the first section of this article.

An analysis of Joanne's social background reveals the importance of a devalued classed and gendered sense of self for explaining this perspective on a disrupted English community. In the early part of her interview Joanne describes her working-class upbringing in Southton, and discusses how she identifies to this day as 'a South London slapper' and 'a fat bird' in reference to her style of dress and physical appearance during her youth. Joanne recounts how over the subsequent years in which she invested in higher education and began a professional career her gendered and classed appearance changed as did her accent which is no longer identifiably regional. Although Joanne still identifies as working-class, she suggests that her husband and son disagree with this identification, teasing her for being 'so middle-class'.

In various ways, therefore, Joanne has invested in and embodied classed and gendered ideals of 'respectable' middle-class femininity (Skeggs 1997). However, Joanne's continued identifications as working-class, and as a 'slapper' and 'fat bird', suggest that the subjectivities of her youth are 'embedded in [her] history and so cannot be so easily "escaped"' (Lawler 1999, 3). The durability of Joanne's early socialisation in structuring and organising her perceptions and beliefs seemingly makes it difficult for her to match the middle-class, respectable representation of her self held by others with the feeling *within herself* that this representation is authentic. As the following excerpt demonstrates, this context of classed displacement is crucial for understanding Joanne's constructions of Englishness.

A lot of [my colleagues] could be considered to be middle-class and upper middle-class girls...with nice backgrounds... I got berated by [them] for wanting to go...and watch an England football match [during the 2010 World Cup]... I got quite cross about that. And I watched the people in my office [all of whom are white]...telling me, 'why do you want to be English? It's a bad thing to be... The fact that you want to be English is just belittling', and [I was] watching the English being frightened of being English... In the same way that...it's acceptable to discriminate against fat people because...there's this connotation of them being dirty or unattractive...you're allowed to discriminate against the English because we're not worth [anything].

When Joanne's middle- and upper-class colleagues 'with nice backgrounds' criticise her wish to express her English identity she feels that they are criticising something that is very important to her. Joanne feels that her colleagues devalue English identity in the same way that they might devalue someone who is obese, 'dirty and unattractive'. In making this analogy, the devaluation of Englishness by Joanne's colleagues is linked to the similarly devalued classed and gendered past with which Joanne still identifies. In relation to her colleagues, Joanne thus seems to experience a classed sense of symbolic violence, a feeling of 'falling short' in terms 'of the right way of being and doing' (Bourdieu 1984 cited in Skeggs 1997, 90).

Joanne's interpretation of this episode does not entirely bypass issues of class. The early reference made to her colleagues' middle-classness suggests that she draws a direct association between class and the process by which her Englishness is being judged and condemned. However, as the excerpt progresses, Joanne's anxieties and insecurities are interpreted and understood in relation to nationalist and racialised discourses. Her colleagues are *white* and therefore, for Joanne, they *are* English. Their criticism of her English identity and their rejection of it is thus portrayed as a kind of racial betrayal of an Englishness of which they are 'frightened' due to the pressures of being 'PC'. In this way, the feeling of worthlessness which Joanne describes at the end of her excerpt is not finally understood by her in relation to the classed symbolic violence that seems to underpin her feelings of inadequacy and insecurity in this excerpt and is instead primarily interpreted in relation to discourses of nation and 'race'. Here, as in Gilroy's recent analysis of a viral video of a racist incident in South London, through Joanne's deployment of racialised Englishness 'a particular history of class injury comes into view' (2012, 392), but – again in a similar way to the case Gilroy discusses – the primarily classed underpinnings of a devalued sense of self are retranslated in relation to the perceived disruption of a sense of racialised national solidarity.

This process of intra-white symbolic violence leading to a devalued sense of self is found in several further participants' constructions of Englishness, often in relation to gendered and generational discourses, and consistently in relation to hierarchies of class. This can be seen in the below excerpt in which Helen (white, twenties) discusses what she considers to be authentic Englishness. Helen is a private sector professional who, like Joanne, describes her family background as working-class.

I mean there's certain pockets of England [such as where Helen's ex-boyfriend's family lives]...and it's still like [the rural-based sitcom] *Vicar of Dibley*...and they still did fox [hunting] meetings and all that sort of stuff and you're just like this is just beyond my, this is

so English [...] [My ex-boyfriend's family]...has a lot of heritage through...the aristocracy [...] [Helen's ex-boyfriend said] 'you [Helen] haven't really got anything' [in terms of a heritage in comparison to him], I'm like 'yeah I know' [laughs]... He's like 'I'm English'...he says that he's 'a pedigree English person'... How do we identify with that if that's not what we are? Where do I come from? I come from a council estate in [South Eastern town]... I don't identify...[with] where I am [from]. When I go back there I find it suffocating and...scummy... So I don't identify with that [the Englishness described above], that's not who I am.

