Who Cares about the White Working Class?

Edited by Kjartan Páll Sveinsson
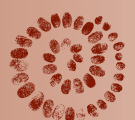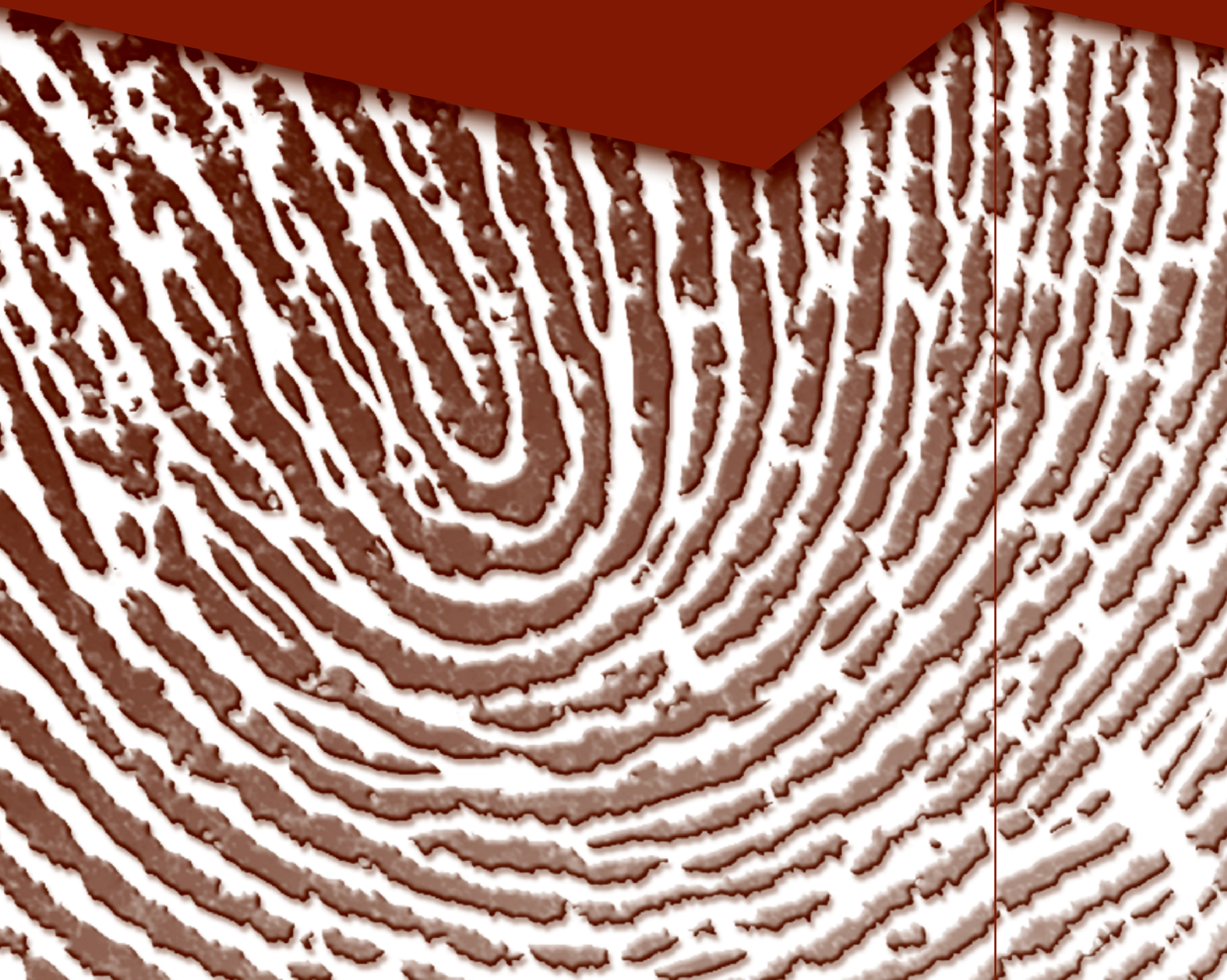
RUNNYMEDE

About Runnymede

The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organization focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Educational Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in close collaboration with eminent thinkers and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. We believe that the way ahead lies in building effective partnerships, and we are continually developing these with the voluntary sector, the government, local authorities and companies in the UK and Europe. We stimulate debate and suggest forward-looking strategies in areas of public policy such as education, the criminal justice system, employment and citizenship.

Since 1968, the date of Runnymede's foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today.

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Foreword

At first sight the subject of this book may surprise readers, coming from an organization which for forty years has worked to promote a successful multi-ethnic Britain by addressing issues of racial equality and discrimination against minority communities. Seeking to examine the grievances of a part of the white majority is not an obvious development. But a recent emphasis in the media and by other commentators on the segregation of, and competition between, ethnic groups has suggested that white working class communities may be losing out in the conflict over the allocation of scarce resources. This has prompted us to ask our contributors to describe what is really happening.

Part of the background to this discussion is created by researchers (myself included) who have interviewed people about their own experiences in particular places at particular times. How do we interpret what we are told? Certainly, ethnographic researchers must listen to what their informants actually say. In my own research, the argument was that access to social housing (in particular) was put under pressure from three things: the fall-out from right-to-buy legislation, the arrival of prosperous middle-class homebuyers and the rapid increase in the main migrant community. However, in interviews what was mentioned as a specific grievance was only the third factor. In as much as the first two were discussed, they were seen as opportunities rather than threats: 'local' people – of whatever ethnic origin – had a chance to make some money and swap their home for something more desirable outside a highly priced inner-city area. Social capital becomes financial capital, we might say.

But this volume shows that an undue emphasis on what informants themselves say can disguise something more significant. In fact, the most disadvantaged working-class people of whatever ethnic background, roughly the poorest fifth of the population, are increasingly separated from the more prosperous majority by inequalities of income, housing and education. By emphasizing the virtues of individual self-determination and the exercising of 'choice', recent governments have in fact entrenched the ability of the middle and upper classes to avoid downward social mobility and preserve the best of life's goods for their own children. Moreover, the rhetoric of politicians and commentators has tended to abandon the description 'working-class', preferring instead to use terms such as 'hard working families' in order to contrast the virtuous many with an underclass perceived as feckless and undeserving. Furthermore, several authors of this volume argue that recent changes in work patterns have contributed fundamentally to these inequalities, as the work of so many of the worst paid has also become part-time, 'flexible' and casual – in other words, highly insecure.

Some contributors discuss the decline in status of working-class occupations. A piece of research in Bethnal Green in the 1950s looked at the evaluation by working-class men of the status of different occupations.[*] The results showed that status was strongly linked by them to the utility and productivity of work; only doctors were ranked more highly than the working class occupations of craftsmen, miners or factory-workers in terms of their value to society. It would be very unlikely for the nature of much of today's manual work to be valued so highly. As several contributors note, self-esteem is more closely linked to educational achievement today than ever before.

What we learn here is that life chances for today's children are overwhelmingly linked to parental income, occupations and educational qualifications – in other words, class. The poor white working class share many more problems with the poor from minority ethnic communities than some of them recognize. All the most disadvantaged groups must be helped to improve their joint lot. Competition between them, real or imagined, is just a distraction.

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Vice-Chair, Runnymede Trust
January 2009

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[*]   Young, Michael and Peter Willmott (1956) 'Social Grading by Manual Workers', British Journal of Sociology 7(4): 337-45.

Introduction:
The White Working Class and Multiculturalism: Is There Space for a Progressive Agenda?

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Class Re-emerges in Political Discourse

When Harriet Harman, the Leader of the House of Commons and Minister for Equalities, released her transcript to the press ahead of her speech at the Trades Union Congress conference on 10 September 2008, certain sections of the media reacted with outrage. The object of their acrimony was the word 'class'. Within her broader argument that equality should not be placed on the back burner during uncertain economic times, Harman's speech had originally stated that the most important predictor of an individual's life chances "is where you live, your family background, your wealth and social class".[1] This statement may appear as a truism, even verging on banal.[2] But the ire it generated in the press was such that Harman dropped the 'c-word' (as the *Telegraph* referred to it) from her speech altogether. The thrust of the critique levelled against Harman was that she was breaking Britain's political 'class war' truce which had been struck around the time Labour came to power in 1997. The Shadow Leader of the House of Commons Theresa May said that "Harriet Harman is stuck in the class warfare rhetoric of 20 years ago", and that "trying to move the agenda on to class and background is outdated and distracts from the real issues facing people in this country today".[3] The *Telegraph* boldly stated: "The class war is over – do tell Labour".[4] The *Independent* leader headline read: "The class struggle is over, it's all about social mobility".[5] Thus, the word 'class' was dropped from Harman's speech, and although the *Telegraph* surreptitiously claimed victory, it was not entirely appeased: "we know now where Labour is heading, and that the language of class war is back".[6]

The harsh response from the press and opposition politicians is revealing in two important ways. Firstly, it reveals how and when it is acceptable to talk about class. Three months earlier, the Telegraph – along with every other major newspaper – reported: "White working-class boys [are] becoming an underclass".[7] This headline refers to a report published by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, which was primarily concerned with gender gaps in higher education participation, but added an analysis of ethnicity in "order to put the gender finding into perspective".[8] Nonetheless, the press reported on the findings as if white working class pupils' ethnic disadvantage was the main aim of the research, where "[w]hite teenagers are less likely to go to university than school-leavers from other ethnic groups – even with the same A-level results, according to official figures".[9] Thus, it was not the 'c-word' itself in Harman's speech that caused offence – since the same papers that derided her are happy to use the term in a different context – but the social reality to which she was drawing attention. Where the media habitually uses the word 'class' in the context of multiculturalism ('the white working class is losing out to ethnic minorities'), Harman was using the word in the context of inequality ('the white working class is losing out to the middle classes'). That is what was so objectionable.

Secondly, a closer look at the media's treatment of Harman reveals how commentators think about the white working class itself. Acknowledging that some social groups may be at a disadvantage, the *Independent* leader goes on to argue that this is

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1   Quoted in Kirkup and Pierce (2008)
2   Tom Harris MP characterized Harman's statements as being "pretty much like saying you're in favour of motherhood and apple pie" (Harris, 2008).
3   Quoted in Gammel (2008)
4   Pollard (2008)
5   *Independent* (2008)

6   Pollard (2008)
7   Paton (2008)
8   Broecke and Hamed (2008: 1)
9   Paton (2008)

ultimately their own fault, and in particular their culture of poverty:

> Generations are being brought up on sink estates mired in welfare dependency, drug abuse and a culture of joblessness. And the majority of children born in such wretched circumstances are simply not making it out later in life. This is not a class problem; it is an underclass problem. And it is the failure of these sections of society to get on that is responsible for the fact that social mobility is in decline.[10]

In a similar vein, the *Telegraph* stated:

> We all already know that poorer areas are beset by problems such as family breakdown and educational failure. We know that badly-off children are growing up with a poverty of aspiration: what they need is structure, competition, exercise, encouragement and hope. Yet Ms Harman and her like persist in endless data-collecting and tinkering attempts to lean on universities artificially to redress the balance nearly two decades after a child is born.[11]

Thus, the issue of class is not a problem of structure, but a problem of culture. There is no working class any more, only an underclass. Unless, of course, we are talking about multiculturalism, in which case the working class resurfaces from the depths of British history. In other words, it is permissible to use class as a stick to beat multiculturalism with, but not as a demand for increased equality for all.

However, the papers were right to suggest that Harman was drifting into an old battleground where Labour had struck a truce with the middle and upper classes in the mid 1990s. As Wendy Bottero observes in this volume, Labour seldom talks about class, preferring terms such as 'hardworking families' and 'social exclusion'. While this may have been part of a broader strategy to woo middle class voters and occupy the political centre, this may have come at the cost of alienating core working-class voters.[12] Harman's return to questions of class and inequality perhaps indicates

that Labour is taking heed of this loss of support, and that their tone might be changing as a result. Indeed, the Fabian Society hosted a fringe meeting at the 2008 Labour Conference dedicated to the theme "Can we give the white working class what they want?", and Prime Minister Gordon Brown declared ahead of the Labour Conference that the party needs to be honest with itself: "While poverty has been reduced and the rise in inequality halted, social mobility has not improved in Britain as we would have wanted. A child's social class background at birth is still the best predictor of how well he or she will do at school and later on in life".[13]

If class inequality is making its way back onto the political agenda, this is because there are legitimate issues and grievances to be discussed and debated. Socially, Britain remains dominated by class divisions, with class identities relatively similar in shape and strength as they were 40 years ago.[14] As Bev Skeggs forcefully demonstrates in Chapter 5, classism and candid scorn for poor white people and their perceived 'culture' is rampant and deemed to be socially acceptable. Economically, income inequality remains historically high,[15] and Britain remains at the lower end of social mobility levels amongst comparable nations, and is actually declining.[16] According to UNICEF, Britain is bottom of the league of 21 industrialised nations where the welfare of children and adolescents is concerned,[17] and a recent report from End Child Poverty revealed that Britain's poorest children are being let down by under-funded schools,[18] which will only further inhibit social mobility. After 11 years of economic growth under a Labour Government, people on low or modest incomes are legitimately wondering why their share of the pie has not increased. Contrary to Theresa May's view, class is still at the centre of how people see their place in Britain today. Returning to the issue of class inequality is

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10 *Independent* (2008)

11 McCartney (2008)

12 Milne (2008); Daley (2008a); Thomas (2008)

13 Brown (2008). In a speech delivered barely a year earlier, Brown argued the opposite by placing the responsibility squarely on individuals: "Now just consider the evidence. We now know the level of parental engagement in learning is actually more important in determining a child's educational achievement than the social class background, the size of the family or the parent's own educational attainment. A child with a stimulating home environment does better on all the scores of early childhood development" (Brown, 2007).

14 Heath (2008), although he also points to some notable differences.

15 Office for National Statistics (2008)

16 Blanden, Gregg and Machin (2005); Blanden and Machin (2007)

17 UNICEF (2007)

18 End Child Poverty (2008)

therefore long overdue.

But there is a danger that a muted and repressed debate on class could be counterproductive and harmful. As Gillborn points out in Chapter 2, alarmist proclamations that Labour's neglect of the white working class will boost the BNP are often veiled attempts to curb race equality. This was certainly the case when Margaret Hodge, MP for Barking, argued in 2007 that the Government "should look at policies where the legitimate sense of entitlement felt by the indigenous family overrides the legitimate need demonstrated by the new migrants".[19] The recent interest in the white working class – exemplified by, but by no means confined to, the BBC's 'White Season' and the Channel 4 documentary series 'Immigration: The Inconvenient Truth' – follows this trend. The interests of the white working class are habitually pitched against those of minority ethnic groups and immigrants, while larger social and economic structures are left out of the debate altogether. The media's effort to acknowledge and discuss white working class grievances has excluded issues such as the legacy of Thatcherism and deindustrialization, or the rise of the super-rich under Labour. Instead, there is a fairly consistent message that the white working class are the losers in the struggle for scarce resources, while minority ethnic groups are the winners – at the *direct expense* of the white working class. In these terms, the white working class has been left behind by multiculturalism, or indeed *because* of it: white residents can not get social housing because migrants and refugees have priority; white boys are failing in school because minority ethnic pupils are disproportionately allocated additional funding; white patients get reduced services at the hospital because the NHS can't cope with pressures caused by migrant 'health tourists'; white workers' wages are undercut by migrant workers who are prepared to work for less; and so on.

What Does this Mean for Race Equality? – The Aims of this Volume

In this context, those promoting race equality urgently need to get involved in the current discussion on whiteness. It is important to take the grievances of members of the white working

class seriously, but the terms of the debate need to be widened to include the deeply ingrained hierarchical class structure which remains one of the hallmarks of British social life. This explains why Runnymede asked eight prominent thinkers on race, class and inequality to reflect on the state of class in 21st century Britain, and its relationship with race equality. The running theme throughout the contributions is that the plight of the white working class is constructed – by the media, politicians and anti-immigrant groups – as either the fault of immigrants and minority ethnic groups, or the cultural deficit of the underclass itself, or both, while leaving the hierarchical and highly stratified nature of Britain out of the equation.

The essays in this volume all point to the paradoxical and hypocritical ways in which the ruling classes speak *for* the white working class on the one hand, and how they speak *about* them on the other. Whereas middle class commentators are happy to defend white working class interests against the onslaught of politically correct multiculturalism, they will simultaneously deride and ridicule the feckless and undeserving poor, who have squandered the opportunities gracefully given to them by the welfare state, and can therefore rightfully be left to wallow in their own poverty.[20] The *Telegraph's* Janet Daley clearly demonstrates this duplicity in her response to Harriet Harman's TUC speech. She first states that Harman was right to pinpoint class as the most important social divide. "A middle class member of an ethnic minority group, or the female sex, or a religion (such as Islam) which is thought to provoke public distrust, is likely to do better educationally, socially and economically than a member of the poorest section of the white working class who has none of those alleged handicaps."[21] In the next paragraph, she explains what she means by this. The crucial difference between the working and middle classes "lies not so much in the obvious disparities of wealth which are capable of remedy, but in attitude and assumptions about life's possibilities which have proved extraordinarily resistant to change".[22]

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19 Hodge (2007)

20 Nick Cohen (2008) powerfully demonstrates the potency of "21st century television's prole porn" – such as Shameless, Little Britain and The Jeremy Kyle Show – where the message is: "Don't feel sorry for them, they're grotesques who indulge in perverse pleasures at the taxpayers' expense."

21 Daley (2008b)

22 Ibid.

The problem with this reasoning – which is by no means confined to the conservative media – is that it invokes a logical fallacy. It may very well be true that affluent individuals of minority ethnic backgrounds have better life chances than a poor white individual. But the fact of the matter is that all BME groups are more likely to be poor than white British people,[23] and are more likely to live in poor and disadvantaged areas. It is nonsensical to compare ethnic groups across economic strata. Because of racism and discrimination, being black is a disadvantage whatever your social status; being white is not. Feigning white working class disadvantage as an ethnic disadvantage rather than as class disadvantage is exactly what rhetorically places this group in direct competition with minority ethnic groups. As such, it does little to address the real and legitimate grievances poor white people in Britain have. The affliction and subsequent resentment of many sections of the white working class are a real cause for concern. But if we are to address these concerns, it is vital to identify the actual cause of this affliction. The white working classes are discriminated against on a range of different fronts, including their accent, their style, the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the social spaces they frequent, the postcode of their homes, possibly even their names. But they are not discriminated against because they are white.

This is what each of the contributors to this volume demonstrate. Wendy Bottero (Chapter 1) argues that the focus on the whiteness of the white working class plays into cultural readings of inequality, which pitch their interests squarely against those of ethnic minorities, and simultaneously allows middle class commentators to blame the 'underclass' for their own misfortunes. David Gillborn (Chapter 2) unpicks the data behind the claims that white working class boys are being left behind in the education system to show that poor white pupils are actually losing out to affluent white pupils, not minority ethnic pupils. Diane Reay (Chapter 3), in turn, gives a qualitative account of white working class educational underachievement, and outlines the damage done to all disadvantaged pupils by the divide and rule policies of the education system. Anoop Nayak (Chapter 4) demonstrates how 'chavs', NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and hoodies are racialized in the popular media, but also how racist name calling in school has radically different effects on black and white pupils, because of larger structural relations of power. Bev Skeggs (Chapter 5) draws our attention to the symbolic violence the middle classes subject on the working classes – regardless of race or ethnic identity – and the strategies working class people employ to defend themselves. Steve Garner (Chapter 6) discusses possibly the most emotive element of the welfare state – council housing – and the effects of the severe shortage of social housing on cohesion and notions of unfairness. Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor (Chapter 7) problematize the trite expression of the white working class as homogenous, static, and exclusively rooted in and defined by the immediate locality, and propose that emigration from the UK is as important as immigration to any discussion of Britishness. Finally, Danny Dorling (Chapter 8) explores a number of policy and welfare areas – ranging from housing to health – and demonstrates that where the white working classes are losing out, it is to the wealthy rather than to migrants or minority ethnic groups.

There are, of course, many fields of inquiry this volume could not cover. For example, political representation and claims about white working class 'disillusionment' with the Labour Party is an important theme that does not receive specific analysis here. Similarly, generational differences between the young and their parents and grandparents, in relation to diversity, racism and anti-racism, are not explored in any depth. In spite of these limitations, we hope that the papers will shed some light on the relationship between class and race equality. This volume is intended to represent a starting point for further discussion. Hopefully others will fill in the gaps in order to build a comprehensive picture of the issues we touch on here. Our aim is to initiate a dialogue to ensure that a re-emergence of class onto the political agenda will not feed divisions, but promote equality for all.

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23   Kenway and Palmer (2007) have shown how the rate of poverty income varies substantially between ethnic groups: "Bangladeshis (65 per cent), Pakistanis (55 per cent) and black Africans (45 per cent) have the highest rates while black Caribbeans (30 per cent), Indians (25 per cent), white Other (25 per cent) and white British (20 per cent) have the lowest rates" (Kenway and Palmer, 2007: 5).

1. Class in the 21st Century

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Who are the 'white working class', and why the sudden interest in them? A flood of media interest has provoked a new debate about the 'white working class'. Amid concerns about this group's 'voiceless' status, and their increasing social marginalization (apparently 'falling behind' other disadvantaged groups), there has been political alarm that feelings of 'betrayal' (by liberal élites and, more pointedly, the Labour Party) might 'drive' the white working class into the arms of the BNP. In this media flurry, it is the *whiteness* of the white working class which is the real focus of attention. This is a debate which pitches the interests of the white working class against those of other ethnic groups and migrant workers, and it is no coincidence that this sudden concern about the *ethnic identity* of the working class has emerged at a time of over-heated public focus on questions of ethnic and religious citizenship. Ironically, the latest attack on multiculturalism comes through the championing of a new excluded 'cultural' minority – the white working class. After a long period of quiet on the 'class' front, it would be good to see questions of inequality, and of the working class, back on the public agenda. But so far, this is a sound-bite debate, in danger of writing 'class' out of the question of inequality altogether.

By presenting the white working class in ethnic terms, as yet another cultural minority in a (dysfunctional) 'multicultural Britain', commentators risk giving a *cultural* reading of inequality, focusing on the distinctive cultural values of disadvantaged groups, rather than looking at the bigger picture of how systematic inequality generates disadvantage. To focus on the cultural differences of unequal groups is just a short step from arguing that the poor are disadvantaged *as a result of* their supposed cultural deficiencies. Accounts of the 'white working class' risk taking this step, particularly when they narrow their focus to look at only the most disadvantaged sections of the category – on the least skilled and lowest educated workers, or on those living in areas of the

highest unemployment, seen as culturally distinct. Concerns about economic and political marginalization have slipped too easily into descriptions of the racism, the problematic work ethic, or the weak educational aspirations of the 'white working class'. The question that seems to be being asked is, if (some) ethnic minorities can do better, why can't the white working class? A very broad and diverse category rapidly devolves into a deficient 'social type': as a council estate dwelling, single-parenting, low-achieving, rottweiler-owning cultural minority, whose poverty, it is hinted, might be the result of their own poor choices. Such arguments contain dangerous echoes of those contemptuous views of the cultural and moral deficiencies of the poor which surface in epithets such as 'chav', 'asbo' and 'pramface'.

For others in the debate, the question seems to be one of greater ethnic entitlement, of some sort of priority citizenship, with the assumption that the white working class *should* be doing better than other ethnic groups. And when commentators argue over the neglected interests of the 'white working class', the comparison to other groups is always in terms of their *ethnicity*, with Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets, or Pakistanis in Oldham. The distinctive social position of these groups is presented in terms of their ethnic identity, as cultural or religious difference, rather than by the very marked class inequalities that they also experience. This exaggerates the differences between ethnic groups and masks what they hold in common. By stressing the *whiteness* of the white working class, the class inequality of other ethnic groups also slips from view. This sidesteps the real issue of class inequality, focusing on how disadvantaged groups compete for scarce resources, rather than exploring how that scarcity is shaped in the first place. If we really want to understand disadvantage, we need to shift our attention from who fights over the scraps from the table, to think instead about how much the table holds, and who really gets to enjoy the feast.

The problems that the working class, white or

otherwise, currently experience are better traced to long-term shifts in economic structure and political policy in Britain: shifts which have hit the poorest hardest. We should look at the impact of the closure of the manufacturing industries which once dominated working-class communities; the neo-liberal de-regulation of the labour market which has made their jobs less secure; the sponsoring of middle-class advantage through 'parental choice' of schools and the marketization of education; the sell-off of council housing which concentrates the most disadvantaged in the remaining estates; and the stalling of incomes and expenditure at the bottom of society whilst the wealth of the rich rockets. It is these broader aspects of class inequality which should take our attention, not the supposed ethnicized cultural differences amongst working class groups.

The systematic nature of class inequality has been ignored in public debate for some time now, but the ethnicization of class problems does not redress this neglect. And there is a depressing familiarity to the debate about the white working class, which rehashes many of the mistakes made in past debates about class. To avoid history repeating itself, this time as farce, we need to think more carefully about why discussions of 'class' slip so quickly from class inequalities to the cultures of the poor, and why such debates teeter so uneasily between defending and blaming the most disadvantaged. To do this, we need to step back a little, to explore the broader impact of class inequalities, and to consider what 'class' really means.

Enduring Class
'Class' is about unequal resources and status, and the social hierarchies to which they give rise. But 'class' also means different things to different people, and its exact meaning, in both academic and everyday use, is notoriously slippery. We can all agree that 'class' is about issues of inequality, but here the consensus ends. Academic and official classifications have generally focused on class as an aspect of economic inequality, and aimed at precise occupational definitions, although versions disagree as to the right way of drawing up the class 'map'. But, however we measure it, the 'working class' remains a sizeable and highly internally differentiated social category. This is worth pointing out, because accounts of the 'white

working class' sometimes give the impression that the 'working class' is a dwindling, increasingly marginalized and homogeneous minority.

If we take the 'working class' as a labour-market category, 'manual workers' make up around 38% of the working population. If we include sales and shop workers amongst the 'working class' (as current official classifications do, emphasizing the routine, low skill, low-pay and low autonomy of such jobs, rather than their 'white collar' status), as well the unemployed (whose ranks are drawn disproportionately from semi-routine and routine workers with lower employment security), then the 'working class' make up around half of the working-age population. This is a very large section of society, and one marked by considerable diversity, not just along lines of ethnicity but, more significantly, also by internal hierarchical differences along lines of skill, pay, employment security and status. The category is so varied that it is perhaps more accurate to talk about the 'working classes'.

Over time, the 'working class' has shrunk in size and become more disadvantaged relative to other groups. However, this is the result of broad economic changes which have affected the working class as a whole, not just the white working class. In Britain, over the course of the 20th century, the proportion of the working population employed as 'manual workers' fell from 75% to 38%, whilst the proportion of professionals and managers rose from 8% to 34%.[24] This decline, and the accompanying change in the composition of the working classes, has had important consequences for the *experience* of inequality and disadvantage. To be a 'manual worker' at the beginning of the 20th century was to hold a position shared by three-quarters of the working population; by the end of the century, the bulk of their fellow workers were in more privileged jobs. There are important differences, therefore, in being a 'manual worker' between then and now, because the *relative disadvantage* of the category has changed. Even if they performed exactly the same sort of work as their parents, the members of the working classes would be in a very different social position, because of proportional shifts in occupational distributions. But labour-market restructuring has

24   Gallie (2000)

also meant a shift in the *composition* of the working classes, with an increase in more routine and relatively insecure forms of employment, a growth in part-time, casual and flexible jobs, and a decline in traditional 'craft and operative' occupations (in 'heavy' industries), at the expense of routine and semi-routine jobs in services.

These changes have deepened the experience of class disadvantage, and some groups have been hit particularly hard. Since the last quarter of the 20th century, young men in particular have become disproportionately concentrated in low-level manual work, and have seen their relative pay slip behind that of older men.[25] Employment-based class divisions have widened and polarized for all, and this class restructuring has meant that the 'working class', and especially young working class men, have become relatively more disadvantaged. These shifts have also affected the culture of manual work, and undermined some of the historic claims for working class status. In the past, one of the main ways in which working class men could lay some claim to social respect rested in the nature of the jobs that they performed. In traditional working class industries (like shipbuilding, iron and steel, mining and the railways), although the work was dirty, dangerous and tough, it also nourished 'heroic' images of men's manual labour. Craft and shop-floor union strength permitted a sense of working class self-respect, based on 'manly independence'. The fracturing of these industries, and the rise of the 'McJob', has undermined such claims to respect, which in any case, were never available to working class women, who have always had to contend with stigmatized and highly sexualized labels.[26] For both women and men, manual work is increasingly seen as a form of subordinate and dependent labour.[27]

So despite the marked rise in affluence and increasing social opportunities which have marked post-war period Britain, class inequalities continue to sharply affect people's chances in life. In the form of the distribution of income and property opportunities, class inequalities strongly influence material life chances: shaping, amongst other things, people's life expectancy, their risk of serious illness or disability, their chances of

educational success, the quality of their house and neighbourhood, and their risk of falling victim to crime. And class inequalities in one generation bleed over into the next, with the class position of parents influencing the prospects of their children, shaping their child's chances of low birth weight and infant mortality, their risk of ill health and disability, and their success in school and in the labour market.

Most people's lives are, materially at least, immeasurably better than that of their grandparents. We live longer, experience better health, enjoy more comfortable lifestyles and face expanded opportunities in education and the labour market. These sweeping changes sometimes make class inequalities harder to see. But class inequality persists within the fabric of that change. Despite a dramatic improvement in general standards of living and the provision of free health care, sharp health inequalities remain in British society, not only surviving the jump from absolute to relative inequality, but actually increasing over time. The lower your socio-economic position the greater your risk of low birth-weight, infections, cancer, coronary heart disease, respiratory disease, stroke, accidents, nervous and mental illnesses. Class inequality is – literally – marked on the body. And this is not an issue of deprivation alone, because health inequalities run right across society with every rung in the social hierarchy having worse health than the one just above it. Increasing affluence has meant that the poor have got healthier, but so too have the groups above them, and at a faster rate, so class health inequalities remain as wide as ever.

During the post-war period, an increase in higher level occupations created 'more room at the top', so *everybody's* chances of achieving a high level job improved and there was substantial social mobility for people from all social origins, including those from working-class backgrounds. However, the *relative chances* of individuals from privileged backgrounds (as opposed to those from more humble backgrounds) achieving higher level jobs has remained significantly better. It is sometimes argued that British society has become increasingly open: more individualistic, and more meritocratic; and that this openness undermines the basis of class inequalities. Most people, after all, are prepared to accept some degree of

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25 Egerton and Savage (2000)

26 Skeggs (1997)

27 Savage (2000)

inequality, as long as that inequality arises through fair competition. But whilst educational success has become increasingly significant for social position and life-chances in Britain, children from different classes are still not competing on a level playing field. In both education and the labour market, class inequality persists because children from more privileged backgrounds remain more likely to be successful.

The rising significance of education in British society has not undermined the role of class; instead it has opened up new avenues for class competition and disadvantage. With the rise of knowledge-based and consumer-oriented economies, access to educational credentials has become increasingly vital to maintaining or improving social position, and education is an asset, much like property or income. Because of this, academic accounts of class have increasingly looked at the importance of cultural and educational resources (as well as economic 'capital') in placing people in the class hierarchy. The significance of cultural resources in class inequality also raises questions of class lifestyles, and of how class differences in everyday tastes (in things ranging from the types of food and clothing we like, to our preferences in music, art, decoration, gardening, or sports) act as markers of class distinction and serve as resources in the competition between classes. Investment in education and cultural knowledge has become one of the key strategies in class competition. But here, as in other spheres of class inequality, the more advantaged a group is at the start of the competition the more successful it is likely to be at the finish.

So despite the meritocratic values of British society, high social position still helps to 'insure' against weaker educational performance, and numerous studies show that if we compare lower achievers, those from more privileged backgrounds have much better careers than their less advantaged peers. The link between social background and educational attainment has also strengthened over time. Children from higher class families are dramatically more successful in educational terms, and this is true even when we hold measured 'ability' constant. Whether it is through living in better areas (with better schools), through the hiring of private tutors, through the choice of private schooling, through the possession of 'cultural

capital', through the more confident negotiation of the school system, through the mobilization of well-placed social contacts, or through the higher aspirations that privileged parents have for their children, or indeed through all of these factors - the fact remains that it is often harder for privileged children to fail than it is for disadvantaged children to succeed. Class inequalities persist because middle-class families have been able to mobilize and convert their resources to help ensure their children's educational and labour-market success.

All too often in the debate about the 'white working class' this broader picture of class inequalities disappears from view. The interest in the 'white working class' is less in their class inequality than in their ethnic disadvantage. But we should always be wary of supposed class labels (like the 'white working class') for they are rarely a straightforward reflection of class realities. We should certainly never mistake them for neutral social description. 'Class' is *always* about invidious comparison, and when people talk about 'class' their accounts often shift easily from social description, to social evaluation, to social abuse. This is because the social descriptions that people use when they talk about 'class' also contain assumptions about *why* inequality exists, and about *how* rewards and resources come to be allocated in an unequal fashion, so such descriptions are always fraught and contested.

The Shifting Uses of 'Class' Labels

'Class' is about how, and why, some people have *more* – more opportunities, more resources, more prestige or social esteem – whilst others have *less*. Everyday accounts of 'class' are less concerned with the fine distinctions of academic and official classifications, and in the popular imagination the idea of 'class' is inextricably bound up with questions of status and lifestyle, with accent and manners, and with rank and status. But all accounts of 'class' categorize and grade the members of society, establishing their relative position, ranking them over one another. It is important to remember that 'class' is about *relative* inequality, and is an inherently comparative concept. It is not just about what a group has, or where it stands in society, but about what it has or where it stands in relation to *others*.

These are politically and emotionally charged

descriptions, because they also generate distinctions of social worth. Being relatively unequal is about more than just the material conditions of people's lives, for it is also a question of how some people are less prestigious, less in control over their own lives, less valued or esteemed than others. It is this aspect of 'class' that gives rise to much of the language used to describe the people at the bottom of social hierarchies (the rhetoric of social inferiors, chavs and the underclass), a language which is so frequently dismissive and contemptuous, and based on assumptions of deserved disadvantage. The everyday language of class (with its talk of 'social betters', social 'superiors' and 'inferiors') contains implicit moral claims – and counter-claims – about whether or not people deserve their rewards. To be 'classy' or 'high class' is not simply a description of social position, but also a statement of greater social worth and entitlement, with the assumption that those of high social rank are not just 'better off' but are also 'better'.

However, hierarchies also throw up counter-claims and defensive reactions. The rhetoric of 'class' is also used to make claims about unfair advantage, and to try to win back respect for those at the bottom. The earliest accounts of the 'working classes' associated them with 'honest toil', comparing those living by the 'sweat of their brow' with the undeserved privilege of a decadent aristocracy. There are echoes of such comparisons in today's criticisms of the pay of 'fat cat' executives. But such talk is also a shield against a more frequent and more damaging comparison: to the undeserving poor. The people at the bottom of social hierarchies must always contend with the potential social stigma of their position, and with the idea that they have only themselves to blame for it. Low social position carries with it connotations of inferiority, which makes it harder for people to feel respected, valued or confident, so the label of 'working class' is never a neutral one. Advocates of the 'working class' often dwell on their decent and hard-working nature, in which respectability is established by contrast to a shadow group – the disreputable, feckless and spendthrift undeserving poor. As Seumas Milne has noted,[28] politicians today rarely mention the

'working class', but instead talk of 'hardworking families' or child poverty, groups who cannot be reproached for their disadvantage. Such groups must be set out as the 'deserving poor' because the idea of undeserving poverty always lurks at the back of questions of inequality.

The very idea of the 'white working class' draws on just such shifting and invidious comparisons. The disreputable figure of the 'chav' (debauched, unruly and wholly undeserving) snaps at the heels of the 'white working class', a slur on their claims to social respect and resources. In accounts of the 'white working class', insinuations of (undeserving) chavdom are resisted by counter-claims of political abandonment, or of unfair competition from other, less 'deserving', disadvantaged groups. This 'class' rhetoric, like so many previous examples, emerges from the *experience* of living with class disadvantage, in which status inequalities generate hostility and contempt from those above, and anger, fear and insecurity from those below. But such shifting meanings, and uses, of 'class' rhetoric should alert us to be cautious about taking the various claims made about the 'white working class' at face value.

Class: Now You See It, Now You Don't

Why do we now care about the working classes, white or otherwise? The question is worth asking, because for a long time 'class', and the working class in particular, were of little interest to social commentators. 'Class' was seen as a spent social force: with its social base – in the industrial factory production which dominated local communities in the early 20th century – apparently in terminal decline. Rising affluence, and labour-market shifts had, so the story went, given rise to a more diversified society, based on services and consumption rather than manufacturing and production. These shifts, fragmenting lifestyles and communities, had shrunk the union movement, and splintered the working class, pulling their political teeth. The 'class system' was a relic of the past, and the faded rhetoric of class warfare, with its paraphernalia of unions and strikes, was as antiquated and irrelevant as the British peerage. Society was now meritocratic, organized around individual achievement and no longer bound by class shackles. People might recognize the continuing importance of inequality, but were reluctant to claim a class

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28 Milne (2008)

'identity' for themselves. They were unwilling to adopt class labels, and instead preferred to speak of their own 'ordinariness'. Politics, it was argued, now lay in new social groups, in questions of racial or sexual identity, or in issues like the environment. Politicians, of all persuasions, preferred to appeal to 'the people' rather than to a particular class, and inequality was framed as 'social exclusion' rather than as a question of 'class'.

'Class' was dead. Or so it seemed. However, such stories were always a little too neat, and the connection between how we talk about 'class', and how we live it, is more complex and shifting than is often recognized.[29] If there was a reluctance to talk about 'class' this is partly because the subject raises the relative worth of individuals and is a question of moral shame.[30] People are hesitant to use explicit class labels because, all too frequently, they are terms of abuse. But labels like 'ordinary', 'decent' and 'hardworking' are *euphemisms* for class, still locating people in the social hierarchy (somewhere between the undeserving rich and the undeserving poor), but without having to engage in direct social slurs. And when people *are* willing to use terms of abuse, a rich vocabulary – of chavs and asbos, slags and scrubbers – readily awaits, also serving as euphemisms for 'class'. Just as importantly, whilst people's willingness to put explicit 'class' labels on social processes may ebb and flow (as the upsurge of interest in the 'white working class' shows), class inequalities remain depressingly enduring and persistent.

In Britain, economic inequality has not only persisted but increased since the 1970s, and still has a decisive impact on people's lives, whether or not they describe their lives in 'class' terms. Despite the enormous changes in British society, there have been remarkable continuities in patterns of inequality. But this continuity in the face of change gives rise to a very complex picture of inequality, and one that can sometimes be hard to see. This is because the inequality of less advantaged groups in 21st century Britain is not manifested in their *fixed attachment* to unequal positions, or in the straightforward *denial* of opportunities to the disadvantaged, but rather emerges in their *unequal chances* of success and *lower relative rates* of mobility. Less advantaged groups have

taken up the bright new opportunities that have opened up in education, training and the labour market, but have still received an unequal share of them in comparison to more advantaged groups, so the relative gap between groups has been maintained. Take going to university. The problem is not that working-class children never go to university (they do, and many more so than in the past), but rather that their *rates* of entry remain low and have not kept pace with the expanding numbers of students from middle-class backgrounds.

The inequality of lower level groups consists not in their social exclusion from the better educational and labour-market positions, but rather in lower rates of movement *into* them. Of course, such relative inequalities, when summed up, amount to a massive gap in the opportunities, experiences and life-chances between those at the top and the bottom of class hierarchies. But such distinctions are blurred by the finely graded nature of the social hierarchy, and the substantial amount of movement within it. 'Class' in the 21st century presents us with a very complex picture of the continuity of inequality in the face of widespread social change. But this story – of relative *degrees* of inequality, uneven *chances* of success, different *rates* of movement – is a very hard story to sell. It is far easier to focus on the extremes of class, and to equate inequality with polarized social types, with toffs and chavs, than it is to acknowledge that inequality is a question of relative chances of success, in which class processes create material and social differences *at every level* of the social hierarchy. The eye slips from the hierarchy itself to those at the very bottom of the heap. It is as if inequality only matters as long as we can pinpoint a visible, readily identifiable, social type: 'the poor'.

The Faces of the Poor
Debates about 'class' often fall prey to the urge to tell a simpler story of inequality: a story of visible, straightforward disadvantage. Such stories focus on the faces of the poor, rather than on the systematic processes of social advantage which generate the differences between rich and poor, and all the groups in between. The search for visible inequality turns into an anthropology of poverty, as commentators gaze on the exotic tribes of the poor. The history of class commentary is

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29   Cannadine (1998)
30   Sayer (2005)

awash with such social types: the 'vagabond poor', the 'residuum', the underclass, the chav, and now the 'white working class'. Seen either as helpless victims or scrounging reprobates, the focus is always their distinctive 'cultures of poverty'.

Often emerging during periods of high unemployment (most recently in the 1980s and 1990s, in Britain and United States) these debates give cultural explanations of poverty. So, for example, accounts of the 'underclass' and the black 'ghetto poor' argued that it was the dysfunctional moral practices of the poor (including their poor commitment to paid work, welfare dependency, criminality, fatherless families and teen pregnancy) which were the cause of their disadvantage.[31] Some versions of the 'ghetto poor' debate offered a more sympathetic account of essentially the same social traits, suggesting that these practices were simply the cultural adaptations that ordinary individuals were forced to make to living in intolerable conditions, in 'disorganized' neighbourhoods with very high concentrations of poverty and few resources.[32] But these cultural adaptations to poverty were also seen as a *constraint* on people's prospects, which made it harder for them, and their children, to climb out of poverty. Sympathetic or not, commentators saw 'cultures of poverty' as *self-reproducing*, creating social conditions which limited the chances of successive generations. So the continuing inequality of the poor was their own fault, the result of their impoverished cultural life and contacts, their failure to acquire 'good work habits', or their 'poverty of aspiration'.

The problem with such arguments is that they exaggerate the cultural differences between 'the poor' and other social groups, and place too great an emphasis on cultural practices as an explanation of disadvantage. The picture of inequality is much more complex than this. Even when we look at the situation of the very poorest, although we can see striking inequality, evidence of social isolation, and the accumulation of disadvantage, this does not amount to a culturally or socially distinct 'underclass'. The poor are not a permanently socially excluded group. There are substantial social and cultural links between the poor and the groups immediately above them in the hierarchy, because 'the poor' are, in fact, individuals who

move between these situations. The disadvantage of the poor consists of greater risks of poverty over their life-time, in which those who experience poverty as children are more likely to cycle in and out of poverty as adults, and between poorly paid and insecure work and unemployment.

For analysts within the class tradition, the key issue is not the cultural characteristics or values of the poor, but the way in which capitalist economies create large numbers of low-wage, low-skill jobs with poor job security, so that the workers in these jobs are always in danger of falling into poverty, depending on the ebb and flow of wider economic conditions. In highly unequal societies there is always someone at the bottom of the pile, but this does not mean that the lowest brick is any different from the other bricks in the pile. The so-called 'underclass' were simply elements of the working-class hit by adverse life-course events or economic recession. As past experience of excluded groups shows, such 'outcasts' have been easily reabsorbed when labour-market conditions improve.[33]

In a move eerily reminiscent of previous 'cultural' accounts of the poor, the debate about the 'white working class' has moved quickly to focus on the most disadvantaged sections: on those with the least skill and education, living in localities with the highest concentrations of deprivation and unemployment, on 'sink' estates with poor amenities and fewer opportunities. The picture built up is of a socially excluded minority, beached by the receding tides of manufacturing, frustrated and angry, but with little hope and low aspirations. The stress on the 'whiteness' of the group adds to the idea of its cultural cohesion and distinctiveness. In accounts which are sometimes sympathetic, sometimes less so, attention has particularly focused on young white working class *men*, on their lack of prospects and on their disaffection from both education and the labour-market. Here we see all the hallmarks of 'cultural' readings of inequality: the stress on social gulfs, the idea of adaptations to poverty which hamstring their incumbents, and the emphasis on the geographic concentration of poverty which displays the disadvantaged as a visibly different cultural group. Some elements of this story ring true, but the

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31 Murray (1984)
32 Wilson (1987)

33 Bagguley and Mann (1992)

evidence as a whole overwhelmingly suggests a more complex and differentiated picture of relative inequality and hierarchy, rather than a culturally distinct and permanently excluded minority.

We can in large part locate the problems of the 'white working class' within the broader framework of changing class inequality within Britain, and the fate of the working class as a whole, without having to dwell on questions of ethnicity or other cultural differences. The increasing insecurity and reduced autonomy of manual work, the widening of relative disadvantage, the declining status and loss of respect for manual cultures, the rise of educational routes to labour market security amid increasing middle-class advantage in processes of educational competition, have all hit the working class, and working class young men in particular, hard.

There are important questions to be asked about the concentration of different social groups in geographical 'hot spots' of very high unemployment and deprivation, areas with few resources and amenities. Such spatial concentrations of inequality do constrain social and cultural participation and citizenship, and threaten 'social exclusion' for the groups that live in such areas. But it is worth remembering that all disadvantaged groups, of whatever ethnicity, suffer from the uneven spatial concentration of inequality. And there is still a danger that the concept of social exclusion may itself become a euphemism for isolated or scapegoated groups,[34] once again shifting the emphasis from the *processes* of exclusion to focus on the characteristics of the excluded. When we think about poverty we are often tempted to think of 'sink estates', with their grim and dilapidated physical infrastructures, because such excluded neighbourhoods are the most visible and evident form of exclusion. However, we need to distinguish carefully between excluded neighbourhoods and the people who live within them:

> It is much easier to identify 'excluded (and excluding) spaces', the consequences of the transition of cities to a post-industrial status…a sharp and clear divide which corresponds exactly with popular conceptions. However, we have to remember that people move in space as well as time. Those who live in the peripheral estates of the Red Belt of Paris or the outer estates of Glasgow or Sunderland in the UK are clearly living in excluded spaces, but the degree of movement into and out of these places is very considerable.[35]

Even in such areas fates are not fixed, for there is high residential turnover in deprived areas, and 'if people can get on they will get out'.[36] Again, the nature of the disadvantage consists in higher *relative risks* of experiencing spells of unemployment or poverty, and in *uneven degrees* of social exclusion, rather than fixed attachment to either an excluded group or an excluded location.

Class and the 'White Working Class'

All too often people want to put a *face* on the story of inequality, and to identify excluded groups whose social fates are fixed, with no hope and no prospects. Often, too, this is well intentioned, the result of attempts to draw attention to grinding deprivation, or to seek help for the most disadvantaged groups. But such efforts backfire when they exaggerate the gap between the poor and the rest of the social hierarchy, and recast inequality as cultural difference. This is the danger courted by current discussions of the 'white working class', as disadvantage is reframed as ethnic identity, and a stereotype of the white poor emerges, squeezing class inequality out of the picture altogether.

We must remember that 'class' is always about more than simple social description, and that class labels are not just attempts to reflect the social world, but are also attempts to shape it.[37] It is no surprise to see an ethnicized revamp of 'class' appearing in the current political climate, but this revamp should be recognized as a set of social *claims* (about who is most disadvantaged and why) linked to competing political strategies, as political entrepreneurs attempt to shape demands for resources and recognition. Before we straightforwardly accept the existence of the 'white working class' as a clear-cut social group, we need to remember that such class labels are part of campaigning strategies, as much an attempt to *create* social and political constituencies as to *represent* them.

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34   Silver (1994)

35   Byrne (1999: 127-8)
36   Ibid.: 8
37   Crossick (1991)

The debate about the 'white working class' isn't really about class at all. But it should be. To really make sense of the problems of the 'white working class', we need to understand how social change, and long-term shifts in economic structure, have affected class inequalities more generally. The broad picture of class in Britain shows an enduring pattern of class inequalities in the face of social change, in which more privileged groups have been able to negotiate the wide-reaching changes in British society to their continuing advantage. The most disadvantaged groups have had fewer resources to adapt to these changes, and they have been hit the hardest by economic restructuring. It is unequal class competition which explains the situation of the white working class, and it is simply misleading to characterize it instead as a question of ethnic identity and entitlement.