As Tyler notes, there are clear parallels in the construction of ethnic and classed distinctions, as 'social class, like ethnicity, is constituted by ideas of origins, ancestry and geographical belonging' (Tyler 2012, 21). Helen constructs a classed, authentic Englishness in relation to an aristocratic, rural portrayal of England represented by fox hunting, *The Vicar of Dibley*, and by her ex-boyfriend's family, whose rural situation and English 'pedigree' (a term associated with both class and 'race') incite insecurities about her social status. While for her ex-boyfriend the family's classed status is seen to allow him to identify authentically as English, Helen feels that her working-class background prevents her from doing so. Helen expresses a sense of shame in relation to the town in which she grew up and the 'scummy' lives being led there by people she knew, suggesting that the elitist Englishness she portrays is 'beyond' her status, and that her English identity represents a lacking, inauthentic Englishness. Helen thus suggests that her membership of, and feelings of solidarity with, an English community are rendered problematic in relation to her classed status. This is in clear contrast to Joanne who positions *other* white and English people and not *herself* as representing the inauthentic white Englishness. There are, however, clear parallels with Joanne's interview in Helen's suggestion that her perspective on Englishness, as a woman from a working-class background, has been rendered insecure through the exercising of classed symbolic violence in relation to the middle- and upper-class white people she has encountered.

These findings provoke questions as to why English identities and notions of an English community constructed in relation to experiences of classed symbolic violence are not rejected by participants like Joanne and Helen. The following excerpt from Helen, which follows directly from the previous one, suggests some answers to this.

I don't identify with elite England...but I still think it's fabulous, you know, some exposure to it. I do think it's part of our heritage, so...as much as I love it, I hate it, it's a bit like Marmite... Where do I sit? You know, I'm not really quite sure. I just plod along in life. Which

is probably why I think...people of my sort of stance kind of plod along and go 'I'm not really sure what I'm meant to be doing really'.

Helen again suggests that she cannot identify with the Englishness she has just described. However, despite her dominated classed perspective, she is glad to have some 'exposure' to elite Englishness, which remains 'fabulous' and 'part of [her] heritage'. Helen describes these contradictory feelings of exclusion and inclusion as similar to Marmite, a reference to an advertising campaign in which the tag line suggests that people either 'love or hate' Marmite, though Helen seems to have misremembered this as suggesting that people can both love *and* hate it. Helen hates Englishness as she does not know where she 'sits' with it and is not sure what she and other people of her 'sort of stance' are 'meant to be doing', a sense of disorientation and displacement which is perhaps here implicitly contrasted to the purportedly secure, authentic upper-class Englishness of her ex-boyfriend's family. However, she also *loves* Englishness because she feels able to identify as English despite her ambivalent feelings. Even if upper-class people suggest that she is *less* English or English in a qualitatively inferior way, and even if Helen agrees with this perspective, it is difficult if not impossible for her recognition as English to be finally withheld. As Skey similarly finds, while a particular classed 'in-group' might clearly distinguish their own superior sense of Englishness from that of white working-class people, they are generally 'bemoaning' working-class inferiority rather than denying their Englishness *per se* (2011, 46). In Bourdieuan terms, Helen feels that she does not have the cultural capital required to invest effectively in the field of Englishness in the way that she would like, but this is nevertheless a field in which she can, as someone who identifies and is recognised as white, at least take it for granted that she is fully entitled to play the game, albeit to a limited extent and at the risk of classed symbolic violence. Therefore even though her Englishness may be problematic and marked, it at least provides a recognised social identity in relation to which some sense of community and belonging can be constructed.

Anthias and Yuval-Davis suggest that a decline in class politics and a parallel rise in a competitive, multiculturalist politics of recognition in the UK since the 1980s has made it difficult to critique 'structural disadvantages...that [do] not fall under the rubric of equal opportunities' (1992, 173). Mariam Fraser similarly argues that 'the privileging of representations, as *the* domain where political battles are to be waged' means that for those who are dominated within society, and whose perspectives are devalued or ignored entirely, such as white working-class women, there are few avenues for social recognition (Fraser 1999, 118; original emphasis). By identifying as English these participants are thus expressing a 'desire to survive, "to be"' within a socially recognised category,

but in a way that is also 'pervasively exploitable' (Butler 1997, 7) in classed terms, something clearly seen in Helen's portrayal of her own inferior, inauthentic Englishness contrasted to the authentic Englishness of the upper-classes. Therefore, just as the previous section suggested that, in a multiethnic society, the racialised foundations of Englishness encourage a sense of racialised disruption to ideas surrounding an English community, the findings in this section suggest that, for working-class participants in an economically stratified society, the centrality of essentialised and obscured classed hierarchies to constructions of Englishness likewise encourages a sense of disruption to the ideal of a cohesive English community. Furthermore, this classed disruption intersects in crucial ways with discourses of 'race'.