2. Education: The Numbers Game and the Construction of White Racial Victimhood

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Introduction

A lot has been written recently about the educational performance of white working class students: this is entirely justified by the continued educational injustices that such children encounter. Unfortunately, a great deal of the public debate has been shaped by ill-informed and inaccurate assumptions that owe more to racist stereotypes than to an understanding of research data. In this chapter I examine these debates and identify some of the facts behind the headlines. I begin by looking at the manufacture of 'news' stories through the use of dedicated opinion polls: two notable examples from early 2008 were especially significant in supporting the idea of the white working class as the new race victims. The second part of the chapter looks specifically at education and, in particular, the media's treatment of official statistics on educational achievement by social class and ethnic background. Finally, and in contradiction of the myth of white victimhood, I explore official statistics that map the extent of continuing racist inequality of educational attainment in this country.

Making the News

Question: Which ONE group of people do you think suffers the greatest discrimination in British society today?

Nationally Representative Sample   22% said Muslims

21% said White British

This startling finding, that one in five of the British population consider white people to be the group that endures the most discrimination, was generated by an opinion poll conducted on behalf of a TV company producing a mini-series on immigration for Channel 4.[38] The series, called 'Immigration: the Inconvenient Truth' began in April 2008, just one month after the BBC aired its controversial 'White Season'[39] which it justified as follows:

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38 Adapted from YouGov/Juniper TV (2008)

39 The 'White Season' included six programmes, aired on BBC 2 TV, from 6-14 March 2008. The season was launched with a special edition of 'Newsnight' on 6 March.

> All the debate about multiculturalism, immi-
> gration… it's always in the news, it's always
> in the air. But sometimes the voice you
> hear *least* from are the communities *most*
> affected – the White British Working Class.
>
> Roly Keating, Controller BBC2[40]

Both series generated a good deal of publicity beyond the networks that carried them,[41] largely on the basis of specially commissioned opinion polls. In this way, the TV series gained widespread exposure by generating news stories based on their exclusive polls. The reporting reflected, and further strengthened, the growing view that white people are the new race victims. But behind the sound-bites and headlines lies a myriad of complex questions about the ethics of such 'research' and the selectivity of the reporting. The BBC, for example, led its 'news' coverage of its 'White Season' by announcing that 'A majority of white working class Britons feel nobody speaks for people like them'.[42] Launching the season on the flag-ship current affairs show, *Newsnight*, it was presented as an issue about race and the specific marginalization of *white* working class people. Unfortunately, when the BBC's poll (conducted by Populus) was published in full (*after* the season had aired) the details raised important questions.[43] For example, the pollsters had only interviewed white people and so it was impossible to know whether the feelings of alienation they expressed were shared among all people of a similar class background. Indeed, the wording of the questions was often so poor that their interpretation was difficult if not impossible. In the case of the headline grabbing question 'Nobody speaks out for people like me' the BBC chose to interpret this as meaning 'white' people like me: but respondents were also asked about other social identities (age, religion, etc) and so 'like me' could just as easily refer to *women* like me, or *men* like me, or *old people* like me, or *Christians*, and so on.[44]

Perhaps even more worrying than the wording of questions is the selection of items to be broadcast in the BBC's news coverage. The Populus survey ran to 132 pages and covered a wide range of issues. The items that featured in *Newsnight's* coverage mostly painted a consistent picture of white people unhappy with immigration and its impact on their lives. The following responses were detailed on *Newsnight* with accompanying graphics under the heading 'immigration':[45]

> *Is it good or bad for Britain?*
> Bad: 52% working class
>   33% middle class
>
> *Immigration has changed the character
> of the area where I live for the better*
> Disagree: 64% working class
>   58% middle class
>
> *It is not immigration I object to but
> uncontrolled immigration*
> Agree: 88% working class
>   88% middle class
>
> *You are labelled a racist if you criticize the
> amount of, or conduct of, immigrants*
> Agree: 76% working class
>   78% middle class

But a different selection of items, from the same survey, could have been used to paint a rather more positive picture. For example, the programme could have highlighted that most people did *not* think that immigrants 'put their job at risk'; 58% of working class respondents and 82% of middle class respondents.[46] Similarly, a majority thought that 'most immigrants to Britain end up fitting in here if they're given sufficient time to do so' (71% working class, 76% middle class)[47] and saw 'drink/drugs' and 'disrespect' as having a greater negative impact than immigration.[48] This last finding, of course, challenges the construction at the heart of the 'White Season', that is, a story of the forgotten or ignored plight of the white working class; a group presented in patronizing and deficit terms, as alienated and racist. This construction does not sit easily with the finding that the pollsters' respondents were more worried about drink/drugs and disrespect.

The view of white people as the *victims* of ethnic diversity is especially prominent in media discussions of education.

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40 Transcribed direct from a recording of BBC TV 'Breakfast' show, live inter-
      view, 6 March 2008: emphasis in original.
41 See Youdell et al. (2008)
42 BBC News Online (2008a)
43 Populus (2008)
44 See Populus (2008) op. cit., Question 4, table 7, p. 13-14.

45 BBC TV (2008)
46 Populus (2008) op. cit., Question 20, table 50, p. 107.
47 Populus (2008) op. cit., Question 17, table 46, p. 99.
48 Populus (2008) op. cit., Question 14, table 38, p. 83.

Victims in the Classroom: Race, Education and White 'Working Class' Boys

For more than a decade discussions of educational inequality in England have given a prominent role to the experiences and achievements of boys. A variety of studies have sought to quantify and understand the generally higher average achievements of girls at the age of 16.[49] Feminist researchers have been especially critical of the way that boys are often viewed as a single homogenous group, ignoring key differences in social class and ethnic origin.[50] Since the mid-2000s a particular focus of popular discourse (in radio, TV and newspaper coverage) has been white *working* class boys. The following headlines, for example, are drawn from a selection of national daily newspapers:

School low achievers are white and British
The Times, 22 June 2007

White boys 'are being left behind' by education system
Daily Mail, 22 June 2007

White boys 'let down by education system'
Daily Telegraph, 22 June 2007

Deprived white boys 'low achievers'
Daily Express, 22 June 2007

White working-class boys are the worst performers in school
Independent, 22 June 2007

Half school 'failures' are white working-class boys, says report
Guardian, 22 June 2007

These headlines relate to a report on low educational achievement[51] and repeat a focus that resurfaces at regular intervals whenever statistics are published on low achievement. This focus is familiar to anyone who works on race equality: it characterizes media debates on the issue and has become a feature of almost every discussion with education professionals on the issue. Before considering the statistics behind these kinds of debate, I want first to examine the public discourse

of white educational failure because this recurring storyline (and its attendant assumptions) have important and destructive consequences educationally, politically and socially.

This is how a leading daily newspaper reported the publication of official statistics on GCSE attainment:

White boys falling behind
White, working-class boys have the worst GCSE results

… Just 24 per cent of disadvantaged white boys now leave school with five or more good GCSEs.
   This compares with 33.7 per cent for black African boys from similar low-income households.
   There were fears last night that the figures could hand votes to the far-Right British National Party because additional funding is available to help children from ethnic minorities. (*Daily Mail*, 13 January 2007)

There are several things to consider here. First, the misleading assertion that 'additional funding is available to help children from ethnic minorities': in fact, local authorities (LAs) and schools have to *bid* for dedicated funding towards minority education projects: the additional funds are not simply handed out, automatically privileging minoritized children as the story seems to suggest. Second, the story argues that the results could fuel support for extreme political parties like the British National Party (BNP). This repeats a line of argument that has featured in British political discourse since the late-1950s – when riots by white racists led to the first major immigration controls.[52] By warning of the danger of inflaming support for racist parties, what actually happens is that politicians and commentators invoke the threat of racist violence as a means of disciplining calls for greater race equality. This can be seen clearly in the following quotation from the specialist educational press:

Cameron Watt, deputy director of the Centre for Social Justice and a key figure involved in a report on the subject published recently by former Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith, said: "There's a political lobby highlighting the issue of underachievement among black boys, and

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49 See for example Arnot et al. (1998)
50 Archer and Francis (2007); Arnot et al. (1998); Epstein et al. (1998); Youdell (2006)
51 Cassen and Kingdon (2007)

52 Ramdin (1987)

quite rightly so, but I don't think there's a single project specifically for white working-class boys. I don't want to stir up racial hatred, but that is something that should be addressed."

Times Educational Supplement, 12 January 2007

It is important to recognize what is happening here. Official statistics reveal that most groups in poverty achieve relatively poor results *regardless* of ethnic background. As Figure 1 illustrates, the achievement gap between white students in poverty (in receipt of free school meals - FSM) and more affluent whites (non-FSM) is more than *three times* bigger than the gaps between different ethnic groups who are equally disadvantaged: there is a 32 percentage point gap between N-FSM and FSM white boys, compared with a 9.7 percentage point gap between FSM white boys and the *most* successful of the black FSM boys (categorized as Black African). And yet it is the race gap that is highlighted both in the *Daily Mail* story (above), which warns of BNP mobilization, and in the attendant story in the *Times Educational Supplement*. It is significant that despite the larger class inequality, media commentators and policy advisers do not warn of an impending class war: they do not raise the

spectre that failure on this scale will promote action against private schools or the 'gifted and talented' scheme that receives millions of pounds of extra funding and is dominated by middle class students.[53] The race dimension is deliberately accentuated in the coverage.

The media image of failing white boys goes further than merely highlighting a difference in attainment, as it actually includes the suggestion that white failure is somehow the *fault* of minoritized students and/or their advocates. This is implicit in the quotation attributed to Cameron Watt (above) but is also an explicit part of some media coverage. This can be seen by examining some of the radio coverage from an award winning news and current programme: the *Breakfast Show* on Radio 5Live.

Radio 5Live is a national radio channel run by the BBC. It was re-launched as a dedicated news and sports service in 1994 and has been described as 'one of the success stories in the recent history of British broadcasting'.[54] The BBC enjoys exceptionally high levels of public trust in relation to its news content; recently receiving more than *five times* the rating of

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53   See Gillborn (2008)
54   Tolson (2006: 94)

FIGURE 1:   Five or more Higher Grade (A*-C) GCSEs (any subject) Boys by Ethnic Origin and Free School Meal Status, England 2006
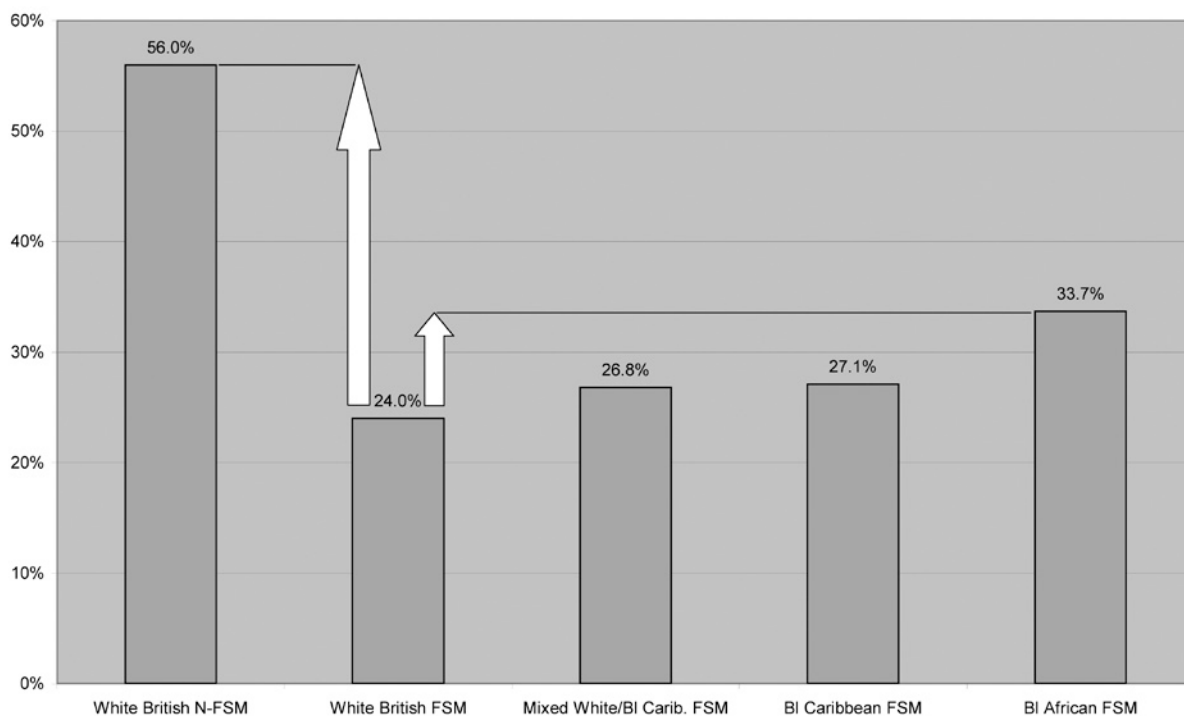
Source: DfES (2006a): table 32

its nearest rival in a survey of public opinion.[55] This makes the BBC's news coverage potentially very influential; it is the most trusted news provider and caters to a national audience. In addition, the programme in question (Radio 5Live's *Breakfast Show*) is held in high regard professionally: it won the Sony Radio Academy Award for the Best News & Current Affairs Programme.[56] On 22 June 2007 the programme led its news bulletins with the story that fuelled the numerous headlines already quoted (above) on white boys as the key under-achieving group. At around 6 a.m. Nicky Campbell, one of the programme's two main hosts, interviewed a researcher who was introduced as having contributed to the research report behind the headlines:[57]

> Nicky Campbell:
>> 'Isn't the problem that - the race relations industry has, some would argue, *compartmentalized* people. And if we had less concentration on race, more on *individuals*, we took colour out of the equation: it wouldn't be "oh Black boys do this, white boys do that, Chinese boys do this, Asian" – it should just be looking at children as *individuals*. Isn't race part of the problem here in a sense?'

> Interviewee (a member of the research team):
>> 'Yes you do have to look at children as individuals but, but this kind of research does actually *show* erm that people from different cultures are having different experiences...'

Despite the host's suggestion that 'the race relations industry' is somehow culpable, therefore, the researcher maintains that ethnicity is an important variable and should not be removed from policy debate. Around an hour later the same issue led the 7 a.m. news headlines and was explored in an interview with a London headteacher:

> Nicky Campbell:
>> '...there's the inescapable conclusion, according to some of our listeners, a- a-and indeed according to some experts too,

that the school system has been focusing *disproportionately... too much* on children from other ethnic backgrounds.'

> Interviewee (a London headteacher):
>> 'I, I think, if I'm being honest that probably was true years ago, it's not the case now, we are – we're put in a position where schools have got to focus on all of the data. We're very *data rich* across education and we are accountable for the educational attainment of all of our students.'

The host's analysis was now backed by the invocation of 'some of our listeners' and 'some experts too' but again the interviewee failed to support the idea that white kids suffered because of minoritized students in their schools. In fact, the London headteacher seems to argue that the government's emphasis on 'accountability' has raised standards for all. Unfortunately, as research has shown, different groups of students have *not* shared equally in the overall improvements that both Conservative and Labour governments have highlighted in the headline attainment statistics. In particular, white working class and black students (of all class backgrounds) have not shared equally in the improvements.[58]

Undeterred, at 8 a.m. the same topic featured in the news headlines and was explored with new guests, including Professor Gus John (one of Britain's leading campaigners on race equality):

> Nicky Campbell:
>> 'Professor Gus John-'

> Gus John:
>> 'Good morning.'

> Nicky Campbell:
>> 'Some are saying that too much attention has been given to African and Caribbean boys to the *detriment* of young white boys.'

> Gus John:
>> 'Well the facts don't bear that out you see. An-and I think this discussion is pretty *distorted*, certainly as far as facts are concerned...'

The interviewee steadfastly rejected the proposal that

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55 YouGov (2005)

56 Sony (2007)

57 All quotations from Radio 5Live are my own verbatim transcriptions from an audio recording of the programmes. I use standard transcription notations:
(...)   denotes that speech has been edited out
italicized text   denotes that the speaker stressed this word/phrase

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58 See Gillborn (2008); Gillborn and Youdell (2000)

white boys' low achievement was somehow the fault of black students. But the damage was already done. Listeners and un-named 'experts' had been cited to support the argument and its constant repetition made it a key aspect of the morning news broadcast. At 9 a.m. the *Breakfast Show* was followed by an hour-long phone-in on educational failure and the presenter read out a familiar sounding view:

> Presenter: [reading from listeners' text messages]
> 'Somebody else says, er, "White young-
> sters fail because PC [politically correct]
> teachers and the media are more inter-
> ested in Black and Asian children".'

In this way the country's most trusted news service had effectively promoted the view that white children are the *victims* of ethnic diversity in general and race equality in particular.

A tendency to present white people as the race victims has been commented upon by writers in both the USA[59] and the UK.[60] The particular manifestation of white victimology in recent academic and media analyses of examination performance is especially dangerous for several reasons. The discourse presents whites as the victims of race equality measures. Consequently, moves that have been inspired by a commitment to social justice become recast as if they represent a competitive threat to white people; they are redefined as a sectional (racialized, even racist) campaign. Simultaneously, this refrain of racial competition has the effect of erasing from sight the possibility that members of all ethnic groups might excel in a single educational system. The prominence given to these arguments and the strategic citation of far right groups (such as the British National Party) has the clear effect of sounding a warning to everyone involved in education: *make sure that white kids are catered for – don't let race equality go* too *far*. The threatened price of de-centring white children is racial violence – both symbolic (in threats and insults) and physical (it is known, for example, that racist harass-ment often increases after prominent news stories on race issues).[61]

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59 Apple (1998); Delgado and Stefancic (1997)

60 Rollock (2006)

61 In the run-up to the 2001 general election, for example, it was reported that "Officers in the Race and Violent Crime Task Force, set up after the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, said they were shocked to discover a direct rela-tionship between political rhetoric, such as Tory leader William Hague's 'foreign land' speech, and an increase on attacks on asylum-seekers" (Ahmed and Bright, 2001: 1).

Race, Class and Educational Attainment

In the previous section I noted how GCSE results for 16 year-olds were reported in the British media as revealing a situation where, in the words of the *Daily Mail* newspaper '*White, working-class boys have the worst GCSE results*' (13 January 2007, original emphasis). It is clear from the data summarized in Figure 1 that the inequality of attainment between 'White British' boys in receipt of free school meals and their white peers who do not receive this benefit (N-FSM) is considerably larger than the difference between white and black FSM boys. Nevertheless the *Daily Mail* story accurately (if selectively) reported the statistics:

> 'Just 24 per cent of disadvantaged white boys now leave school with five or more good GCSEs. This compares with 33.7 per cent for black African boys from similar low-income households.' *Daily Mail* (2007)

It is significant that the paper chose to highlight the largest possible black/white inequality: Black African FSM boys were 9.7 percentage points more likely to attain five higher grades, i.e. three times the size of the gap between 'White British' and 'Black Caribbean' FSM boys (3.1 percentage points). Even more impor-tantly, the story focused exclusively on pupils in receipt of free school meals but used a variety of terms as shorthand for this group, including 'working class', 'disadvantaged' and 'low-income'. This is a common feature of media coverage of educational statistics. Indeed, this assumption that FSM equates to 'working class' students was enshrined in some of the headlines quoted earlier:

> White working-class boys are the
> worst performers in school
> *Independent*, 22 June 2007

> Half school 'failures' are white work-
> ing-class boys, says report
> *The Guardian*, 22 June 2007

This slippage, from 'receipt of free school meals' to 'working class', may be an innocent attempt to bring life to otherwise verbose and dry educational statistics. But the consequences of this shift are far from innocent. Receipt of free school meals is used as a crude measure of disadvantage in educational

statistics mainly because it is a piece of information that is readily accessible: the data are routinely collected by schools and provide a simple binary division. In contrast, there is no single scale of social class categories that is universally recognized; the categories are multiple and difficult to interpret; and, perhaps most importantly, the data are expensive to generate because additional, often sensitive, information is required. Consequently, official research rarely uses a detailed measure of social class, preferring instead to rely on the simple proxy of FSM. In the GCSE data quoted above 13.2% of all pupils were in receipt of free school meals.[62] But in a recent survey by the National Centre for Social Research 57% of UK adults described themselves as 'working class'.[63] Consequently the discursive slippage from 'free school meals' to 'working class' has the effect of inflating the significance of the finding: data on a relatively small group of students (13% of the cohort) are reported in a way that makes it appear descriptive of more than half the population (57%).

The focus on pupils in receipt of free school meals

has become increasingly pronounced in recent years. The media's exclusive use of the FSM statistics reflects the way that the data are presented by the Education Department itself. In 2006, for example, the department published a 104-page digest of statistics on race and education.[64] Amid the 19 tables and 48 illustrations, the document focuses a good deal on the significance of the FSM variable and, for example, includes *three* separate illustrations detailing different breakdowns of GCSE attainment among FSM students;[65] in contrast there is not a single table nor illustration giving a separate breakdown for non-FSM students and their relative attainments cannot be deduced from the FSM data that are presented.

The failure to interrogate N-FSM attainment in official documents invites the question as to how different ethnic groups attain within this larger, increasingly neglected, 86.8% of the cohort. The answer is contained in Figure 2. As the figure illustrates, the image of white failure created by the newspaper headlines does not reflect the reality as experienced by the majority of students. White British students who do
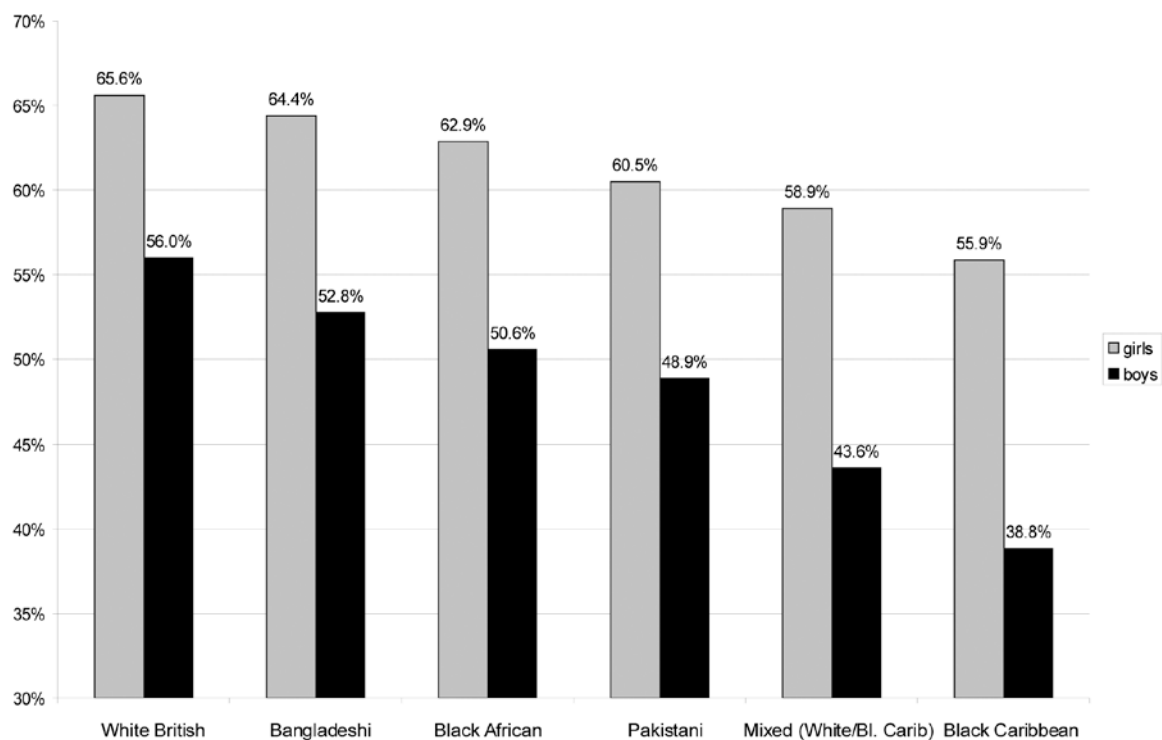
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62 Department for Education and Skills (2006a: Table 32)
63 BBC News Online (2007b)

64 Department for Education & Skills (2006b)
65 Department for Education & Skills (2006b: 65-68)

FIGURE 2: Five or more Higher Grade (A*-C) GCSEs (any subject) Non-Free School Meals by Gender and Ethnic Origin, England 2006

Source: Department for Education & Skills (DfES)(2006a) table 32.

not receive free meals are more likely to attain five higher grade passes than their counterparts of the same gender in several minoritized groups, including those of Bangladeshi, Black African, Pakistani, Mixed (White/Black Caribbean) and Black Caribbean ethnic heritage. Clearly, race inequality of the more familiar variety (where minoritized students achieve less well) remains a key characteristic of the English education system and affects students of both genders.[66] The largest inequalities relate to Black Caribbean N-FSM students, where girls are 9.7 percentage points less likely to achieve the benchmark than their white peers and the figure for boys is 17.2 percentage points.

Conclusion

The educational achievements of white working class students are no less important than those of any other group. However, the media's construction of white people in general, and white working class boys in particular, as the new race victims is both factually inaccurate and socially divisive. TV series that present the white working class as alienated and inherently racist rely on a partial and crude reading of data – often attaching sensationalist headlines to complex, sometimes unreliable, research. Although national newspapers and radio shows have proven themselves keen to repeat the view that white working class children suffer *because* of minoritized children, the evidence does not support this idea. Educational statistics rarely include accurate measures of social class: headlines about *'white working class'* failure often refer to a group (receiving free school meals) that is significantly smaller, and experiencing more pronounced economic disadvantage, than most people would imagine when they hear such terms. The pursuit of social justice in education is ill served by the sloppy, sensationalist treatment that has characterized public debate of this issue in recent years.

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66 Students of Chinese and Indian ethnic heritage are the only principal minority groups who are *more* likely to achieve five higher grade passes than their white N-FSM peers: for a detailed account of these groups and an analysis of racism within their school experiences see Gillborn (2008: ch. 7).

3. Making Sense of White Working Class Educational Underachievement

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Introduction

Children from white working-class backgrounds are the most under-performing ethnic group; just 17 per cent of disadvantaged white boys attain 5 or more A*-Cs at GCSE compared to a 56 per cent national average. Black Caribbean boys also perform well below the national average, with just 19 per cent obtaining 5 or more A*-Cs at GCSE.[67]

White working-class boys are becoming an underclass. White teenagers are less likely to go to university than school-leavers from other ethnic groups - even with the same A-level results, according to official figures.[68]

These are just two examples out of many media and political reports that reflect the pervasive moral panic about white working class educational underachievement. There has always been white working class underachievement and occasional moral outcries about it but what is new about the current concern is the emphasis on whiteness. And, as Wendy Bottero argues in this volume, a focus on the white working classes in ethnic terms as yet

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67   Centre for Social Justice (2006)

68   Paton (2008)

another cultural minority in multicultural Britain presents a cultural reading that disregards wider structural aspects of inequality. So a cultural interpretation distorts and misrepresents just as much as the other familiar scenario of blaming teachers for educational failure. The prevalent commonsense view veers from a judgement that the white working classes themselves are to blame for their underachievement, that it is about cultural deficits, lack of ambition, and the wrong sorts of attitudes to a view that certain individual schools and their staff are failing the working classes. But white working class educational underachievement is far more complex than either any cultural deficit analysis or failing school thesis allows. In this chapter I am going to attempt to map out the complex web of historical processes, class and ethnic relationships, educational policies, and dominant political and social attitudes that have shaped and continue to shape white working class relationships to education. I also draw on data from three ESRC projects I have been involved in to illustrate how educational experiences can elevate and centre, or deflate and marginalize students' sense of self, and the ways in which for working class students across ethnicity these processes work primarily to deflate and marginalize. While some, primarily middle class students are labelled and constructed as 'good, ideal learners' the result for the vast majority of working class students is an imposed, inferior and often rejected identity that is both disorientating and demoralizing.

Rather than adopt the familiar 'blame the victim' analysis that takes a view of white working class culture as hermetically sealed off from the rest of society whilst valorizing middle class ways of being and doing, an important question to ask is what have been the attitudes and actions of those with the power and resources to effect change. And to answer that question we need an historical perspective in order to understand upper and middle class motivations and attitudes both to the white working class and state schooling.

A Brief History of
Working Class Underachievement
In his survey of the rise of education systems in England, France and the USA, Andy Green[69]

singles out England as the most explicit example of the use of schooling by the upper classes to dominate the lower classes. He demonstrates how the growing middle-class commitment to working-class education in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was totally different from their ideals in middle-class education but was rather a means of ensuring that the lower classes would acquiesce in middle class aspirations.[70] Adam Smith epitomized this English bourgeois viewpoint regarding working class education in *The Wealth of Nations*:

> An instructed and intelligent people besides are always more decent and orderly than an ignorant one ... less apt to be misled into any wanton or unnecessary opposition to the measures of the government.[71]

For Smith, as well as for the vast majority of the political and intellectual élite at the time, the schooling of the working classes was always to be subordinate and inferior to that of the middle classes, designed to contain and pacify rather than to educate and liberate.

As William Lovett, a working class campaigner, argued in the early 19th century:

> Possessors of wealth ... still consider education as their own prerogative, or a boon to be sparingly conferred upon the multitudes.[72]

Writing about the introduction of state education for all, a hundred years after the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, Jane Miller asserts that "the provision of education for working-class children was thought of by and large instrumentally, rather than as likely to contribute to the life possibilities of the children themselves".[73] When the English state schooling system was set up in the late 19th century the intention of the dominant classes was still to police and control the working classes rather than to educate them. So any notion of education as liberatory has always been tempered by the ruling élites' instrumental view of education as a form of control of the white working classes.

69   Green (1990)

70   Ibid.: 248
71   Smith (1785: 305)
72   Extract from 1837 speech in Lovett (1920)
73   Miller (1992: 2)

A Contemporary Educational Culture of Winners and Losers

It is this historical legacy of being the inferior 'other' within education that resonates in the present. Since the 19th century there has been a long history of academic writing that positions schooling as a space where the working classes feel out of place and ill at ease.[74] As Linda McDowell argues,[75] it is deference that was and still is expected of the white working classes. That was the expectation when state schooling for all was introduced, and, as New Labour's respect agenda demonstrates, that remains the expectation today. In fact, what is surprising is that some of the white working classes still make an enormous effort to succeed educationally in an educational system that holds little prospect of a positive academic outcome. The same two barriers that were present at the inception of state schooling still exist. The working classes continue to have access to relatively low levels of the kind of material, cultural and psychological resources that aid educational success. Most can neither afford the private tuition and the enriching cultural activities that many middle class parents invest in for their children. Nor do they have the same degree of confidence and sense of entitlement that the middle classes possess in their interactions with schooling. Also the negative representations and othering that characterized the past continue in the present. This lack of positive images of the working classes contributes to them being disqualified and inadequately supported educationally. Just as the tendency has been to locate behavioural problems in Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) rather than white students, so the working class across ethnicity has become the universal repository of educational failure. But educational success and failure is necessarily relational. Those who succeed do so at the expense of others' failure.

In July 2008 Gordon Brown, the Prime Minister, said "I want to see a Britain that is far more upwardly mobile. But it cannot be achieved without people themselves adopting the work ethic, the learning ethic and 'aiming high'". Gordon Brown happened to be making his speech at a time when UK economic inequality was at its highest since records began in 1961.[76] And as Wilkinson and Pickett[77] point out,

educational failure becomes more prevalent as societies become more unequal. Brown's injunction to try harder is indicative of the pervasive discourse of meritocracy. Under the new educational hegemony we have all become personally responsible for our own educational success and social mobility. In this highly individualized and competitive culture the white working classes are pathologized as unmotivated, unambitious and underachieving. The irony is that the rhetoric of social mobility and equal opportunities within education has increased in volume and intensity as both have become less and less possible in practice. We cannot all succeed academically. If we did, what counts now as educational success would lose its value. Neither is there any glimmer of recognition that the middle classes' intense and increasingly anxious preoccupation with educational achievement can be as damaging as working class underachievement. Numerous studies indicate that one of the key lessons middle class children learn is that failure is intolerable, unwanted and belongs somewhere else. We can glimpse this in what white middle class Camilla[78] says about class differences in her multi-ethnic state secondary school:

> I had everything that the working class kids
> didn't have. You know everything that my mum
> and dad had given me and I was more intelligent
> than they were and there was more going for
> me than there was for them. And I think also
> because my mum and dad had achieved so much
> I think I probably felt quite second rate to them
> and being friends with these people made me
> feel like the one you know who was achieving
> you know and was superior to them. (Camilla)

Alongside a clear recognition of her relative advantages is a more disturbing articulation of social and intellectual superiority that positions the working classes as the 'inferior other' within education. We can also see how the educational system works to positively affirm white middle class identities, acting as a means of finding yourself as a successful 'bright' learner. In contrast, the educational system is rarely about positive affirmation for the working classes. They are at far greater risk of losing rather than finding themselves, of both being unable to construct

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74 Willis (1977); Humphries (1981)

75 McDowell (2008: 283)

76 Toynbee (2008)

77 Wilkinson and Pickett (forthcoming)

78 The names of interviewees used throughout this chapter are not actual. They have been changed to maintain anonymity of the participants of this study.

a successful learner identity and feeling that their working class roots and sense of self have no value in a context where working class culture and identity is constructed as a hindrance to academic achievement.

Working Class Students' Perspectives: Making Visible Class Inequalities in Education

So in place of 'the usual suspects', namely either working class culture or 'failing' schools that invariably have predominantly working class and BME intakes as key to working class failure, we need to focus on the operations of power within education. This involves centering relational aspects of educational achievement as well as an historically contextualized perspective that recognizes over a century of class domination within state schooling. The repercussions of this potent negative cocktail were evident in the large ESRC project on pupils' perspectives on their teaching and learning that I participated in. White working class responses to the educational system are in large measure a reaction to the attitudes and actions of those with more power and agency to affect policies and practices within schooling. These include not only teachers but also more influentially the middle classes, policy makers and politicians. In the project secondary school students were asked whether they felt that they had the confidence to act within schooling; whether they felt they belonged, as individuals and as groups, within the school community; and whether they felt they had the power to influence the procedures and practices which shaped their learning. The vast majority of the working class students talked about a sense of powerlessness and educational worthlessness, and feelings that they were not really valued and respected within education. But it was working class boys, in particular, who manifested the alienation that continued domination within the educational field generates:

> Danny: Some teachers are a bit snobby, sort of. And some teachers act as if the child is stupid. Because they've got a posh accent. Like they talk without 'innits' and 'mans', like they talk proper English. And they say, 'That isn't the way you talk' – like putting you down. Like I think telling you a different way is sort of good, but I think the way they do it isn't good because they correct you and make you look stupid.

> Martin: Those teachers look down on you.

> Danny: Yeah, like they think you're dumb … we don't expect them to treat us like their own children. We're not. But we are still kids. I'd say to them, You've got kids. You treat them with love but you don't need to love us. All you need to do is treat us like humans.

In both Danny and Martin's words we can see how educational processes are simultaneously classed as processes in which relations of teaching and learning too often position working class pupils as inadequate learners with inadequate cultural backgrounds, looked down on for their 'stupidity' and, according to Danny, positioned as less than human. Danny's words are also infused with a sense of the righteous indignation that once underpinned a strong working class politics. In its absence, cultural oppression has re-emerged with an almost Victorian middle class horror at the indignities of poverty, and the ridiculing of the white working classes through portrayals of 'chav' culture.

The fallacy is that this is a uniform class issue that affects all working class students in similar ways. Class is always, to varying degrees, mediated by gender and race. Rather, as I will examine in more detail later, the roots and the consequences of alienation from schooling differ according to ethnicity. What is present, though, for all the working class students in the study, are varying degrees of alienation. As the extract below shows, black working class girls can feel just as marginalized and alienated by schooling as the white working class boys:

> Sharmaine: Sometimes we feel left out.

> Sarah: Because you know, teachers are not meant to have favourites.

> Sharmaine: You can have, but you can't show it, you know. That's unfair to the other people.

> Sarah: Because there's a whole class there and you want to pick that particular person, and you are nice to that one, and the rest you don't care about.

> Alex: But everyone has to be the same.

> Sharmaine: He needs to treat everyone equal.

We can see in what both working class boys and girls say across ethnic difference some of the hidden injuries of class that are enshrined and perpetuated through educational policies and practices.

A Judgemental System: Producing Working Class Underachievement Across Ethnic Difference

Currently we have an educational system that is preoccupied with educational standards, publicizes league tables and seeks to transform education along more overtly entrepreneurial lines. Below I draw on the contemporary assessment and testing regime as an exemplar of how large numbers of working class children are produced as worthless in the current educational economy but, as Gillborn and Youdell[79] have demonstrated, the growing practices of setting and streaming across all stages of schooling produce similar effects. The paradox of the existing highly regulatory system is that while the stated aim is to raise the achievement of all children, one consequence of the increased surveillance of students' learning is the fixing of failure in the working classes. Below are three quotes from a black working class boy and two white working class girls:

> I'm really worried I am going to do bad in the SATs because if you get too scared or something, or paranoid, or something it kind of stops you from doing it, because you just think you are going to get everything wrong and it's easy to get paranoid about the SATs. (Mohammed)

And:

> Norma: I'm really worried about the SATs.
>
> Diane: Why?
>
> Norma: Well it seems like I'll get no points or I won't be able to do it, too hard or something.
>
> Diane: What would it mean to get no points?
>
> Norma: Well instead of being a level three I'll be a nothing and do badly – very badly.

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79   Gillborn and Youdell (2000)

And:

> Sharon: I think I'll get a two, only Stuart will get a six.
>
> Diane: So if Stuart gets a six, what will that say about him?
>
> Sharon: He's heading for a good job and a good life, and it shows he's not gonna be living on the streets and stuff like that.
>
> Diane: And if you get a level two, what will that say about you?
>
> Sharon: Um, I might not have a good life in front of me, and I might grow up and do something naughty or something like that.

While all children across class expressed a degree of anxiety about testing it was primarily working class girls across ethnic difference who talked in terms of a sense of educational worthlessness as a consequence of contemporary testing regimes. The quotes make visible the system of value that produces the middle classes as valuable academic stars whilst simultaneously generating a working class that is represented within the current testing regimes as 'incapable' of having a self with value. They are reduced to Norma's 'nothing'. This is further revealed in Sharon's poignant summation of class destinies and how they are tied to academic achievement, illuminating how class has entered psychological categories as a way of socially regulating normativity and pathology. As the children's quotes illustrate, at the micro-level of the classroom there are regular glimpses of the normalizing and regulatory function of testing on children. However, although children expressed anxieties across class differences, it was not the white middle-class boys panicking about being exposed as no good through the new assessment procedures. Rather, it was the black and white working-class girls agonizing that they would be 'a nothing'. And the risks of finding they have very little value are disproportionately high for such working class girls. These girls, in the context of schooling, inhabit a psychic economy of class defined by fear, anxiety and unease where failure looms large and success is elusive; a place where too often they are seen and see themselves as

worthless. In the context of this inner city classroom we have a literal manifestation of the working class as a social group with no value.

Here we have a distillation of how the working classes are seen by the media, politicians and increasing numbers of the middle classes. There is not space to rehearse Bev Skeggs' brilliant exposition[80] of the disgust, condescension, and attribution of worthlessness to the working classes by those who see themselves as brighter, more mobile and innately superior. But the greatest weight of censure falls on those I have described elsewhere as the 'too black' and the 'too white' working classes, those who are seen to be out of control and refusing to espouse white middle class values and aspirations.[81] As I have tried to show, this denial of working class value within schooling is not simply a contemporary manifestation. It has a long and damaging history dating from the inception of state schooling for all. This I want to argue makes the white working-class experience of education qualitatively and quantitatively different from that of their BME counterparts. The white working classes bring to their experience of schooling a collective memory of educational subordination and marginalization that is less the case for BME groups, despite the endemic individual and institutional racism they face. Children negotiate schooling not only directly through their own experiences but also through the sedimented experiences of parents and even grandparents. As Ruth Lupton[82] found, white working class families' expectations of social mobility through education are often minimal, conditioned by their own experiences over several generations. Both the historical legacy, and how it is played out in the present, are different for many BME working class groups. Some of these bring histories of educational achievement in their countries of origin, although migration has often brought economic impoverishment and downward mobility. Others, despite a lack of educational credentials, bring a strong conviction that a fresh start in the British educational system will provide crucial opportunities for their children's advancement that were denied to them.

Working Class Masculinities: A Case of Too Few Incentives to Invest in Education?

There is seldom a fresh start for the white working

classes in contemporary UK schooling. However, now as in the past, it would be wrong to see white working-class students as passive victims; rather they are expected to make difficult choices between prioritizing official pedagogic practices on the one hand and local pedagogic practices on the other, and for boys in particular, between popularity among the peer group and an elusive successful learner identity. This is especially so for white working class boys like Shaun (quoted below), although many working-class Black British boys whose families have been here for a number of generations are no longer aspirational. They, too, have learnt to live with educational failure compounded, in their case, by racism:

> Shaun: Like now I am different in the classroom than I am in the playground, I am just different.
>
> Diane: Right, so how are you different?
>
> Shaun: In the classroom I am not myself. I am hard working and everything. In the playground, yeah, I'm back to my usual self…just being normal.

Shaun recognizes that, unlike their middle class counterparts, working-class students need to transform their identity in order to succeed. And transformation is a fraught, risky, and often painful struggle if you and your kind have historically been, and are currently positioned as 'other' to the educated, intelligent and cultured subject. For Shaun academic success is not normative and he has to literally think and enact himself as 'other' in order to attempt to do well. In her book on *Educational Failure and White Working Class Children in Britain*, Gillian Evans[83] highlights the need for research to help understand how white working class boys come to perceive troublesome, oppositional and resistant behaviour within schooling as a social good. However, I would suggest that confronted with a high risk of educational failure, a context in which they are seen to have little value, and a difficult, often impossible, transition from failing to successful learner, such attitudes are understandable. Facing an educational competition they cannot win they construct peer group macho and physically aggressive competitions where some of them can and do win.

80 Skeggs (2004)
81 Reay et al. (2007)
82 Lupton (2004)

83 Evans (2006)

Conclusion

Yet, the contemporary preoccupation with white working-class male underachievement is on an important level yet another manifestation of 'the lack of care' of those who have social and political power. It elides the quieter, less noticed, but equally potent, disaffection of working class girls and underlines their educational neglect. It sidelines the inadequately tackled problems of racism all BME students face in schooling. What it does do and do very successfully is institute a policy of divide and rule that pits one educational disadvantaged group against another. So we have the bizarre situation of a scramble to represent a particular category as the most under-privileged when all working class groups across gender and ethnicity need extra resources and critical attention. In place of diversity as a strategy of divide and rule we need an educational system founded on respect for both the white working classes and BME groups in society; a system that accords positive value and meaning to both 'workingclassness' and ethnic diversity. Until we eradicate racism and class contempt, schools will continue to be characterized by pervasive damaging and entirely unjustified working-class educational failure. It is the underachievement of our political élites and a majority of the middle classes that we need to focus on first. As Ferdinand Mount, an upper-class, right-wing political commentator, admits in his book on the class divide "it is people like us who are largely responsible for the present state of the lower classes in Britain. My argument is that we did the damage, or most of it. It is the least we can do to try and understand what we have done and help to undo it where we can".[84] Currently, there is little attempt to understand, and even less to undo the damage. Rather both the political élites and the middle class majority display moral and civic neglect; a wilful inability to critically analyse, understand and take responsibility for a situation that only they have the power and resources to remedy.

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84   Mount (2004: 12)

4. Beyond the Pale: Chavs, Youth and Social Class

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When John Lydon, lead singer of The Sex Pistols, infamously declared in an interview for *Rolling Stone* magazine how "Punks and Niggers are almost the same thing"[85] one may be tempted to write off his remarks as youthful, arrogant hyperbole.

But Lydon knew that 'Punk' – a label attributed to the scene by the popular press, rather than being an internally generated appellation – carried with it associations of deviancy that could soon be racialized. Indeed, the title of Lydon's (1994) autobiography, *Rotten: No Irish – No Blacks – No Dogs* suggests an affinity with being an outsider, an animal, and for at least this Anglo-Irish Punk, a racially marked miscreant. For many dispossessed young people, Punk offered a snarling, guttersnipe riposte to British post-war white respectability. But Lydon is not alone in believing he was cast as 'a race apart'. At particular moments Football 'Hooligans', Skinheads, Teds and Hell's Angels have all been deemed as a distinct race with peculiar characteristics identified by politicians and the national press. These representations of youth are embedded in long-standing social class relations.

Historically there is ample evidence to show that the bodies of the British urban poor were regularly compared with African natives of Empire in terms of physique, stature, posture, facial mannerisms, intelligence, habits, attitudes and disposition. Moreover, this 'casual residuum', as they were frequently termed, were rarely seen as 'white', but rather were imagined as part of a toiling, sweating, blackened and putrefying mass

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85   20th October, 1977

of flesh, unapologetically designated 'the Great Unwashed'. Thus, in his introduction to John Hollinghead's *Ragged London in 1861*, Anthony Wohl makes a telling, if undeveloped observation concerning the pigmentation of the industrial impoverished. It is alleged that "the inhabitants of the slums are 'swarthy', or 'sallow', or have 'yellow faces', or are blackened with soot, or possess 'dark sinister faces' – any colour, it would seem, but white".[86] Wohl does not elaborate on this fleeting remark, but its implications are significant: along with Irish, Jews, Gypsies and others, large sections of the British poor would not have been classified as white.

The designation of the British working-classes as white is then a *modern* phenomenon. Within the lower echelons children and young people would frequently be racialized as 'street Arabs' or 'slum monkeys' and metaphorically cast as apes, vermin, rats and parasites. Given these dynamics we may begin to grasp why, as late as 1958, long after the biological idea of race is discredited, the British race writer Paul Gilroy muses over articles in *The Times* in which "Teddy boys and their urban community were described as a 'race' in their own right".[87] Media theorists such as Stan Cohen denote how the teenager was given the same characteristics as the 'Negro' in popular representations that constituted them as 'Other' to the nation state.[88] What is evident is that working-class youth have long been held in a precarious and contingent relationship to whiteness. Today this may seem strange, as the working-classes now tend to be seen as the authentic carriers of whiteness, as synonyms such as being 'salt of the earth' or 'backbone of the nation' testify.

In contrast to the parochial whiteness thought to be inhabited by sections of the working class, the bourgeoisie tend to be envisaged as mobile, cosmopolitan citizens no longer rooted to archaic images of whiteness. However, whiteness is performed in many different ways – the ability to choose which neighbourhood to live in, which school to send your children to, or how to present yourself to employers, the police or passport control are unapologetic expressions of middle-class race privilege.[89] This doing of whiteness reminds us that nothing whitens more than money.

In a concise and elegant account of the development of British post-war youth subcultures Dick Hebdige[90] alerts readers to the inescapable multi-ethnic dialogues pivotal to youth formations. His detailed illustrations of Hipsters, Beats, Teddy Boys, Mods, Punks and Rockers vividly demonstrate the significant role that black culture has played in each of these youth cultures when it comes to dress, style, music, drugs, language and argot. The traces of black culture can even be detected in Skinhead subculture, which on the surface may appear as a frenetically white display of English nationalism. Hebdige records:

> Even the skinhead "uniform" was profoundly ambiguous in origin. The dialectical interplay of black and white 'languages' (dress, argot, focal concerns: style) was clearly expressed in the boots, sta-prest and severely cropped hair: an ensemble which was composed on the cusp of the two worlds, embodying aesthetic themes common to both.[91]

The 'two worlds' Hebdige identifies are exposed in the practices of many early Skins who had a penchant for reggae music and developed their style through combining the protest culture of Jamaican Soul Boys with the earthy aesthetics of British labouring culture. Such transnational dialogues intimate that when it comes to youth culture, blackness and Britishness can no longer be set apart, but have given rise to new ethnicities and hybrid cultures – this is the 'outside' history of Britishness that is also its 'inside' history.[92] Just as the idea of an original or authentic white working class is a myth, transnational migrations, global culture and new patterns of consumption suggest that any notion of British youth culture as 'white' is at best imaginary. As John Lydon would have it – 'England's Dreaming'.