White middle-class participants' unsettled English identities

As this final findings section will demonstrate, white middle-class perspectives on Englishness provide similar yet also somewhat different perspectives on the ways in which class and further dimensions of the social world disrupt notions of an English community. John (white, forties) is a public sector professional who was educated in a private school and identifies as middle-class. John also describes, however, how he has struggled financially in recent years due to changes in his employment situation. As the following excerpt demonstrates, John's perspective on his sense of self has some clear similarities with those of participants from working-class backgrounds.

It does come back to...this thing about 'oh you can't wave that flag because you're English and you're middle-class'... Rock music [represents Englishness to me]... [A journalist in a magazine] was pontificating about what [would have] happened if the Windrush [the name of a ship that brought the first large number of post-War migrants to Britain from the Caribbean in 1948] hadn't have come. And he was saying about...white middle-aged men with their pompous overblown self-important ponderous rock music... This [journalist is] a white guy. It's almost like a self-abasement...but [English rock music is] certainly part of my culture...and a lot of men my age...children of the [19]70s and [19]80s...hang onto their rock music.

John suggests that the inhibition he feels in expressing his Englishness is related to him also being middle-class. In his discussion of 'rock music' John then relates this notion of cultural constraint directly to his whiteness, his gender and to his being 'middle-aged'. John suggests that he could

potentially express his racialised, nationalist, gendered and generational cultural identity through English rock music, and therefore a critique of this musical genre in a magazine is construed as an attack on his culture and sense of self. John seems to be concerned that the cultural identity he associates with the genre has been devalued, a process of devaluation which reflects a wider sense of insecurity with the value of his cultural identity in today's Britain.

As with Joanne, this experience of a devalued sense of self is primarily interpreted through a racialised lens. John implies that the cultural impact of post-colonial migration since the docking of the Windrush has had an interloping effect on (implicitly white) English music and culture. This racialised perspective is further suggested elsewhere in his interviews when John discusses how there is 'no Englishness' in parts of Southton associated with non-white populations, and when he bemoans how he is 'the only white face' in his 'multicultural' workplace. John thus clearly associates these notions of cultural constraint and personal devaluation with an unsettling of local English society by the racialised 'other'. However, in the above excerpt it is not only post-colonial migrants who are held implicitly responsible for this perceived shift in the culture of England, it is also *white* people, such as the journalist he refers to, who John suggests are involved in something akin to a 'self-abasement' and thus a form of racial betrayal. Here, as in Joanne's earlier excerpt, the authentic Englishness, of which it is implied John feels he is representative, is being betrayed by the white English themselves, and the less authentic, 'self-abasing' white English person is constructed as holding a relatively powerful cultural position.

Similarly to Byrne's findings (2006, 144), therefore, in the present study the personal anxieties of middle-class participants experiencing a perceived deficit in social status are being articulated in relation to ideas surrounding a racialised sense of disruption to Englishness. John's concerns seem to be particularly related to generational cultural shifts and can perhaps also be linked to his recent financial anxieties, thus demonstrating the ways in which the patterns analysed in the previous section can also occur among middle-class males whose social status remains amongst the most privileged in society. For John, as with Joanne and Helen, anxieties – actual and imagined – pertaining to complex social hierarchies are made more intelligible in relation to ideals of a community founded upon a normative white Englishness disrupted by the presence of the racialised 'other' and an inauthentic, white English, internal 'other'.

For middle-class participants whose sense of self seems to be more confident and secure, ideas surrounding an English community are perceived to be disrupted in ways that are apparently less

anxious. A key way in which this occurs is in relation to the xenophobic and exclusionary formulations of Englishness some middle-class participants associate with white working-class people. In the below excerpt, David (white, thirties), a marketing director from a middle-class background who, like John and Guy, was privately educated, is discussing reasons why he sometimes identifies as British rather than English.

Great Britain...is the [pause] the intellectual view of it...whereas one of the more damaging parts of Englishness [in comparison to Britishness]...is how...most of that identity is born of...emotional reasons... It's...[mimicking London regional accent] 'England's fucking awesome, everyone's great, we ruled the world', all that sort of stuff. It's all emotional stuff...not intellectual... I think the Britishness thing is the...way of rising above it... [The British are] this incredibly...successful, historically significant people...who have achieved more than an island of our size ever should have... Part of [being] English is...[being] arm in arm with...friends at Twickenham celebrating a try when England are playing [rugby]... This is something that is quintessentially English.