A Race Apart? Chavs and Charvers
In late 2004 the word 'Chav' kicked its way into media headlines and was rapidly declared

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86   Wohl, (1986: xix)
87   Gilroy (2000: 73)
88   Cohen (1973)
89   Byrne (2006)
90   Hebdige (1979)
91   Ibid.: 57
92   See Gilroy (1987); Hall (1993); Back (2007)

the 'buzz word' of the year. Popular culture, the tabloids and television all seized upon the label as the definitive way for describing young people who wear tracksuits, baseball caps and chunky gold jewellery. However, the phrase is not nearly as recent as it may appear and variations go back a number of years. In parts of Northeast England the term 'Charver' is widely used. Like Chav it is thought to derive from the Romany term for 'small child', bearing close associations with traveller communities. The etymology is especially powerful as many of the aspects of Gypsy, Traveller and Romany style such as the donning of gold sovereign rings or large hooped earrings are associated with the subculture today. Young people I encountered in schools, city-centre and neighbourhood spaces[93] intimated that 'Chavy gear' is essentially fake and bought from the market, a space replete with Travellers, Pakistani hawkers and a cornucopia of legal and illegal street vendors. On another occasion I witnessed two white youth taunting a younger teenager who sported a tracksuit, Rockport boots and a bleached fringe. They pointed and started chanting Charver at him and then extended this to 'Charwallah', a term for Indian tea-servants that intimates its lower-class and potentially racialized attributes. The connection to Gypsies and South Asians is part of what Dick Hebdige prophetically termed the "phantom history of race relations"[94] enacted upon the loaded surfaces of post-war British working-class culture – a dialectic barely seen but ever present.

More recently, however, these connections are being displaced and elaborated upon by local cultures. Some young people I spoke with drew connections with the allegedly archetypal lower-class names Sharon and Trevor (hence, Shar/vor). Indeed, the Charver has long been caricatured in the Newcastle comic *Viz* through the cartoon animations of 'Rat Boy', 'Tasha' and 'Kappa Slappa', as well as the representations of 'Charver Kid' in the populist magazine *Newcastle Stuff*. These illustrations are in many ways a precursor to Vicky Pollard, the emblematic figure of lower working-class youth displayed on the BBC series *Little Britain*. They inform us how a Romany word can become deeply associated with an urban

underclass in the conjoining of race and class stigmatization.

Although its Romany connections are long-established, the term Chav has been contested with different regional and local appropriations. For instance one interpretation suggests that the negative class inflections are thought to derive from Cheltenham Girls School, a renowned English public school, where those beyond the academic hot-house were said to be disparaged as 'Cheltenham Averages', a cutting phrase soon shortened to Chavs. Some refer to the tight pineapple pony-tails of Charver young women held in place by a scrunchy as the 'Croydon facelift', while others connect the etymology of habitation to Chatham in Kent. Within these emerging ascriptions can be found some subtle and interesting distinctions. While Charvers in the Northeast are associated with an unemployed urban underclass, in other localities they may constitute the moneyed working-class, whose 'vulgar' tastes, excessive interior design or exclusive designer clothing has become a source of mirth, desire and rebuke. So-called 'Celebrity Chavs' such as Coleen McLoughlin, the wife of England footballer Wayne Rooney, and former tabloid models like Jodie Marsh and Katie Price (formerly Jordan) are examples of this more upwardly mobile Chav stratum.

However, in the Northeast neighbourhoods in which I lived and conducted an ethnography of young lives the references to 'Charvs' combined lower-class status with specific subcultural practices, real and imaginary. Charvers were popularly associated with street crime, drugs, car theft, burglary and underage sex and drinking. The following statements drawn from a BBC website I was recently involved in partially illustrate these connections and the symbolic intensity of class hatred.

> I've had several friends jumped and beaten up by Chavas high on dope and tanked up on cider. They are scum [...] If the chava culture is all about lower class kids how do they afford all these labels, all that massive chunky gold jewellery and all that drink? Most of them will never attempt to get a job, they are happy to play the system for every penny they can. They turn to crime to fuel their binge drinking and drug addictions. (Up North, BBC web discussion).

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93   See Nayak (2003; 2006)
94   Hebdige (1979: 45)

> Chavs are the ones who go round in huge groups to make themselves look intimidating, shot up on heroin, drunk off their heads, threatening any and everyone they see […]. One night […] there was a gig and after it had finished everyone was leaving, only to be greeted by a large group of chavs, looking for a fight, so abuse was hurled and punches thrown because they were leaving the gig, the worst part is that two girls were harassed and followed. So that is why I have a certain dislike for them, bordering on anger. (Dave T., rock Mosher, BBC web discussion).

What is interesting about the above statements is how similar they appear in tone to the hostility directed towards Mods, Rockers, Punks and Skins, similarly designated as 'scum'.[95] Furthermore, the testimonies attribute acts of violence, drunkenness and drug-taking to a particular subculture: Charver Kids. And yet – rather beguilingly – it is not entirely clear if the young people involved in these scenarios necessarily identify as Chavers, if being a Chav necessarily equates with violence or if the term is simply shorthand for lower working-class youth disparagement. For example when car crime occurred, in the absence of visible perpetrators, an immediate response was to view this as 'Chav activity'.

> Yesterday evening I had my car windscreen smashed because somebody threw a brick at it. […] Let me tell you, there is nothing positive to say about charvers. They are thick, pathetic little toerags, some of whom will go on to become really big toerags. The only consolation for the civil members of society among us is that these little morons are set for a life of misery, either behind bars or unemployed. Charvers – the real dregs of society. (Ben R., BBC web discussion).

Evident in these remarks is a complex process whereby an individual criminal act is plugged into the imaginary surface of Charver subculture and amplified accordingly. The resulting current of reverberations sends out fear, panic and anger. Here, the working-class Chav looms large in the public imaginary as at once knowable and distinct from other 'ordinary' white youth.

This separating out of mundane crime from a qualitatively distinct – and thereby more deplorable – 'Charver crime', was most notably enacted when it came to street violence and car crime. In 1991 parts of Tyneside were to witness a series of riots and curfews as young men took to the streets after two young people were killed in a high-speed car chase with the police.[96] During this time 'joy-riding', TWOCing (Taking Without Owner's Consent), ram-raiding, 'ringing' (fixing false number plates to a stolen car) and cat-and-mouse chases with the police through neighbourhood estates were rapidly branded 'Charver crimes'. The displacement of a more general idea of street-crime or car crime into 'Charver crime' follows similar routes to those painstakingly identified by Hall et al. in *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*.[97] In this famous edition Stuart Hall and his colleagues meticulously investigate how the concept of 'mugging' was imported from the American ghetto and applied to British inner-city crime and unrest as an explanatory term generated by media and popular discourse. Surreptitiously 'mugging' was a phrase reserved for crimes where the victim was white and the perpetrator black. This racialized representation encouraged a 'moral panic' around 'mugging' which became unequivocally associated with black criminality; an image that endorsed the brutal policing of multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and figured in the public imagination during urban riots in 1981 and 1985. In a similar fashion to the way 'mugging' becomes attached to the bodies of black youth, street crime was accorded a pre-given set of taxonomies. Consequently, in altercations where young people were beaten up or forced to hand over money, mobile phones and valuables to other youth they frequently remarked that they'd been 'chaved' – a single phrase that captures a dense accumulation of fears surrounding race, class and fear of crime.

As the early historical portraits discussed in the previous section disclose, the racialization of lower working-class bodies is not a new thing. The legacy of British subcultural studies further indicates that this process is part of a continuum. Following the 1991 uprisings on estates in

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95   See Cohen (1973)

96   Campbell (1993); Collier (1998)
97   Hall et al. (1978)

Tyneside, Oxford and Cardiff the bodies of young people became especially marked. Children, the very individuals who were said to need protection from crime, were assigned a new role as some of its worst perpetrators. Most disconcertingly, this 'moral panic' centred not just on teenage youth, the typical targets of social outrage, but on children below the age of 10 years. Anthony Kennedy, who became known as 'Rat Boy' for his elusive ability to escape the police and hide in the maze of tunnels and passageways that make up the Byker Wall estate, came to epitomize what became construed as a new, lawless childhood. Rat Boy constituted an anti-hero, a super-villain whose comic-strip pseudonym suggested his irredeemable evil. According to the social criminologist Richard Collier, Rat Boy was constructed as "something very 'UnBritish', once alien but now increasingly familiar".[98]

The metaphor of the rat is not inconsequential. David Sibley has recorded how "The potency of the rat as an abject symbol is heightened through its role as a carrier of disease, its occasional tendency to violate boundaries by entering people's homes, and its prolific breeding".[99] It was precisely these aspects – disease, invasion and breeding – familiar tropes casually attributed to minority ethnic communities that were now virulently being applied to white unemployed families in the North East. Although in this case the invasion is not the entry into the nation state of the immigrant, 'grinning pickaninnies' that so exercised the manic imagination of Enoch Powell. Instead it centres upon a domestic violation by local youth that left people terrified of break-ins, burglaries and being 'chaved'.

At the time of the 1991 riots Northumbria recorded the highest level of crime in England and Wales and the ward in which I lived was the peak local levels of crime within the county. Frenzied conversations about Chavs, Rat Boys, TWOCing and lawless children were a means by which people were trying to make sense of their immediate environment as the district became most closely associated with Charvers. Caught in the headlights of such dazzling representations of lawless youth, the 'combustible masculinities' Bea Campbell has written about,[100] it is easy to forget

that in the five years preceding the riots unemployment for young men alone in the area had quadrupled. With economics rarely making for a stimulating story, the figure of Rat Boy emerged as the living embodiment of a longstanding horror in which the lower orders are perceived as parasitic, over-breeding and carriers of plague. His automobile acrobatics were later depicted in the screening of the captivating drama, *Our Friends in the North*. That rats are slum dwellers living amongst rubbish serves only to further compound the notion that Charvers are ultimately 'white trash' as the connections between Rat Boys, poverty and a tainted whiteness are symbolically threaded together, then stitched into place.

It appears then, that Chavs and Charvers are defined across a shared discourse of lower working-class origins that at moments may become racialized. Like minority ethnic communities before them, Charvers are associated with street crime, disease, drugs, over-breeding (many heralded from large families) and the seedy underbelly of the 'black economy'. They reside in the de-industrial urban quarters of the locality where South Asian communities, new migrants and asylum seekers are displaced.

Unable to secure homeownership and 'white flight', their inner-city habitations are often depicted as dark places and described as urban jungles, shanty towns, a 'blot' on the ostensibly white landscape. Recently the Southern-based media appropriated the word Chav which became shorthand for what was seen as the excesses of white working-class style – an obsession with designer labels, being 'flash', 'bling' or 'dripping in gold' – motifs frequently ascribed to black and Asian youth. In the popular imagination and cultural discourse Charvers are portrayed as a primitive 'white trash' urban underclass of the type Chris Haylett has alluded to in her writing on New Labour and social exclusion.[101] Such depictions are regularly aimed at those deemed Chavs, NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and Hoodies.

The cultural representations of Charvers follow historical portrayals of other supposedly 'deviant' working-class subcultures such as Teddy Boys, Punks or Skins as animalistic and a 'race apart'.

98   Collier (1998:92)
99   Sibley (1995:28)
100   Campbell (1993)
101   Haylett (2001)

In local schools where I carried out interviews and observations some young people parodied what was characterized as the 'Charver walk'. This involved affecting a hunched-over posture, loping stride and dangling, 'knuckle-grazing' arms. There are echoes here of disparaging Edwardian accounts of working-class youth who were thought to enact a 'monkey walk' or 'monkey run'. The 'ape-like' walk ascribed to Charvers implied their animalistic, sub-human tendencies and parallels early racist discourses comparing Irish people and black youth with apes and monkeys. As Jay, a web respondent, reflected, "Charvers and Chavs for me is the Caucasian equivalent to the rude boyz/girlz of the 90s". Like black youth, Charvers were repeatedly depicted as 'gangstas', 'rogues', 'apes', 'dole monkeys', society's evolutionary 'missing link' in the chain of human order. The precarious relationship they may have to whiteness is accentuated through connections to Gypsy, Traveller and Romany communities. Given these legacies it is unsurprising that many young people I spoke with declared rundown areas, fairgrounds and open-air markets as familiar spaces for 'Chav hangouts'. As we have observed, the identity is composed through the stigmatization of youthful bodies where tracksuits, tattoos, brassy jewellery, a particular walk or vocal intonation is enough to mark out the borders of white 'respectability'.[102] Underlying this corporeal display, familial unemployment, council home residence, early teen motherhood, crime or drug-use are stubborn markers of abjection that cast impoverished young people beyond the pale.

White Working-Class Youth and Perceptions of Anti-Racism

When discussions of race, ethnicity and multiculture take place in school contexts, the assumption is that it is something to do with visible minority ethnic groups. The young people I spoke with[103] had little conception of themselves as having an ethnicity or being implicated in race-making practices. Instead whiteness was seen as a homogenous category deemed ordinary and unremarkable to students and teachers alike. This meant that few white youths had any investment in the schools' occasional attempts to host multicultural events or celebrations. Many of the privileges accorded to whiteness were so taken-for-granted that they tended to be unseen. Some white working-class students even perceived that they were at a cultural disadvantage in classroom contexts.

> Anoop: Are there any advantages to being white in this school?
>
> Nicola: Well, no.
>
> Michelle: 'cos coloured people can call us [names].
>
> James: It's not fair really 'cos they can call us like 'milk bottles' and that, but us can't call them.
>
> Sam: The thing is in this school, is like if you're racist you get expelled or something, but they [black students] can call us names and the teachers don't take any notice of it.
>
> James: They take no notice.
>
> [School group discussion, 11-12 years]

In this case the school's sensitivity to racist harassment appears to bolster white injustice among respondents, and create a feeling that such forms of 'moral' anti-racism are 'not fair'.[104] That teachers are said to ignore name-calling from black students, yet expel white students for using racist taunts, which affirms a sense of white defensiveness.[105] This led some white youth to make charges of 'reverse racism' in name-calling disputes with black peers in which they presented themselves as 'victims' of racism.

> Anoop: So what do the name-callers say?
>
> Michelle: Things like 'milk-bottle'.
>
> James: And 'whitey'.
>
> Michelle: And 'milky way' and things.
>
> [School group discussion, 11-12 years]

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102 Skeggs (1997; 2004)
103 The names of the pupils quoted in this chapter are pseudonyms.
104 See also MacDonald et al. (1989); Hewitt (1996)
105 See Gillborn (1996)

Such discussions reveal the unspoken grievances some white youth may harbour and their acute sensitivity to any perceived forms of unfairness. Such perceptions of unfairness are divorced from historical relations and the commonplace ways in which racism is enacted to the detriment of minority ethnic pupils on a regular basis. Alongside the opinion that anti-racism was 'unfair' to the needs of white youth ran an overwhelming feeling that black students had an identifiable culture that they could draw on which was denied to the Anglo-ethnic majority. A positive assertion of this culture by minority ethnic youth would tend to be sceptically interpreted by white students as a deliberate act of exclusion.

> Sam: What I don't like is all the Pakistani people all talk in their language and you dunno what they're talking about. Used to be this lad in our class, Shaheed, he would talk to his mate Abdul, half in English, half in another language.
>
> Nicola: If they wanna talk about you they can talk in another language.
>
> Michelle: If we wanna talk about them, they know what we're saying.
>
> [School group discussion, 11-12 years]

Revealingly, white students were keen to make a careful distinction between racism as a discourse of power available to them through regimes of representation (in language, speech, metaphors and imagery); and racism as a 'chosen' subject position that was explicitly ideological and practised in daily, vehement exchanges. Whereas the former stance offered a latent potential for racist enactment, triggered only at certain moments, the latter position was more readily condemned as explicitly racist and anti-egalitarian. It is this 'unevenness' of racism in young people's lives that became increasingly apparent. The grainy line separating what white students said to their black peers in certain situations, and how they felt towards them more generally, became a source of tension when episodes of racism surfaced in classroom contexts. Most specifically in fraught and heated personal exchanges between students, racist name-calling offered an inviting mode of

redress. For example:

> Sam: We canna sey anythin' 'cos they [black students] can get us annoyed and it's hard not calling them a racist name or somethin'. I never bin racist 'cos I don't think it's right but some people jus' think it's hard to not call them a racist name if an argument starts.
>
> [School group discussion, 12 years]

The student responses listed here question why white racial epithets such as 'whitey', 'milk-bottle' or 'milky way' are not construed as forms of racist name-calling. As other researchers have implied, the meanings carried in white, derogatory terms rarely carry the same weight as anti-black racist terminology.[106] Here, there is no equivalence between black and white name-calling as, ultimately,

> …racist attacks (by whites on blacks) are part of a coherent ideology of oppression which is not true when blacks attack whites, or indeed, when there is conflict between members of different ethnic minority groups.[107]

While some students may have engaged in a 'white backlash' against moral forms of anti-racism, others disclosed a more complex understanding of white power. Ema, an auburn-haired 16 year-old, came from a working-class family and hoped to join the army as her father had done. She explained how if someone used a racist term like 'black bastard', 'I'd say something and get 'em done', indicating that she would report the remark to a teacher. However:

> Ema: If someone says, 'She's just called me "white trash"', I'd say, 'And what's wrong with that?' I'd probably think, 'Well maybe it would hurt them, but to me it wouldn't be anything to say "white"'. I'd be proud of it.
>
> [School interview, 16 years]

Ema makes a qualitative distinction between using a black or white racial epithet before an

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106 Back (1996); Troyna and Hatcher (1992a)
107 Troyna and Hatcher (1992b: 495)

insult. She indicates that white has a neutral or even positive signification that cannot be easily overturned ('I'd be proud of it'). As Troyna and Hatcher would have it, the prefix 'white' does not draw on an historical, 'coherent ideology of racism' (slavery, imperialism, apartheid, discrimination, xenophobia, nationalism) in the ways that a term 'black bastard' might.[108] What these extracts reveal is that while it is usually visible minorities who endure the burden of racism and must be ever alert to the risks of racist terror on the streets, a number of white working-class youth perceive anti-racism as 'anti-white'. This false perception implies that state and institutional equality initiatives are often met with a wary social class resistance.

Concluding Remarks

Developments at a global scale suggest that future multicultural policy can no longer evade the thorny question of whiteness. As new member states gain accession to the European Union, whiteness can no longer be seen as a homogenous racialized category. As we have already discovered, claims about who is white and who is not have always been open to dispute. Recent demands concerning 'British jobs for British workers' suggest the borders of whiteness are flexible and contingent. Where at one time such remarks were aimed primarily at black and minority ethnic workers, in the present climate of impending global recession such qualifiers are more likely to be directed at Polish, Lithuanian or Romanian labourers.

Global conflict and bloodshed in parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia attest to forms of white intra-ethnic distinction and new racial absolutes. 'Ethnic cleansing' undertaken in the former Yugoslavia as Serbians, Bosnians and Croatians drew upon symbols of blood, kinship and territorial nationalities suggests a need to move beyond simplistic black/white understandings of racism. As a consequence of this brutal armed conflict many 'white skinned' people have had to seek asylum and refuge in Britain and other nation states. As many newly arrived asylum-seekers have discovered, having white skin is no guarantee against racist hostility where

being of a particular faith, wearing a headscarf, or lacking appropriate English language skills can emerge as new signifiers of race difference in the street and on the playground. Young people may be particularly attuned to these signs and the symbolic manner in which they come to mark certain bodies as abject and 'Other' to the nation state.

It is also apparent that white children and young people are seldom 'ferret-eyed fascists' or 'anti-racist angels'.[109] The previous vignettes disclose that young people hold contradictory opinions which may be egalitarian at one moment and exclusionary the next. While whiteness remains a marker of privilege in the contemporary world its value is continually refigured in mobile relations of gender, class, religion and ethnicity. If multicultural initiatives are to be made meaningful they must reckon with this complexity but without losing sight of the materiality of race in British society and the recognition that the majority of racism is still targeted at visible minorities. There can be little doubt that white working-class youth subcultures may on occasion be deemed beyond the pale, but it is minority ethnic youth who continue to exist in the shadows of the English imagination as the ultimate repository of fear. In the shaky and indeterminate post-9/11 landscape it is they who are displaced within an 'axis of evil' that casts them as the dark Anarchists and Anti-Christ that John Lydon had once fittingly alluded to.

Summary

- Historically a considerable section of the British working-class would not have been considered white;
- Youth subcultures are frequently cast as a 'race apart';
- British youth culture is steeped in black culture, being the product of globalization and successive transnational migrations;
- Many white working-class youth may incorrectly assume that they are 'victims' of modern day anti-racism – a claim that needs to be challenged.

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108 Troyna and Hatcher (1992b)

109 MacDonald et al. (1989)

5. Haunted by the Spectre of Judgement: Respectability, Value and Affect in Class Relations

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The first section provides a very condensed history of how we get to contemporary understandings of class. I make this detour because the perspective one takes determines what one sees: as Cannadine notes, "the history of class is as much about the history of *ideas* about society as it is about society itself".[110] The perspective taken here is that class is always a category produced through a dynamic relationship between classes: one class's advantage is another's loss. Advantage often works through exclusion, which is highly apparent in issues like education and housing (see Chapter 3 by Diane Reay and Chapter 7 by Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor in this collection) but is much more difficult to detect when it comes to matters of culture and subjectivity. The second section draws on empirical evidence to show how class relations structure even the most intimate areas of people's lives: how they feel about themselves and others. It draws on three different research projects.[111] Firstly, it draws on a longitudinal ethnographic study with 83 white working-class women in the north of England, conducted over a period of eleven years including three years full-time, in-the-field participant observation. Beginning in 1981, its central focus was the construction of subjectivity (culminating in the 1997 publication *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*). The second project was a large ESRC (RES 148-25-0040) research project on *Making Class and Self Through Televised Ethical Scenarios*, on reality TV conducted between 2005-2007 [112] with 40 women of different class and race backgrounds in London, using four

different research methods and which surprisingly, given the different historical periods, produced strikingly similar responses on class and respectability to *Formations*. Thirdly, the gender changes and 13 men become the focus for a small research project (CRESC) on responses to the British Government's 'Respect Agenda' (2006).[113]

Two Brief Histories

There are two major theoretical/political trajectories to the development of class as a concept in the UK. The first, Marxist, prioritizes the role of exploitation and struggle in the making of classes and hence social relations more generally; the second focuses on class hierarchies and status without reference to struggle and exploitation. For Marxists, class has a number of distinctive features: class is a relationship always relative to other groups and the *relationship* is *antagonistic* because it is always based on exploitation and control. Therefore class is about the struggle between groups in which exploiters and exploited fight it out.

This perspective could not be more different to the other major trajectory which concerns itself with the precise nature of classification, employment 'aggregates', status, and how to best conceptualize occupational groups in a hierarchical order. It began in 1665 with William Petty, who set out to calculate the value of the 'people' of England for taxation purposes, devising what is now known as the 'political arithmetic' tradition of class analysis. The person was conceptualized as a quantifiable, knowable, hence *governable object* tightly linked to national concerns.

As the category of class developed in popular usage, morality became central to its recognition, categories such as the deserving and undeserving poor euphemised class relations, but were as Lynette Finch documents often premised on the surveillance of women's behaviour.[114] Ann McClintock suggests, however, that is was not just women but more generalizable 'others', who were known through the moral concept of degeneracy, a term applied as much to classifying racial 'types' as to women and the urban poor.[115] It is this moral and discursive positioning of all types of the working-class with degeneracy that leads to one response – the claim for respectability, which is never an issue for those who are not positioned at a distance from it.

Respectability and Affect

Immersed in the lives and spaces of a group of white working-class women over time I became highly conscious of the numerous ways in which they were constantly subject to negative value judgements about their futures and pasts, behaviour, intelligence, taste, bodies and sexuality, to such an extent that it shaped their spatial sense of entitlement, engagement and limit: where they did or did not want to go, how they felt they could or could not 'be'. 'Being looked down on' was their description of a process to which they were continually subject, a visual assessment by others that repeatedly positioned them as lacking value. For instance, when they entered 'posh shops' they were acutely aware of the way they were being read and judged by others:

> We'd all gone up to Manchester the other Saturday, you know for a day out, the three of us …We were in *Kendals* during the day, you know where the really posh food is, and we were laughing about all the chocolates and how many we could eat - if we could afford them- and this woman she just looked at us. *If looks could kill*. Like we were only standing there. We weren't doing anything wrong. We weren't scruffy or anything. She just looked. It was like it was her place and we didn't belong there. And you know what? We just all walked away. We should have punched her in the face. We didn't say anything until about half an hour later. Can you imagine? Well and truly *put in our place* ...

114 Finch (1993)
115 McClintock (1995)

> It's things like that that put you off going. You feel better staying around here. (Wendy, 1986)

The gaze that embodies the symbolic reading of the women makes them feel 'out of place', thereby generating a sense of where their 'place' should be. The shop assistant's gaze is a judgement of taste,[116] with spatial consequences, which classifies the classifier as much as the classified. It displays one of the 'hidden injury' of class identified by Sennett and Cobb.[117] Respectability became the trope by which class relations came into view. Judgement was present in nearly all aspects of their lives, as Susan notes in response to visits by a Health Visitor:

> You know they're weighing you up and they ask you all these indirect questions as if you're too thick to know what they're getting at and you know all the time they're thinking 'she's poor, she's no good, she can't bring her kids up properly' and no matter what you do they've got your number. To them you're never fit, never up to their standards. (Susan, 1992)

Or Anne, in terms of what she should wear:

> All the time you've got to weigh everything up: is it too tarty? Will I look like a right slag in it? What will people think? It drives me mad that every time you go to put your clothes on you have to think 'do I look dead common? Is it rough? Do I look like a dog?' (Anne, 1992)

Yvonne, Ann and Wendy articulate an awareness of the constant pressure of negative judgements. Anne talks of how every decision is an attempt to deflect the negative evaluations of others.

Since the ethnographic research project the working class has seen its social and moral value diminish. We are now in a period where outright contempt is freely expressed *against* the working class. In 2004 'chav' became the Oxford English Dictionary word of the year. The Chavscum website, with its books and marketing, is a site where "the

116 Some would identify this judgement as the narcissism of small difference for it is likely that the shop assistants could be sociologically identified as working-class, but as Robbins (1986) observes, many servants in Victorian England took on the judgements of their employers against each other in order to generate a modicum of value for themselves. The significance of this move is that the judgement is repeated continually across a range of sites, so it is the recurring effect of the negative judgement, rather than the small difference that is significant.
117 Sennett and Cobb (1977)

hatred almost explodes off the computer screen",
a comment made by the ex-Conservative party
adviser, Ferdinand Mount who describes its content
as "weird loathing" and "vile caricatures".[118] In his
most recent book, on class, he remarks:

> What I do not think many people have yet
> woken up to is that the working class has
> been subjected to a sustained programme of
> social contempt and institutional erosion which
> has persisted through many different govern-
> ments and several political fashions.[119]

As ex-Head of Margaret Thatcher's Number Ten
Policy Unit, he charts, but expresses surprise at, the
'bad manners' and vulgarity of the middle classes
who now feel it is legitimate to display their hatred
of the working class so blatantly. Chris Haylett[120]
has illustrated how government rhetoric is replete
with references to the abject and useless white work-
ing class, with moral solutions activated by 'The
Respect Agenda',[121] the 300 changes to the criminal
law and the profusion of ASBOs, Parental Orders
(POs), Individual Behaviour Orders (ISOs) which
treat working-class cultures as both deficit and
pathological.

The men of the CRESC group are sharply
aware of how they are still read as degenerate and
uncivilized. The following exchange was recorded in
Deptford in 2006:

> John: What goes on in working class participa-
> tion (referring to the educational schemes
> of which they are a part) … it's all cultural
> colonialism. (*Register switch*) "We come here
> to civilize these people and when it comes
> down the nitty-gritty and the power value…
> we still hold the power and your achieve-
> ment belongs to us, it doesn't belong to you,
> it belongs to us because we've done it for
> you, you know what I mean? And let's pat
> you on the back "--, it really winds me up.
>
> Jack: A rough diamond theory…
>
> John: Yeah, polish them.

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118 Mount (2004: 90)
119 Mount (2004: 273)
120 Haylett (2001)
121 The Respect Agenda was quietly withdrawn in 2007.

> Jack: Insufferable, you know, I mean, that
> we are the sort of flawed but inter-
> nally wonderful individuals and we
> just need our buttocks polishing.

There is a certain amount of 'bad feeling'
expressed against those who patronize, judge and
ignore the inequalities of others:

> It's through their fucking, horrible refraction
> process that they have this distorted image of us.
> Because in order to be middle class that requires
> X number of people living in shit squalors and
> pleading ignorance about them… (Bill, 2006)

As Andrew Sayer[122] notes, moral boundary draw-
ing and value attribution treats the merits claimed
for the judging group as if universally valid. He
describes how the middle class rarely want to
acknowledge the privileged social and economic
position from which they speak, displaying
embarrassment and evasion, often denying the
significance of class, or individualizing difference,
responses which he suggests indicate an aware-
ness that class differences lack moral justification.
Sayer points to the moral significance of class,
precisely because it cannot be divorced from
attributions of worth and person-value, creating
unequal possibilities for flourishing and suffering.

Spinoza's 16th century theory of affect,[123] what
he terms 'the force of existing' is a useful way
to think about how we live with class relations
with others in a continuous variation of valua-
tion. Spinoza maintains that when we come across
somebody good, if they make us joyful, they
increase our capacity/ability to act, whereas if we
meet sadness inhibition increases and decreases
our capacity to act. Spinoza was concerned to
understand how people with power use sadness
to affect us to increase their power and decrease
the power of others (he studied priests). This
continual variation is experienced through social
encounters: judgement-diminution, humiliation–
diminution and contempt-diminution. I'd argue
that the repeated attachment of contempt and
negative value to the working class intensifies
diminution. Thus social encounters are dialectical

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122 Sayer (2005)
123 Spinoza (1996)

attachments and detachments of value, whereby one may establish value at the cost of another; hence why judgements of taste and classification are considered by Pierre Bourdieu[124] to be acts of symbolic violence:

> If there is any terrorism it is in the peremptory verdicts which, in the name of taste, condemn to ridicule, indignity, shame, silence … men and women who simply fall short, in the eyes of their judges, of the right way of being and doing.[125]

The responses of the *Formations* women and the CRESC men above demonstrate a clear understanding of how judgement is used to diminish.

Inverting Moral Value

In response to 'being looked down on', judged, patronized and diminished, caring and respectability become key weapons in an armoury of defence. In particular, parenting becomes a key source of moral value in which the judges become subject to judgement:

> Don't they like their own kids? Is that why they give them away all the time? (Cynthia, 1992)

> Of course I'll bring up my children by myself, you can't go shopping them out, you shouldn't have them if that's what you'll do. (Ann, 1990)

> I think it's awful how rich women who should know better shop out their children, I just can't see the point in having them if you don't want to care for them, that's what its all about, I think it's really awful, what are the kids going to grow up like knowing their mothers don't really care about them… I don't reckon that sort should be allowed to have children. (Sally, 1990)

> What gives them the right to think they can judge us? They don't know how to bring up kids. They've never done it. (Debbie, 1992)

Middle-class mothers, especially those institutionally placed to judge their childrearing practices, were a source of indignation and resentment. By claiming themselves to be the real and proper

mothers the *Formations* women invert class divisions and claim *moral superiority*. This inversion of value has also been extensively documented in other research on motherhood[126] and child development.[127] But this inversion is not just restricted to women. In the CRESC research with men, Pat notes:

> And as I say, when I had counselling, I was sitting there going, "What?" and like really going, "What, you're talking shit," basically. And I had a disagreement with someone 'cause I really worry about my children, which I think is natural in most people, and it comes down to a point, there's nothing unusual about…, everyone I know worries about their children and I said, "Can you just humour me for a second?" He went, "yeah." I said to him "did you have a nanny?" He was, "Sorry?" I went, "Did you have a nanny?" It was, "Em, em, that's not relevant," and that's what it boiled down to, it wasn't because I was over-worried about my children, it was because *he wasn't worried enough*, you know what I mean. As far as I was concerned it was a cultural thing. He had his nanny and his relationship with his parents was *completely different* from my relationship with mine, you know what I mean. (Pat, 2006)

Other researchers have also documented the desire for respectability and the importance of care to the black and white men in their research in the UK, US and France.[128]

The moral inversions were repeated in our ESRC media research on reality TV, where being a full-time mother was seen to be a source of high moral value in opposition to women who put their careers first. The participants watched an episode of *Wife Swap*, which pitted two women against each other: Tracy who has one child is aspirational and works full-time outside the home for at least 12 hours a day for 'nice things'; and Kate who has six children and works full-time in the home. The first column of the extract is the visual track of the programme, the second the TV spoken track and the third, the research participants' responses:

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124 Bourdieu (1979; 1986; 1987)
125 Bourdieu (1986: 511)

126 Duncan (2005); Lawler (2000); Reay (1998)
127 Walkerdine and Lucey (1989)
128 Duneier (1992); Lamont (2000); McDowell (2007)

Text-in-Action: Extract 1 Wife Swap (2006)

Audio Marker Visual image	Television text	Participants' responses
18.50 Kate driving home from work	**Kate:** I can't believe it's eight o'clock and I left home 13 hours ago no wonder I've got a headache it's just ridiculous	
18.53 Kate pulling onto drive Kate enters the house	**Voice over:** By the time Kate gets home its eight thirty. **Kate:** 'How's Lottie?' **Mark:** She's fast asleep **Kate:** Ah. **Mark**: She was shattered.	**Sally**: Nightmare, absolute nightmare init? **Sonia:** I had to leave home at seven with [name of her child] to get to work and drop them off, I had to leave at seven **Sally:** Oh no she's crying, she had a mare of a day. **All:** Yeah.
18.56 Kate to Camera Shot of Lottie sleeping Kate and Mark in the living room	**Kate:** I'm quite disappointed that Lottie was in bed and I didn't get to bath her. I'm so tired. My body feels really alive but my head feels dead. Quite often at home it's the other way round. **Mark**: Do you think Tracy would be feeling like that now?	**Sonia**: She's not had her all day has she? I suppose with all them children **Sal:** But that's not fair on that child! (tone of outrage) **Sonia**: Exactly and that's what she's feelin' **Sal:** ((?)) **Sonia:** mmm I'm taking the mother's role [performs] and when I woke you up and dragged you out of bed at six o'clock in the morning [and dropped you off at seven o'clock] **Sal:** [to have you out by seven] **Sonia:** and now it's eight thirty at night and you ain't seen me all day. The kid's in bed. **Sal:** How you gonna make up for that? **Sonia:** You can't. [tone of righteousness]129

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129 See Skeggs, Wood and Thumin (2008) for extended analysis.

Sally, Sonia and Sal's moral positioning was not spoken in the interviews we had previously conducted with them but was <u>dramatized</u> in our viewing sessions. Connecting to their own personal experience they demonstrate empathy and judgement, immanently positioning themselves within the unfolding drama. They dramatically enact their own life choice - making maternal and domestic sacrifices for the family - as the right choice, displaying and authorizing their emotional labour. In these viewing sessions with our working-class (Black, South Asian and white groups) good parenting was forensically investigated by the participants, subject to harsh judgement about those who did not 'care enough' and often placed in opposition to aspiration and social mobility, a structural opposition also constructed through the programme's format.

The moral position they take attributes value to their own position and 'choices', yet is in conflict with current British government initiatives to encourage mothers to return to the labour market as fast as possible. On the one hand our participants' reaction against the aspirational woman helps legitimate their own positioning outside the labour market. But on the other hand, in refusing to take up the position of aspiration and mobility, in favour of giving time to children through more traditional modes of femininity, these working-class women are defending the **small sources of value** to which they have access – their mothering skills. Valerie Walkerdine demonstrates how, when women enter the labour market without qualifications it is mostly to "poorly paid, often part-time work, [with] little job security and periods of unemployment".[130] Sally, Sonia and Sal offer a realistic appraisal – through their encounters with television - of the pain and pleasure of their future possibilities: staying at home with friends and children may be preferable to a dead-end job and life lived at the site of the 'working-poor'. Elsewhere in this research the women attribute high value to domestic, emotional and feminine appearance labour, so it

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130   Walkerdine (2003: 241)

Text-in-Action: Extract 2 What Not to Wear (2006)

Visual marker	*Television text*	*Participant's responses*
02.23	Presenter Trinny (introducing potential participants):… the main offenders for closer inspection	Lucy: I bet they have got a nanny. Bev: Yeah? Lucy: I bet they have. I bet they have got a nanny and it's all very well isn't it?
04.27	Trinny (on mothering): There are all those juggling acts that are really tough	Lucy: Oh I think it's true but…. But I think that it's true but I don't think people want to hear it from some stuck-up posh bird with a nanny. Do you know what I mean
07.13	Presenter Susannah: it's Sarah, a mother of triplets who not surprisingly…	Lucy: triplets?!
07.19	Trinny: because they have triplets…	Lucy: and no nanny. Bev: mmm? Lucy: and no nanny
07.45	Trinny: three kids at 23	
07.57	Susannah: …drab, dull, uninteresting woman	Lucy [shouting]: no! you're exhausted, you have got three kids

is not labour per se that is the issue,[131] rather it is the value that can be gained from it.

In another viewing session, this time of *What Not to Wear*, with Lucy, the presenters are challenged for not understanding the social conditions of other mothers (see Text-in-Action: Extract 2 on page 41).

Lucy begins by suggesting the conditions for childcare between the experts and participants are radically different, which leads her to de-authorize the experts in a specific class. That the television participant has triplets makes Lucy, as a mother, even more outraged and protective, hence the strong response.

This research project not only revealed how respectable and caring parenting was used as a defence to 'de-authorize' judgement, but also how working class women were more generally defended.

In a final example from this research the mainly black focus group defend Jade Goody, a white working-class woman who has been vilified on the media as a 'chav', as worthless, stupid and valueless. The debates around Goody were based on her perceived lack of propriety: her colloquial direct speech, her size, her lack of education and her humour on the third series of Big Brother.[132]

> Sonia: Don't get her started about Jade.
> Ruby: I kind of *like Jade*. I kind of *like Jade*. My little **ghetto rat made good**, you know what I mean [laughter]. I like her.
> Sally Mc: [...] This is what it's done for a lot, the ghetto rats that you're all referring to.
> Sally: *I like Jade*.
> Sally Mc: About giving them a chance?
> Ruby: Before you're struggling, ducking and diving, and then you get an opportunity through 'reality' TV and then all of a sudden you're able to provide for yourself, provide for your family and not go to bed and... you know what I mean...And not wake up in the morning and think, 'Oh God, where is this

going to come from, where am I going to get that from?' Reality TV does that.
> Sally: Yeah.
> Janet: No, *I like Jade*.
> Marian: I do actually.
> Ruby: It's *only Jade that I like*. I think she's done very well.
> Marian: She does her own shows.
> Sally Mc: *But she does what she did well*.
> Sally: Yeah.
> Ruby: Because there are some programmes, I mean how could you ..., you did, I don't like you so I don't care. But that's the first, I got to care about, like with Jade *I liked her*.
> Sally: Yeah I *like Jade*. I do like her.

The connection to Jade is made through an ethic of care and to her proximity to the culture and labour of the group. That Ruby, Sally Mc and Sally are black perhaps produces the particular articulation of 'ghetto rats'. They immanently position themselves with Jade, whose participation on 'reality' television opens up a potential opportunity structure to not worry constantly about providing for your family. The stressed repetition of 'I like her' from all the focus group participants signals an insistence against the negative value generally attributed to Jade and those like her who are often positioned as the abject working class.[133] Here the group offers a display of general defence against the judgement of her/their culture as valueless, and the fact that Jade has resolutely refused to accept and perform middle-class standards:

> Marian: Yeah, she's all right. I don't know her but I mean [all talking at once]. She's done well [all talking at once]
> Sonia: I suppose we all relate to that don't we?
> Sally: With elocution lessons, she's not Jade.
> Ruby: Yeah.
> Sarah: She's still Jade.
> Ruby: I say I like her, she's still got a belly, she's my kind of girl [laughter].
> Marian: She has no poshness, no airs and graces.

The fact that they assess Jade's success – 'she's

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131 Skeggs and Wood (2008)

132 This focus group discussion took place before Jade was ejected from Celebrity Big Brother for bullying Indian film star Shilpa Shetty and calling her 'Shilpa Poppadom', thus creating a national scandal during which the then Chancellor (now Prime Minister) Gordon Brown had to apologize for Jade and British racism to the Indian Prime-Minister. "By the end of the summer Jade had been described as a nasty slapper, public enemy number one, the most hated woman in Britain and a monster" (*Independent*, 2007).

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133 See Skeggs (2005)

done well' – as a good thing, rather than criti-quing her aspiration or lack of skills, educa-tion or qualifications, suggests that the earlier critique of aspirational Tracy is not just about her perceived lack of care but also her preten-tiousness (referenced here through elocution) To our working-class groups it is precisely Jade's resistance to certain middle-class stand-ards (e.g. speech, disciplined bodies, 'airs and graces') that makes her credible. Jade represents the working-class culture which is devalued on television and dominant culture more generally: loud, excessive, sexual, large, fecund, local, uncompromising, and without pretensions, from a similar economic and cultural position to the women in the group. Jade was seen to be deserving of her success because she was not ashamed of, or apologetic of, her culture.[134]

Awareness of Inequality

And why should people have to defend their lives, culture, practices and feelings? As the CRESC men point out, they are socially posi-tioned in relations of inequality through no fault of their own:

> It's…, *it's an accident of birth*, it's not something I've achieved. (Peter, 2006)

> People I know been stabbed, shot, died of overdoses and no…, at one point were no different, it's an *accident of birth* and yet we're living in that brutal world. (Pat, 2006)

> I think to myself, what is the difference between the people who are sitting there (in the student café) and the people who I grew up with? And the only difference is an *accident of birth*. (Bill, 2006)

> Why should then my sons, 'cause they *happen to be born in…, from my background …* why should they have to work three times harder than anyone else? Why should his opportunities be limited just by the fact of *where he was born*? (Jack, 2006)

To which Bill replies:

> Because they're statistically nine times more likely to be arrested, more likely to go in prison, all that statistically just because of where he was born.

This accident of birth leads to very different circumstances for living:

> I think most working-class people they just want a decent quality of life. A *decent* quality of life doesn't have to mean a plasma televi-sion or a three bedroom semi-detached house in Surrey. It can just be surrounded by fami-ly, and being… *not bursting into tears when the car breaks down or you get another bill comes in*. But then you get this accusation that you're all completely un-ambitious when really you're just struggling to get by. (John, 2006)

The parallels with Ruby's sense of struggle are noticeable here, as they are with Steve's:

> We live in a society of haves and have-nots and its brutal. We're made to think that if we want the same things for our kids – educa-tion, nice life, things – that we're wrong. We shouldn't expect them. But that's what I've learnt. I've seen another world and I want it, I want if for my kids. A world where you can take for granted that you have the things that stop life being a struggle. Yes I am envious of their lives, why shouldn't I be. They have everything. (Steve, 2006)

> In fact anyone has to feed their children, what's so working-class about that? But there is a more major concern *if it's made impossible to do*. (Jack, 2006)

This group links their experience of judgement and diminution to an unjust historical inherit-ance (accident of birth) which makes life much more difficult, producing an entirely different set of possibilities for living and surviving. Sianne Ngai,[135] developing the idea of affect, argues that this awareness of injustice leads to the expression of 'ugly feelings', that is, the

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134 Another equally vilified woman in British tabloid culture – Jordan (Katie Price) – was similarly defended.

135 Ngai (2005)

affects become attached to us as if personal dispositions, when in fact they are generated through our relationship to much larger structures. The antagonistic feelings expressed by all groups are, I'd argue, legitimate responses to systematic diminution/devaluation over time. All the different projects were replete with these 'ugly feelings', generated from structural inequalities emergent in the encounter in which they felt wrongly judged, mis-recognized and diminished. And which they morally defend themselves.

Conclusion: Worrying Mobilizations

Moral value is continually constructed for these groups through their expressions of care, parenting, non-pretentiousness, and defence of continual contempt, derision and judgment by the middle-class. All working-class groups live this movement of judgement and defence, although the form it takes varies by 'colouring in' (inflected by racism). Accusations of degeneracy across groups are as prolific today as they were previously. Inequality and injustice is felt more intensely when people are blamed or cast as immoral for that into which they were born. With an increased intensity of contempt, condemnation and derision with which to deal yet with sources of dignity in short supply and without any positive forms of identification to use for defence and protection few options are open. The jobs available to all these research groups are those likely to subject them to further derision and contempt, not to mention making them the 'working poor'. What is remarkable is that in these conditions they still desire to be seen as respectable, as caring, as good parents with valuable non-pretentious culture.

However, Tom Frank[136] has shown how these

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136 Frank (2004)

ugly feelings may be detachable from source (inequality) and re-attached to other sources that offer moral value. He shows how the Republican right was able to detach already formed moral values such as unpretentiousness, authenticity, hard work and loyalty from the conditions of their original production (working-class life), a space which was increasingly entrenched, and re-attach them to the interests of an imaginary safe and secure prosperous right wing nation through the promise of respect and respectability. These different political mobilizations were premised on already structured class relations through which class antagonism can be activated. Paradoxically, it is highly unlikely that the CRESC group will be politically mobilized in this way; they are avowedly anti-racism and almost Marxist. Their access to Marx and Bourdieu through education has given them an incisive understanding of inequality, they know that the inequalities they experience are not of their making, and they try as hard as they can now to make sure their children are protected in some way from the same injustices. All they want, like the women, is a decent life, a life without constant worry and struggle, and a life where they are not consistently and persistently judged as lacking, to be treated with respect (value). What they all find unforgivable are the people who judge them; in particular judgement by those who have no understanding of the conditions by which they have to live, and those whose privilege is also an accident of birth but not recognized as such.

The research questions to which we need answers are why are the middle classes not held accountable for the levels of symbolic violence that they enact in daily encounters with others? Why do they want to behave in such ways? Why are they so invested in the judgement, diminution and exclusion of others?

6. Home Truths: The White Working Class and the Racialization of Social Housing

Steve Garner
Aston University

'Elsie',[137] an older white woman who has lived on her estate in Bristol for 30 years, commented on the local authority's policy of placing what are referred to locally as 'problem families' on to the estate:

> You always hope you're gonna bring
> them up, but that doesn't always happen.
> They can drag you down, can't they?

Elsie is talking here about the effort to retain a moral universe based on ideas of hard work and earned entitlement, civility, pride in appearance (of self, as well as house and garden). The issues around which the stories of Elsie and her fellow residents are framed are familiar ones, and tell a story of social housing in post-war Britain. The central narrative is decline in status. What started out as a sought-after estate that you were lucky to get a house on has undergone such transformations that people no longer recognize it as particularly attractive. While Elsie's is not the roughest estate in town, it is very badly equipped in terms of amenities. The places with more disadvantage, as measured by the indices of deprivation, get much more funding. Meanwhile, the estate is losing facilities – a police station, a community building, a swimming pool, shops, safe places to encounter other people. As another interviewee, Sally, argues, in Plymouth about her similar estate: "You don't get nothing for doing things well, do you? You only get funding if it all goes bloody wrong."

The specifics of why a particular estate has followed its exact trajectory are to do with local dynamics, but there is something in what Sally says. People who live on estates that are not the worst in terms of education, housing stock, employment rates, mortality rates, ill-health, etc.,

usually do not receive the kind of priority funding that may sometimes turn other estates round. The indices of deprivation that are used to calculate – on a ward level – which places are more disadvantaged than others necessarily emphasize averages. Within a ward there might well be sections that fall into the bottom 10% (usually priorities for funding), yet the overall figure for that ward might be raised by an area of private owner-occupancy, or a high level of right-to-buy owner occupancy for example. People on the ground see the funding preferences as an anomaly. "Why don't *we* get what *they* get?", they ask. It isn't fair! However, in 21st century Britain, this pattern is not anomalous, but is the way that funding regimes and in parallel, social housing, now function. It has been in relatively short supply since the 'right-to-buy' legislation dating back to the early 1980s. In the thirty years between 1971 and 2002, levels of home ownership rose from 49% to 69%.[138] The majority of this increase occurred in the 1980s, in the first decade of 'right-to-buy'. The percentage of households renting council homes increased from 31% in 1971 to 34% in 1981, then gradually declined during the 1980s to only 14% by 2002.