David initially vacates Englishness and identifies instead with Britishness, a category he associates with 'the intellectual' view of nationality in comparison to the 'irrational' and 'emotional' (barely) implicitly working-class Englishness indicated by a mimicked regional accent. David thus positions himself as a "'rational" ...moral individual with reflexivity', in contrast to white working-class people subject to the 'primitive impulse' (Skeggs 2004, 39) of 'emotional' English identities. These findings have clear echoes with Mann's participants, who exemplify a 'disengagement' with English identities which they associate with classed representations of hooliganism and 'ruffians' (Mann 2012, 492-3) in favour of a more respectable Britishness. David does still identify as English, and does identify Englishness with a sense of sociability and conviviality, as can be seen towards the end of the excerpt in his description of watching England play rugby, yet this portrayal of Englishness is apparently disrupted by what he sees as the emotional irrationalities of working-class manifestations. In stark contrast to John, Joanne and Helen, therefore, David sees himself as relatively empowered in relation to the classed, white English 'other' he constructs; he feels authorised from a dominant classed perspective to make his views and his identity 'count' (Lawler 2004, 113).

Some of the most important work achieved in this construction of a 'rational' middle-class Englishness involves the displacing or projection of the exclusionary aspects of nationalism onto

working-class people. David mimics, and in the process ridicules and derides, someone who is implicitly working-class for their jingoism and parochial ignorance: 'England's fucking awesome, everyone's great, we ruled the world'. However, shortly afterwards David identifies himself with a remarkably similar nationalist perspective in which the *British* are declared an 'incredibly...successful, historically significant people...who have achieved more than an island of our size ever should have'. Elsewhere in David's interview these national 'successes' are linked to the 'achievements' of imperialism, and as such there seems to be little difference in the content of the statement with which David identifies and the earlier statement in which he parodied, ridiculed and condemned working-class people. Therefore David's 'rational' way of 'rising above' unreasonable and emotional, triumphalist Englishness might be seen, in practice, as no less triumphalist. It is, furthermore, important to note that in the present study, contrary to David's argument about rational middle-class nationalism, racialised constructions of Englishness were almost as regularly articulated by white middle-class as white working-class participants, a pattern clearly seen in John's and Guy's earlier excerpts. Although David does not draw on discourses of 'race' in the same way as the other participants discussed in this article, he nevertheless draws on narratives of a disrupted national community that are bound up with classed hierarchies and an essentialised and obfuscated dominant classed perspective.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates how, for white participants in the study cited, Englishness is associated with the kinds of notions of community and social cohesion that those on the left who advocate a reinvigoration of Englishness suggest could be the basis for progressively-minded English identities. The article also demonstrates, however, that the potential for a progressive Englishness founded upon a sense of solidarity and cooperation seems to be undermined by the classed and racialised foundations of English nationalism discussed by Stephen Haseler (1996); what Gilroy calls the 'disabling historical deficit' (2012, 395) of racialised and classed politics in England remains clearly evident in the findings discussed. Participants consistently demonstrate how notions of an English community are seen as disrupted in relation to a racialised non-English 'other' and/or a classed intra-English, intra-white internal 'other'. In particular, the article demonstrates how pervasive concerns with gendered, generational, and especially classed hierarchies and status, engender different interpretations of this sense of disruption.

The key pattern that emerges suggests that discourses and categories of 'race' and nation are employed and identified with during discussions surrounding English identities in order to try and make sense of and interpret what are primarily classed concerns and distinctions. These concerns and distinctions are then obscured or retranslated in relation to narratives of a disrupted national, often racialised, English community. The core of interrelating and intersecting classed and racialised power-relations (relations variously interpreted, essentialised and legitimated in relation to one another) that is seemingly native to Englishness thus encourages particular frameworks of understanding whilst constraining the potential for more critical and nuanced interpretations of complex social and personal concerns.

In an ethnically diverse and economically stratified society such as the United Kingdom's, the perceptions of disruption discussed above therefore seem somewhat likely to emerge in some form among those who identify as English, and perhaps particularly acutely during today's climate of austerity and economic insecurity. Furthermore, for even the most self-assured, the identities and sense of community associated with Englishness are at best only provisionally successful in terms of rendering society more intelligible and in terms of providing a sense of personal value and stability, a pattern evidenced by the consistently anxious, fearful and angry constructions of Englishness analysed in this article. Taken together, these findings suggest that any advocacy of a reimagined Englishness should be treated with a strong degree of caution and scepticism, if not outright opposition, by anyone of a progressive political persuasion.

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Biography: Charles Leddy-Owen is a lecturer in sociology at the University of Portsmouth.

Contact details: Charles.leddy-owen@port.ac.uk. University of Portsmouth, School of Social, Historical and Literary Studies, Milldam, Burnaby Road, Portsmouth, PO1 3AS, UK.

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