Part of this decline could be accounted for by the transfer of housing stock from local authorities to housing associations – or Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) – since the 1990s. The percentage of households renting from a housing association increased from 1% in 1971 to 7% by 2002. Nowadays there is always far more demand than supply of social housing, and only people who are technically homeless, and/or have multiple social problems, disabilities, or dependent children, can aspire to be housed by local authorities in the short to medium term. The chunk of working-class

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137 All names of interviewees have been changed in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

138 Office for National Statistics (2002)

families on low to medium wages who used to be relatively certain of getting access to council housing in the period up to the 1980s are now unlikely to enjoy that luxury. Availability shrinks as the remaining housing stock is increasingly reserved for multiple problem families and single parent families. In this process, labelled 'residualization' by Ray Forrest and Alan Murie,[139] social housing has changed in meaning. Against the backdrop of the house price increase in Britain that has seen the average house outstrip the average income by increasing proportions in the last quarter of a century (now standing at around 7:1), social housing is no longer a normal entitlement for people who cannot afford to buy: it is a last-gasp resource for the residual very-low income and benefit-receiving section of the working class. As of 2002, one out of every two lone-parent families lived in social housing compared to one in seven of other family structures. The average income of owner-occupancy households was 2.8 times that of social housing households. More than three-fifths of social housing renters are economically inactive (63%) compared to 31% of owners. Among owners, 40% are classified socio-economically as in an 'intermediate' position or above, *vis-à-vis* 8% of social housing renters.[140] In terms of space, 83% of owners, and 43% of social housing renters, have more than adequate space per person.[141] From being a proud institution that has been struggled for and won from the State (what the French would call 'un acquis'), social housing has become, in general, a stigmatized resource.

Social Cohesion and Unfairness: Why the Housing Shortage is Good for the BNP

Previous social housing allocation regimes up until the 80s used 'family connection' or 'local connection' as a priority criterion. This meant that tenancies could be assumed by children of tenants, and ensured that distinct patterns of settlement would be reproduced, with extended families in proximity. Nowadays, allocation is based primarily on points systems like 'needs' and 'bidding'. The justification for this has, as noted above, been to

keep step with the shrinking base of funding and building programmes by concentrating allocation on those who most need housing. The new regimes are thus bureaucratically fairer, but not necessarily viewed as such by the white working-class. Indeed, one person's fairness is another's obstacle to fairness. A return to preference through local connection may seem fair for longstanding residents who want their children assured of an option to stay on the estate, but not for people trying to access it from outside. Where existing demographics are whiter than the surrounding city, the local connection can be seen as a means of keeping unwanted minorities out. The authorities' perceived collaboration with minorities at the expense of the local white working-class is cited as evidence of their fall from favoured position. *'They'* runs the line, 'are bringing the immigrants onto our estate'.

Housing is a basic right and is surrounded in emotive discourse about belonging and entitlement. It is therefore easy to manipulate politically. As a dwindling resource, social housing has become a flagship issue for the BNP. Housing allocation is easy to represent as a site of unfairness, particularly when it can be identified with new migrants, and even more easily when those new migrants are black and Muslim. The dynamics of this are intensely local. On some of the Bristol estates, the new 'Others' are Somalis.

> The Somalians, they're having everything ... the lady across the road [Somali], now I know she's got grown-up children and she's got young children. Now I know they're mucking about with the social. You know they're claiming they don't get this and they don't get that ... and they're all working. And the two things I ask for they got [...] And I think hang on a minute. Is it right that you look after your house, pay your council tax, pay your rent, pay your taxes and you're not rewarded? Yet those that do nothing ... one they get it because they show you the racist card ... you're not givin' it to me 'cos I'm black ... and you're not giving it to me 'cos I'm on benefits. (Jacky, 30s, Bristol)

Jacky's comments demonstrate the logic of unfairness we have picked up as a pattern, relating your own, deserving yet unrewarded experience with that of an undeserving neighbour. Nick's

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139 Forrest and Murie (1983, 1988)

140 'Intermediate' is the fourth of nine hierarchically arranged socio-economic groups currently in use by the Office for National Statistics. The UK average of intermediate and above status was 33 per cent. The dataset used for the statistics in this section is *Social Trends 38*, which is based on the 'Living in Britain General Household Survey' (Office for National Statistics, 2002).

141 Office for National Statistics (2002)

comments (below) focus at a less immediate level: the nation-state. They came toward the end of an interview during which he had talked of his fears that affordable housing would remain out of his reach and that migrants were filling available gaps in the local labour market.

> Well, if you're a British citizen, as a British citizen, yeah, if you are a British citizen, then you should ... I'm sorry ... At the end of the day, if you're coming over from another country, you've got to understand how our country works, do you know what I mean, so you know, you should respect and understand what our law ... you know what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. You can't come into another country and then get everything handed to you on a plate. I'm sorry, I just don't agree with that. (Nick, early 20s, Bristol)

The local situations in Outer London and former mill towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire differ from that of Bristol, yet the stories told and the emotions expressed – abandonment, loss, resentment – are the same. There is no doubt in my mind that the BNP have captured this strand of popular discourse on unfairness. Throughout the interviews carried out by myself and colleagues in England over the past four years, unfairness is the cry of a substantial section of white people – and this is not confined to residents of social housing. People see themselves engaged in struggles over culture, accommodation, language, and benefits with minorities and immigrants, as well as with other white working-class people seen as scroungers, but not with the middle classes. The BNP's website and materials reflect this view of the white working-class as a beleaguered majority.

The BNP's 'Africans for Essex' campaign, run in Dagenham in 2004, illustrates this. One of the party's tactics consists of consistently promoting the idea that deals are secretly being agreed between local authorities, or between central government and local authorities. In this story, cash incentives of £50,000 were being offered by the local authority to Africans to encourage them to buy houses in Essex. In another case, the authorities were alleged to have secretly earmarked a building for asylum-seekers, and in another, a (secret) deal had been struck over sharing another borough's quota of asylum-seekers. By repeating the accusation in their own publications, the BNP have managed to create a rumour that is reported on and then has to be refuted by local authority officials. The story takes on a life of its own. This scenario is feasible because for people used to relentlessly not being communicated with, there is credibility in any story about resources being allocated away from them. Indeed, the type of stories we hear frequently in fieldwork are often unlikely and sometimes implausible; a local authority that sends a workman to turn all the toilets round so they don't face Mecca before they are let to Muslim tenants, and another that gives 'start-up vouchers' to help immigrants with their housing ("I never got that", 'Lesley', 30s). These stories are also told about a range of benefits and about setting up small businesses. Their principal function is to express the idea that the odds are stacked against the white working class. What is new about that theme is that the new character benefiting from the white working classes' unfair treatment is the ethnic minority and/or immigrant or asylum-seeker, as well as the unrespectable white working class. What rare identification there is of the middle and upper classes having a role in the allocation of housing revolves around generic critiques of the government and local authorities being out of touch with what happens on the ground.

Quite a typical view is that "they seem to be getting what we've worked all our lives for and can't get" ('Cathy', 40s), which is interpreted as especially unfair when contrasted with the "elderly who haven't got anything, can't afford to pay heating, worked all their lives and get nothing" ('Sue', 30s) and with "single mums who have to live in hostels", while "foreigners are in nice cars and have big houses" ('Jake', 18).

Indeed, people's emotional investments in community lead to some surprising collective choices. On one estate in the South-East, people explained to us that they had voted against undergoing a regeneration programme because they feared that their necessary re-housing during the regeneration of the poor quality housing stock would mean that minorities would be given places ahead of them in that area. They themselves would be permanently displaced. On a large, mainly white estate in the Midlands that has successfully

regenerated its housing stock, people now occupy an opposite position, i.e. defending their housing and being ambivalent about incomers. Commenting on the significant changes brought about by regeneration, one man admits there are still "one or two little problem areas, but you go to one of the other areas, let's pick 'Cold Moor' here 'cause it's one of the nearest areas and it really is like being in a different country when you go there ... And you go there and it's absolutely filthy. Well, I think the perception is ... because that's a mainly Asian majority in 'Cold Moor', people here say, 'They want to bring more on to this estate? Look at our estate. Hang on a minute. We've fought for this and we've got it really nice at the minute, let's keep it that way!" This wariness is not reserved for Asians however, which is what we shall look at further in the next section.

I want to suggest a way to understand how the issue of housing has become attached to the question of resources being drawn away from the white working class by migrants and BME people, rather than as a case of shortage *per se*. I will explain the concept of 'racialization', and then apply it to housing.

Racialization

In the 1980s, social scientists interested in 'race' began to question the dominant paradigm, called 'race relations'. This had developed out of work undertaken in the USA in the 1940s and framed the issue in a particular way: there are a number of 'races', ran the argument, who compete for resources on a number of markets (employment, education, housing, etc.). The management of these relations so that the outcomes are peaceful and productive should be the aim of public policy. In terms of biology, the idea that the human race was divisible into races had been rebutted since the 1950s, the image of blocs of races in competition had become the default setting of public policy in the UK as well. Critics of 'race relations' argued that 'race relations' assumed that 'race' was a biological rather than a social reality; it assumed that it was necessarily 'race' that dominated people's identities (rather than also class, gender, nationality, etc.); and it was incapable of understanding the complexities of historical change, i.e. seeing the importance of 'race' as being a process, rather than a given. They maintained instead that

racialization should replace 'race relations'. This approach basically involves trying to understand how and why 'race' gets attached to social relationships over time, rather than assuming that 'race' is part of the natural order and therefore ever-present. In the case of the 'Africans for Essex' campaign for example, the racialization approach would focus on who introduces 'race' into the issue and why. The political strategies and stakes of this intervention would be examined. So the scarcity of social housing in the borough, and the growing mistrust of the local authority are fused by political actors creating the potential scenario of the taxpayers' money being used to provide this resource to people constructed as lying outside the national and racial communities to whom the message is addressed: white voters on Outer London estates, the new battleground for the BNP.

The first thing to note, more broadly, is that 'race' is not only to do with colour, but with tying culture to bodies in a hierarchical way. The cultural and the physical for me are the two intrinsic elements of racial ideas and practices: you can't have one without the other. Moreover, a neat line between 'white' and 'non-white' is not an accurate reflection of how people *always* talk or behave. Groups that are ostensibly 'white' can therefore also be racialized in majority white countries. In the British context, this has historically included Jews, the Irish Catholics and other Eastern European migrants. In some areas of the UK, the Eastern Europeans are the only migrants, if not just the most recent. They sometimes face the type of violent response meted out to black and Asian migrants and their descendants, as in an extreme case recounted by Ed Jones in Salford.[142]

In fact there are a number of trends that seem contradictory. Firstly, qualitative surveys show that colour can still be an important index for white people's perceptions of who is entitled to resources. There is a great deal of confusion over the different statuses of asylum-seekers, refugees, economic migrants, etc. Few know the significant difference in entitlements of these groups, and they tend to be amalgamated in popular understandings, not just with each other, but more importantly with other longstanding non-white minorities, so that in some research everyone who is not white becomes

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142 Jones (2008)

potentially a 'bogus asylum-seeker' claiming resources to which they are not entitled.[143]

Secondly, and adding a layer of complexity to the situation, the decision about where to place the boundary between groups is not often based on a simple white/non-white dichotomy: it is an equation rooted in personal acquaintance, residence and locality. There are two simultaneous aspects to this: the un-entitled can be other white UK people whose claims to resources are questionable. These are people on benefits, particularly disability benefit, single parents, ("Taking out all the time and never giving anything", 'Kevin', 50s), while alongside the properly entitled can be black, Asian and other descendants of migrants who are known in their area. The boundaries between 'us' and 'them' in terms of 'race' and membership of communities are not always drawn in the same place. "I'm not racist", begins another of our Bristol interviewees whose opening phrase is a familiar one. "I'm not racist ... but I am prejudiced. I am prejudiced, but I'm not only prejudiced against people that are black. I'm prejudiced against people who are on the dole who don't do nothing, and still get it all" (Jenny, 50s).

The threat of dangerous 'others' does not lie simply or even necessarily with brown-skinned foreigners or their descendants, and it is a mistake to suppose that is automatically the case. It bears reiterating that the question of belonging is a very local one. The threat to the good life lies also at the far end of the working class, in the form of anti-social behaviour perpetrated by 'problem families'. Again, the levels of this are not uniform, and not everyone on an estate experiences it as equally annoying or frightening. Young as well as old people can feel unsafe because of it. The 'hoodies vs. pensioners' scenario is not the only one. The dynamics on estates are much more complicated than this alone. The working-class residents who think of themselves as decent and hard-working, especially community-minded people, are generally critical of people who behave badly and/or don't raise their children to be respectful. They see this as a reflection of who gets council housing nowadays, and of new anti-social, or at least anti-sociable, values. The fatalistic mantra around this states that the police are powerless and can't be

bothered, and the youth have nowhere to go: 'it's the same everywhere' is the consensus.

People understand the social change occurring around them as negative. However, and this is where we need to think harder about a response to the question of how the white working-class understand the allocation of social housing, the identification of a particular group or groups of people as being responsible for decline is a matter of very local dynamics. In one context it could be minorities in a nearby area: work on who votes for the BNP suggests the 'proximity effect', i.e. observing demographic change in a neighbouring district and seeing it as potentially harmful in one's own area, is a key factor in pushing people to vote for them. It could be the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour. Or, as we have found in Bristol, it could be new minorities, many of whom happen to be Somalis there, but could be Poles or Portuguese elsewhere (vis-à-vis 'old' minorities). In constructing such new minorities as the main agents of the decline of established white British working-class communities, the latter discursively incorporate African-Caribbeans and Asians as part of the 'we' with which they begin their sentences. This is not in any way an argument that the latter have increased their standing materially, or that racism has lessened – indeed, an element of contradiction seems to be constitutive of the current discourse about 'race'. It is just to note that based on work I and others have carried out over the last four years, the 'imagined communities' that are the product of white British working-class people's discussions also frequently and unproblematically include their black and Asian neighbours: often because they are known as individuals rather than anonymous members of a group.[144] Of course, including non-white locals in the 'we' is sometimes contingent and may be a way of inoculating the speaker against accusations of racism, but I am also convinced that it is often a genuine reflection of who is seen as belonging on a purely local and cultural level.[145]

Comments

All of the above has taken place within the framework of a social housing shortage in the UK. On

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143 Lewis (2005)

144 Hoggett (1992); Hoggett et al. (1996); Back (1996)

145 Moreover, the estate in Bristol where the first element of fieldwork was carried out is one of the most sought-after by African-Caribbean tenants, which suggests that they see it as relatively safe.

a daily basis, local authorities have to manage paucity, and people's expectations of deserving to be well housed. At its inception, in the first decade of the 20th century, Britain's social housing was aimed (through the level of rents set) at the upper echelons of the working class. Arguably, it is only in the post-war period, particularly from the late-1950s, that this starts to change, with the slum clearances in urban areas and the creation of tower blocks outside the urban core areas from the late-60s. Once council housing began to be sold off in the 1980s, the diminishing resource was necessarily more difficult to get, and the emphasis shifted to needs-based provision. Britain's post-war history of migration is of immigrants slotting into the country's class structure overwhelmingly at working-class level. The maths of Britain's housing equation are not complicated: more into less doesn't go as far as before. Hence the anxiety about being near the front of the queue. The question of why resentment is targeted at minorities, who are mainly fellow recipients, rather than at allocators, flows from this anxiety. The process of racialization indicates that political interventions from various groups, including the State, inject 'race' into that equation. Paul Hoggett, whose work includes studies of people's relationship to housing and community in the East End of London,[146] suggests that the emotional dimension of the statements of perceived unfairness collected in our fieldwork can be conceptualized as the first-born child being usurped by another, with the State playing the role of parent.

Indeed, you can feel the palpable resentment of diminution of resources for 'us' among our white working-class interviewees, and the sense of loss, disempowerment and abandonment. There is also recognition of the parameters of welfare. One of my Midlands interviewees even suggests that "The state seems to have taken the place of a working-class man". His logic is that if you wanted to be the partner or husband of a woman with children and on benefits, you would have to earn over £20,000 per year to raise her household income (to replace the equivalent benefits). "That's not working class money now is it?" he asks.

It is clear that the white working class have collective stories of loss and disempowerment

to tell, whether they are linked to the closure of factories, the elimination of an entire industry or long-term neglect by the relevant authorities. Yet they seem to forget that so do migrants and BME British people. On the subject of housing, in our interviews, they seem intent on making themselves the exclusive victims. Were a space to be created in which the white British working class, migrants and BME people could tell each other their stories of being refused housing, being obliged to live in sub-standard conditions (while paying a premium), and of asylum-seekers placed en masse in motels and in unwanted properties on estates (or even in detention centres!), our white respondents would probably find much more in common with these groups than they imagine. Feeling that you have less and less control over your life is not the monopoly of Britain's white working class.

It is not just about class or just about 'race'. Although it is worth hammering on a table and shouting out where decisions are made that racism and social class still matter, regardless of whether you try to neutralize them by using the language of 'social exclusion', 'multiculturalism' or 'managing diversity'. The story of social housing in post-war Britain marks a shift from collective provision of high-quality housing as a recognition of contribution made, to the crisis management of paucity in which only the most needy can hope to be housed. Where the racialized boundaries are placed, in a particular place at a particular time, is interesting and important for the people living there, yet shifting boundaries does not eliminate them.

Housing is not the be-all and end-all of why so many white working-class British people feel abandoned, but it occupies a special place in the emotional chain of attachments to the State and to other people, standing where 'community' meets 'society'. Ceding the ideological ground to the far right is one danger. Yet the content of the ideas referred to above only becomes a possibility when the material side is neglected in the first place. The framing issue is that there is not enough social housing in the UK at a moment when the price of private housing is simply unaffordable for a vast swathe of people on low to medium incomes, and even stretches the budgets of those on above average incomes.

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146 Hoggett (1992); Hoggett et al. (1996)

7. Moving Representations of the 'Indigenous White Working Class'[147]

Ben Rogaly and Becky Taylor[148]
University of Sussex

When the BBC launched its 2008 'White Season' of five television documentaries and a drama it was accompanied by a barrage of publicity on radio as well as TV. While the films themselves covered diverse topics, from a reappraisal of Enoch Powell's notorious 'rivers of blood' speech[149] to a more subtly worked film on 'race' and immigration, *All White in Barking*, the advertising summed up the series as a whole as follows:

> The white working class in Britain is put under the spotlight... in a season of unflinching programmes examining why some sections of this community feel increasingly marginalised today. As political parties debate the way forward for immigration, debate rages in the media and the popularity of the far-right continues to rise in some sections of society, the *White Season* explores the complex mix of feelings that lead some white working class people to say they feel under siege and as if their very sense of self is being brought into question.[150]

As part of this publicity drive, BBC's commissioner for documentaries Richard Klein argued in the *Daily Mail* that "[g]lobalisation, mass immigration and economic upheaval" had together caused revolutionary change, "help[ing] to transform the fabric of our nation" so that "[t]oday we are one of the most culturally and racially diverse places in Europe". Yet:

> ... in all the heated discussion about the consequences of this revolution, one voice has been largely absent: that of the white working class. Politicians pontificate and academics argue, yet the voices of the British working-class public have been all but ignored... [M]any of the white working class see themselves as an oppressed ethnic minority... Every other culture, they argue, is revered except that of the indigenous population.[151]

For Klein, it would seem, not only is the label 'indigenous' reserved for the white *working* class, as though the latter was some kind of lost tribe, but the '*British* working class' is used interchangeably with 'the *white* working class'. The implication of the latter is that British people of colour are not in fact British at all. Klein's language is reminiscent of that used by Labour's Margaret Hodge of her white working class constituents in Barking in the lead up to the local elections in 2006:

> They can't get a home for their children, they see black and ethnic minority communities moving in and they are angry.[152]

Finding herself feted on the British National Party website, Hodge retracted this apparent gaffe, clarifying that the cause of anger was the pace of arrival of new (im)migrants. But the damage was done, and the irony that so many of the migrant workers arriving in the country at the time were white central and eastern Europeans[153] has passed relatively unnoticed.

Such representations of white British working-

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149 It may seem curious that Powell was resurrected in this way, but Paul Gilroy has recently pointed out that many of the 'most powerful, influential and ambitious people and institutions [in Britain] cannot leave the vexed memory of Enoch Powell alone' (Gilroy, 2008: 190).

150 BBC (2008)

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151 Klein (2008)
152 BBC News Online (2007a)
153 Anderson et al. (2006)

class people, in opposition both to black and minority ethnic British people and foreign nationals of all classes, are usefully divisive for owners of capital and for the state. Such divisions enable the maintenance of low pay and insecure working conditions, using, according to Jon Cruddas (Hodge's neighbour as MP for Dagenham), old tactics of divide and rule:

> The Government… is unable to have a rational debate about patterns of migration, or inequality or demographic change. Instead there is this populist, dog-whistling rhetoric… we can retrieve this situation if we remake a class politics which recognises the heterogeneity of the working class… Look at the interlinked issues of the demand for labour, the patterns of migration, the long-term inequalities in wages and access to public services and housing… focus on these issues and we'll be able to get back into the debates around inequality and social immobility, and so find alternative social democratic remedies… Without a materialist politics one is unable to transcend the things that break people apart – one cannot find the shared experiences that bridge cultural, religious and racial differences.[154]

In order to bring about a new politics that unites people around material struggles and access to resources from the state, categories need to be reframed. This means engaging with and challenging the kind of language used in the popular press, and selective references to history by writers such as the *Daily Express's* Patrick O'Flynn. Reflecting on Hodge's position in May 2007, O'Flynn wrote:

> Many of Mrs Hodge's constituents in Barking are not only suffering this unfairness now but come from families already bitter at being driven out of the East End of London due to migration from the Indian sub-continent. In the Sixties and Seventies most council housing in the East End was given to large families just arrived from Bangladesh. The cockney families headed further east to towns such as Barking and Dagenham because there was nowhere else for them to go. Families who had manned the docks, lived through the Blitz and helped fend off Nazi

Germany were flabbergasted to find Britain's rulers showing more consideration to strangers from the Third World. So Mrs Hodge's English constituents have been refugees in their own country. They saw one beloved neighbourhood with a legendary community spirit destroyed in the name of multiculturalism and are understandably anxious that the same thing should not happen again. Increasingly desperate, they have begun voting in large numbers for the BNP.[155]

O'Flynn's rhetoric is common to many who conveniently forget not only the crucial role played by Britain's colonies in both world wars, but also the legacy of colonialism in producing the global inequalities which form the context of much post-1945 migration. Yet it is not only populist journalists of this sort who encourage readers to visualize the East End as divided between true 'cockney', i.e. white, East Enders, and 'strangers from the Third World'. Succour is given to such a position from more scholarly quarters too. In a book examining relations among working-class people in the East End (white people and people with Bangladeshi heritage) and relations between working class and recently arrived middle-class residents (mostly white), there was no reference either to the sacrifices made by south Asian, African, Caribbean or Polish forces in the two world wars, nor any serious consideration of the role of colonial rule in producing Britain's wealth and distorting the economies of its colonial territories.[156]

In contemporary times there is strong evidence that what has become known as Islamophobia is particularly prevalent in the UK, that this has become one of the predominant forms of expressed racism, and that it has been perpetuated in mainstream media:

> Britons are now more suspicious of Muslims than are Americans or citizens of any other major western European country, including France. According to an international Harris poll last month…38 % think the presence of Muslims in the country is a threat to national security…and 46 % believe that Muslims have too much political power in Britain… The fact

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154 Cruddas (2008)

that a large minority of Britons have some of the most Islamophobic attitudes in the western world has passed without comment. Instead we have been treated to a renewed barrage of lurid and hostile stories about Muslims which can only have further inflamed anti-Muslim opinion and the community's own sense of being under permanent siege.[157]

Writing after the 9/11 attacks in the USA, literary theorist Edward Said connected the apparent acceptability of anti-Muslim sentiment with new forms of imperialism. "The web of racism, cultural stereotypes, political imperialism, dehumanising ideology holding in the Arab or the Muslim is very strong indeed."[158] Said was angered by writers who promoted such discourses, mostly members of the same élite university class circles in which he moved, such as Bernard Lewis:

> [Lewis'] ideas are… fairly current among his little acolytes and imitators, whose job seems to be to alert Western consumers to the threat of an enraged, congenitally undemocratic and violent Islamic world.[159]

Although their books were published later, influential journalists Michael Gove (*The Times*) and Nick Cohen (*The Observer*) may be the kind of writers Said had in mind in his reference to Lewis' followers.[160] Neither of these authors analyses the nature of British colonialism or imperialism, including contemporary British foreign policy. Crucially, although the two books state that they are opposed to Islamism rather than to Muslims *per se*, they take no account of the potential effect of their writing on the experience of being seen as 'Muslim' in contemporary Britain. Indeed, sections of their text can be read more generally as anti-Muslim.[161]

The point here is that ideas about who belongs to a place, and whose presence is more legitimate, on grounds, for example, of length of settlement, are not only generated at the local level or only

by working class people but are contributed to, sometimes inadvertently, at other times wittingly, by writers in middle-class occupations. They help to produce and perpetuate a tendency to frame migration in terms of 'race', and to see migration as strange and as threatening to people they also portray as 'indigenous' white working-classes. At the same time, there is a long history of some occupationally middle-class script-writers and journalists reproducing the racializing of long-term settled white working-class people (currently using the pejorative term 'chav'), and insinuating that poverty is caused by people's individual behavioural traits, rather than broader political economy and governmental contexts.[162]

Lately an attempt has been made to reframe this language and to conceptualize 'social cohesion' much more broadly as being related to neoliberalist changes in the economy, and to the growth of insecure employment and accompanying pressures on family life.[163] This important study, investigating the connection between immigration and social cohesion in six contrasting sites in the UK, uses new categories that bring to light the commonality rather than the strangeness of migration and social heterogeneity: long-term settled majority ethnic, long-term settled minority ethnic, and new arrivals. As is common among migration studies researchers, the report uses the term transnationalism to refer to the practices of people who remain connected to other countries and continents through their own or their relatives' migration to the UK.

'Indigenous' Transnationalism

In our forthcoming book,[164] we bring to light forms of transnational life that involve long term settled majority ethnic residents of England. We call this 'indigenous' transnationalism, and it can be used to add to critiques of an 'indigenous' Englishness. There is after all no intrinsic, essential

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157 Milne (2007)

158 Said (2003[1978]: 27)

159 ibid.: 342-343

160 Gove, also a member of the Conservative shadow cabinet, certainly cites Lewis with approval: 'As the noted scholar of the Middle East Professor Bernard Lewis has explained, the decline of the Islamic world relative to the West provoked agonized soul searching within Muslim minds' (Gove, 2006: 16).

161 See for example Gove (2006: 16-17) and Cohen (2007: 115).

162 Skeggs (forthcoming); Reay et al. (2007)

163 Hickman et al. (2008). The JRF report was released a week after the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government report on 'Community cohesion and migration' (HC369-I), which had failed to disentangle the issue of recent immigration from that of relations between different groups of long-term settled people.

164 *Moving Histories of Class and Community Identity, Place and Belonging in Contemporary England*, in press with Palgrave Macmillan, expected publication date Spring 2009. The book is based on our research project 'Deprived White Community?' Social Action in Three Norwich Estates, 1940-2005', funded by the ESRC as part of its Identities and Social Action programme, grant reference, RES-148-25-0047. Much of the material in the following two sections of this article is drawn directly from the book. It is reproduced here with the permission of the publisher.

Englishness (let alone Britishness), but rather an identification which can be learned and adopted and is thus, in the process, changed.[165] Migration out of the United Kingdom is as important as migration into it in the making of its constituent nations and of the idea of Britishness. Other forms of emigration have included working-class moves to Australia under the 'ten pound Pom' scheme, to the US, for example as GI brides in the 1940s, and more recently to a wider range of countries in Europe, Africa and Asia.

The book draws on oral history interviews with 73 people who were (former) residents or workers in three social housing estates in Norwich. In it we use the term 'indigenous' transnationalism to refer to the transnational practices of people who have not moved away from their place of birth but are related or otherwise connected to people who have done so. In our interviews, we found that connections with other places continued through memories, absences, practices learned elsewhere, through the media, the internet, through gifts, letters, phone calls and emails, and through ongoing visits and travel. These manifestations of life stretching over time as well as space were very often as emotionally charged as the transnational practices of new arrivals. It is our contention that the flows of things, people and imaginations that these processes taken together involved, meant that the people in these estates were not as entrenched or fixed in place as writers in various genres have often made white working class people out to be.

In a further extension of the usual way in which the idea of transnational life is used, we applied it to the connections between people who had not moved and others who had moved *within the borders of the United Kingdom*. This other form of stretched life worlds, often also involving visits, communication, and emotions concerned with absence and loss, can be referred to as translocalism. It is important not least because travel between places to visit relatives involves encounters with unfamiliar manifestations of life in Britain, including, in the case of some Norwich residents, multi-ethnic inner-cities such as Birmingham, Leicester and London, and Welsh-speaking areas of Wales. In proposing the idea of 'indigenous'

transnational and translocal life, we too aim to draw attention to migration 'as part of everyday life' and to 'the intrinsic heterogeneity of local society',[166] although *im*mobility is often as important as mobility in the making of places.

Moving
The departures of people who migrate are often infused with emotion for people who stay behind. Sisters Greta Fawcett and Jean Holmes spoke of their younger sister Theresa, who left Norwich for Australia on the 'ten pound Pom' scheme in her early twenties.[167] She was initially deeply unhappy, but, as with working class immigrants in other contexts, instant return was not possible because of the financial resources required. Greta remembered the moment of parting vividly:

> I'd arranged, before I knew… what day she was going, to go to London with a friend. And Mum went to London with Theresa to see [her] off at the airport. And we met up with them, and I thought, 'oh dear, she looks so…' She was only little, she was the smallest one of us, and I thought, 'she doesn't look old enough'.

For Eva Garland, her son Michael's departure for Australia was particularly painful. He and his wife had been living with her and they had a son:

> I was absolutely distraught when they took him. I was more bothered about the grandson than I was them two going, but I mean they made their lives.

Bill Fussell's younger brother emigrated after the Second World War, and any feelings of loss were reconciled through his account of how his brother had succeeded in challenging and circumventing class boundaries through becoming a successful mechanical engineer in Canada. Like Bill, his brother Stanley stood up to his boss in the Parks' Department of the council:

> Something they got arguing about… He didn't do no more, he got the bucket, and tipped the whitewash all over [his boss and resigned]… So, that time of day they were

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165 For example, the 'Saxons, having become English, would then subsequently work to anglicize the Normans in turn. The assimilation of the Normans represents the first instance of the idea that being English is something that you do not have to be born into but that you can become' (Young, 2008: 19).

166 Hickman et al. (2008: 184)

167 All names of individual research participants used here are pseudonyms.

looking for people to emigrate to Canada and Australia and places like that…

BT: And did he ever want to come back to England?

Bill: No. He won't come back here, no.

BT: Why's that?

Bill: Well, he didn't think that was good enough. 'Cos he was badly treated, wasn't he? At work. And he was like me, got a will of his own, he knew what he wanted to do.

The frequency of visits varied from family to family. Bill, although maintaining telephone contact, only visited his brother once in Canada, while Eva has been to Australia seven or eight times, as she felt it was the only way to see the grandchildren. In Margaret Brooke's case, contact with her sister was minimal after she left with her new husband, also an estate resident, in 1964. Her sister never visited England and Margaret, who had been seven when she left, never went to Australia:

I speak to her at Christmas round Mum's and she always writes to my Mum and… my Mum always get like photos every year of the grandchildren and that sort of thing but she's never ever come home.

The turbulence of emotions – hope, unsettlement, struggle, homesickness – relating to migration is encapsulated in Edward Dale's recounting of how he and his wife finally settled in Australia:

I have always wanted to travel overseas so when they were advertising for bricklayers in Australia I talked it over with my wife, she was very reluctant at first as she was very close to her mother. So when she said she would give it a try, I filled in the forms and sent them away… We landed in Fremantle in 1958 then on to Perth. It was a bit of a shock, as at that time there was very little work for bricklayers [if we had gone on to Melbourne there was plenty of work] but eventually I found work with my own efforts but I had to leave my wife and children for two or three weeks at a time for work, but I made sure that

they never wanted for anything… but I knew that my wife was homesick for her family, so I said we would save up and go back to England… I knew… after a month in England that I could never settle back there, plus the children missed Australia and was always asking, 'when are we going home?'… So, we both worked hard to save the money to come back. One of my wife's brothers decided that he and his family would give it a try. So once more after saving up for our fares we sailed back to Australia, and I can honestly say that we have had no regrets.[168]

As Edward's account suggests, visits and returns could be as painful and unsettling as absences. Lily Haley told us that she was just getting over the return of her son Simon to Australia after his recent trip home. The visit had been extended because Simon's wife had had an accident and had been treated in hospital for a facial injury.

But I think that extension then made it very difficult when we all had to part again. That was awful… He's been gone back about three weeks now.

While Lily is adamant that, having never flown in her life, going to Australia is unthinkable, Simon's presence there is the main reason she uses the internet. She uses it to send and receive photographs.

Recent arrival Satnam Gill is by contrast a regular flyer. Having grown up and been to university in India, he moved to the US for three years and still maintains relations in both countries, through visits, phone calls and electronic communications. However, invoking similar emotions to longer term residents missing relatives abroad, but from the point of view of one who had moved, he described his homesickness when he was away from India, and how happy he had been to return home there from the US:

It felt like finally… you came back to your home again [laughter]. I mean when you are like there for long, long time you know, twenty years, twenty five years… you're always homesick… wherever you are… Because you've got all your old friends, your circle, your relatives….

168 The Dales still live in Australia, and sent this account via email.

White residents with memories of living in other places in Britain and Ireland, and people who continued to visit relatives in other places, also had lives that stretched across place.

Eileen Donald had migrated from Ireland to England. Describing her move as having been driven by extreme poverty and a violent father, she said she identified closely with the book *Angela's Ashes*. Her visits home were tempered by emotion, and in fact she felt unable to go for her father's funeral:

> I wouldn't go home. My sister arranged everything. And I just wouldn't go, because I just couldn't forgive him. See my sister left home a lot longer and I was only a kid...

We have already seen how Eva Garland's experience of transnational living when her son and grandson moved to Australia was emotional from the start. The connection between spatial mobility and emotion in her life was also evident in the description of her continual longing for home while she herself lived in Leicester:

> I was always homesick. I mean I enjoyed being [there] but I always longed for Norwich. If I was ill or anything, or bogged down, I would come home, have a week and then go back... When I was down in the dumps I used to sneak back... home... in the end, we saved enough and had a little caravan at Hemsby [on the Norfolk coast].

It was not only Eva who came and went. One of her daughters had stayed on in Norwich with Eva's mother and she would come regularly to visit her in Leicester. When Eva did eventually return to live in Norwich it was to a different estate, as she was able to exchange her Leicester council house with somebody there.

For other residents, the emotion they experienced when talking about absent relatives related to the fact that they refused to come and visit the estates, now seeing the area as 'beneath them'. Flo, with typical humour (although overlying a degree of anger), told us about her eldest brother, Fred:

> Christ... for him to come and visit... about once every three years! That's like coming into Glasgow Gorbles as far as he's

concerned... Fred's a snob and his wife.

> BT: What does he, is that particular to this area, he thinks it's...

> Flo: Oh he thinks it's dreadful, 'oh I don't know how you could possibly live here sis. I don't know how you could possibly stay here' [putting on posh accent]

> BT: Does he talk different to you?

> Flo: Yes very 'frightfully, frightfully' 'cos he mixes with a better class of people [with posh accent].

Here we can see how Fred's social and spatial distancing of himself from the estates[169] has been embodied through adopting a different accent. Such categorization of the area by people who were once 'insiders' but no longer see themselves as belonging illustrates how people's lives become stretched socially as well as physically through migration.

Fears

As we have suggested, transnationalism is not simply experienced by those who move away and their immediate descendants. Rather it also exists for people without recent migration histories of their own, who are often erroneously referred to as 'indigenous'. Although she has never lived abroad, Eva's life has become part of a wider transnational space, partly through translocal connections with her other daughter who remained in Leicestershire and is a Christian lay preacher. In talking about her, Eva revealed how she herself felt threatened by Islam, which she regarded as strong in Leicester and nationally and internationally resurgent:

> What's worrying me... [and] I shall be glad when I'm gone and that is the honest truth, is the Christians and the Muslims, they're my main worry. Because [Muslims] are completely taking over. And my daughter and her husband, they have been inducted as lay preachers. And her religion is everything to her. Well, it is to me too. And I wouldn't like anything to happen to them.

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169 Flo herself echoes this through her own categorization of 'the Gorbals'.

Similar concerns were also raised to us by people who had travelled and lived abroad. While her expatriate life had been spent largely in compounds in Cyprus and Singapore, separated from colonized people, Sandra Dyson placed the onus on immigrants to the UK to do the integrating: "getting more foreigners…it doesn't bother me… as long as they integrate… some do, some don't… they won't talk to you half the time". In contrast to her approval of what she saw as *Jews*' tendency to stick together, Sandra raised questions in particular about the willingness of *Muslims* to integrate. She told a story she had heard (it was not clear whether this was from a media source or a personal contact) that a Muslim family in London had insisted on having female fitters for their new windows: "I thought it was ridiculous. But that's the way they are. That's their religion…". Referring to Muslims in general, she later told us:

> Nothing against them. As long as they don't go to extremes like some of them have. But if they're going to live in this country, I'm sorry, they should live under our rules, not theirs. If they want to be Muslims and behave the way they did in their own country then go back to it.

Nowadays Flo Smith, who spent long periods in the same colonial locations as Sandra, travels regularly to Birmingham to visit one of her daughters. Like Sandra, she felt differently about Jews and Muslims:

> We've always had Jews here. And we've had, over the years, a build up of a lot of Chinese. But they've never bothered you, they've gone in with you. Can you understand what I mean? But these Muslims, I just can't explain how I feel. You go Peterborough. You're on the train to go to Birmingham, you're going to, there's … blasted great, within yards of each other, two mosques with these big green domes, and to me they don't blend in… with our churches, they stand out like sore thumbs. And I think, why do they bring everything of theirs with them and it seems like a takeover bid. I just don't like it Becky, I'm sorry. But I've got no prejudice against them, but I just don't like the way they're taking over.

The fear of and antagonism towards Muslims and their apparent agenda of 'taking over' in contemporary England was shared by Tom Crowther, who had both served in the colonial military and spent two years in Northern Ireland in the 1950s. He elided the category 'Muslim' with that of 'Arab' and made an explicit link to the emigration of (implicitly white and non-Muslim) Britons:

> I see this eventually as the Muslims taking over England. I really do because they breed like rats and rabbits and… they've already established themselves in mosques here, there and everywhere and… eventually I mean a great number of Britons are going to emigrate away from this island and consequently it will be an Arab state. I really do feel that most strongly.

Yet, paradoxically, the dynamics of integration were explicitly considered from the perspective of a new migrant when Flo Smith reflected on the possibility of moving from Norwich to be near another of her daughters in Wales. Although she said she felt comfortable in that part of Wales "because there's so many English live down in that part now", and there had been 'only' one incident of anti-English behaviour (being ignored in a shop) that had upset her "in all the years I've been going there", she thought again and added:

> But I think once you shut your door, you'd be very isolated. You'd have to join in the Women's Institute, you know what I mean. You'd have to join all that sort of thing, to get yourself integrated, can you understand what I mean? But the best way [] to get in is to have a dog.

Thus in thinking about *her own* possible migration, Flo articulated the advantages there would be to living in an area with a good number of fellow-English people. However, she did not apply this very human criterion to Muslims, nor indeed to black and minority ethnic people more generally:

> Flo: I don't know nothing about the Muslim religion. I ain't that bothered. But why should we have to conform everything for them, for their human rights? Why should we turn our lives round to fit them in all the time?

BT: But, do you feel that you have?
I mean, has it affected you, having
lots of Muslims in this country?

Flo: No, it hasn't affected me as much as [I]
don't have anything to do with them, but, when
you go to the bigger cities like Birmingham,
like to my daughter's… I just feel as if a white
person's a bloody minority. 'Cos there's so
many of them there and they're even getting
now, where they've got their own schools….
And I think they are affecting our lives.

BT: In what way?

Flo: Well, the way they're taking over.

The feelings of Flo and others about 'Muslims'
need to be understood in the wider context of the
history of racisms. As Gilroy observed, "[r]acism
does not… move tidily and unchanged through
time and history. It assumes new forms and articu-
lates new antagonisms in different situations".[170]
Thus not only have different 'races' moved in and
out of the spotlight of racism over time depending
on context and events,[171] but also articulations of
racism are 'untidy'. We found participants speak-
ing in racist terms variously about people with
darker skin colour than themselves, often eliding
the presence, status and activities of 'foreigners',
'immigrants', 'Muslims' and 'asylum-seekers':

> … my grandson who works at Kettles Crisps
> up the Bowthorpe, he says that there's more
> foreigners now… The government has sent them
> here, they're paying the firm extra to employ
> [them]. He said, 'we've got Asians, people
> from Poland'. We're getting so many different
> people in this county of ours now. And that's
> all been sent by the government… a lot of them
> come here and they're all on benefits. And the
> hous[ing] situation is difficult, isn't it? There's
> lots of our young people can't… get houses and
> they're all got to be housed (Bert Kersley).

Just as racisms are experienced by a range of
individuals and groups, so too are those racisms
perpetuated throughout British society. Middle

class Khushi Chatterjee, an English teacher at the
local comprehensive in the estates in the 1970s
and 1980s, faced racism from pupils and teach-
ers at school. But significantly, her own children
also experienced 'race' in the family's more middle
class area and at the school that had an intake of
predominantly middle class children. While one
daughter had experienced being called 'chocolate
face' in the street, at school it was:

> … the usual middle class thing which hides
> it in all kinds of ways…. When [my daugh-
> ter] went to… secondary School, one of the
> things that really… made me very very angry
> was that the head master… had given her [a]
> name [using word-play on her actual name]
> to rhyme with toilet. I was so angry.

Just as we need to be alive to the ways in which
middle class individuals perpetuate racism, we
would argue that this awareness needs to be
extended to consider the racialization of the work-
ing classes. Among the teenagers we interviewed,
there was a sense of feeling looked down upon
by 'students', of being despised, akin to a sense of
being racialized themselves as working class estate
residents. Dean felt he got 'dirty looks' from the
students: "They look at us and go, oh, yeah, chavs".

Conclusion

We have drawn attention to the role of political
and media élites in creating and perpetuating nega-
tive meanings to the category of Muslim because
we do not believe that Islamophobia stems inher-
ently from working class white people. Rather it
must be set within the context of (both individual
and media generated) middle class attitudes, and
a long historical tradition of different forms of
racism. It is significant, however, that, when talk-
ing to us, participants frequently collapsed catego-
ries of 'race' and faith into each other. There was
a clear juxtaposition between the silence on, and
thus taken-for-grantedness of, colonial occupation
under the British empire in the past on the one
hand, and views on immigrants to Britain (those
of colour that is) and on settled members of visible
minorities in the era of the new imperialism, on the
other.[172]

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170 Gilroy (1987: 11)
171 Ignatiev (1995); Paul (1997)

172 See also Rogaly and Taylor (2007).

More generally in this piece we have drawn attention to the importance of transnational and translocal ties for many people's individual and collective identification processes, even people who have not themselves moved very far across space. The evidence suggests that a range of emotions may be associated with spatial mobility and transnational living. A longing for 'home' was strongly articulated by some research participants who had moved away from the estates and later returned, and by a newcomer thinking of the 'home' he had left. Seeing people's lives, including those of working class people, as moving histories, draws attention away from the construction of any particular group as 'indigenous' and could lead towards greater appreciation of commonalities in histories of migration, for example in the emotions involved. Such histories take place in contexts of structural inequality and national discourses of 'race', citizenship and belonging, though their very diversity shows they are not *determined* by them.

8. From Housing to Health – To Whom are the White Working Class Losing Out? Frequently Asked Questions

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The remit for this chapter was to produce a contribution which translates academic thinking to non-academic audiences. Concerns of and for the 'white working class' are most frequently expressed in terms of how they might be losing out to groups of people recently arrived in Britain – immigrants – most of whom happen to be white also. In this short chapter I take a few commonly made assertions and suggest an answer to them, and what might be done to improve policy for poorer people in general.

'Immigration Means We Don't Get Houses for Those that Deserve Them.' True?
Without immigration much current housing would no longer be standing in Britain. In particular many immigrants in recent decades came to towns and cities in the north of England which would have been greatly depopulated otherwise. Their coming and remaining has been one of the primary reasons why housing has not had to be demolished on a large scale outside of Scotland. In contrast, in Glasgow, a city which did not attract that many immigrants in recent years, a great deal of housing has had to be demolished. Fewer immigrants results in fewer homes.

A majority of immigrants to Britain from abroad now settle in the south of England. Here there is the least social housing and so almost all housing is not allocated on the basis of who most deserves a home, but on who can afford a home (or homes). More and more housing has been bought to be rented privately, or as a second or third home by richer people. We have never had as much housing in Britain as we have now, but we have also never shared it out as badly as now. Recent immigrants to Britain tend to be the worst housed, living in the most overcrowded accommodation and in some of the worst quality properties.

Concerns are often expressed over who is housed first in social housing. Recent immigrants without children have almost no chance of being housed in such housing because of the rules of allocation, based upon need. We do not have enough *social* housing for everyone's needs in Britain. We do have enough *housing in general* for everyone's needs. What we need is a way of transferring more homes that people cannot afford to pay a mortgage on to social housing so that there is enough social housing for all who need it. This could be done if the current government programme that allows local authorities to buy a few repossessed homes at auction were extended so that people could sell their homes to the local council but remain living in them when they hit hard times.[174] That 'right to sell' would increase the stock of social housing. If it were coupled with policies to help people owning multiple empty homes to give up some of their spare houses, and to help single people in very large houses downsize, that would also help. Then we might get the housing we deserve.

'Immigration is a Drain on the Health Services.' True?

Health Services in Britain only work because of immigration. In fact there are more nurses from Malawi working in Manchester alone than there are in Malawi.[175] Immigrants and the next generation of children of immigrants make up a vastly disproportionate number of the staff of the National Health Service (NHS). Any sensible calculation of the net effect of immigration on health services could not conclude that there is any drain on resources. There is, however, an obvious drain on the health services of other countries from our reliance on so many staff from abroad. If more clinicians from Britain were to work at least part of their career abroad that effect would be somewhat offset, they would gain insight that they could not easily secure in Britain. They could have a significant impact worldwide.

There is a problem with accessing health services for some groups of recent immigrants however. The National Health Service is not a national service. Often services are limited, such a dental care, and recent arrivals to an area can be put at a disadvantage because all NHS dentists are booked up. This affects all migrants, not just immigrants. More seriously, in 2004, proposals were made to further exclude overseas visitors from eligibility to use the NHS primary services. Only 'ordinary residents' of the UK are entitled to free NHS treatment (someone living lawfully, voluntarily, for settled purposes). This regulation is particularly detrimental to anyone who has recently arrived in Britain who may find it hard to establish that they are ordinarily resident here. If someone is found not to be ordinarily resident then everything is charged for except immediate A&E care. The Hippocratic Oath does not include a clause allowing this discrimination. The moral dilemma which doctors are faced with is also a moral dilemma confronting society as a whole. Do we really want to be the generation which dismantles the principle that a doctor's first concern is his or her patient, especially for such a spiteful cause?

Working class people are often talked down to by middle and upper class doctors.[176] Such doctors often resent the kind of work they find themselves doing. When they applied to go to Medical School it did not cross their minds that they might, later, be asked to work with sick people all day. A better skilled medical workforce would provide a far better resource for working class people.[177] Medical staff who come from abroad are less likely to see people in Britain as beneath them. If our doctors routinely worked overseas following training then teenagers might think more carefully before applying to medical school. The experiences they would gain from abroad would also be useful. Younger doctors in Britain have usually not seen cases of measles and tuberculosis. But both diseases are becoming more common in Britain. When the influenza pandemic or any similar event does strike, all of us, including the white working class, would benefit from the knowledge and understanding of a more internationally experienced health workforce.

'My Boy's the Only White Boy in His School – I Can't Leave Him There Can I?'

There are many ways in which children can be the only one in their school. Often this is hidden. For instance being the only child to be living with your

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174 Some policies similar to this were announced on 2 September 2008 as this chapter was being submitted.

175 Worldmapper (not dated)

176 Greenhalgh, Seyan and Boynton (2004)

177 Seyan, Greenhalgh and Dorling (2004)

grandparents, the only child that has a particular illness, or being the only child to have reached grade 7 on the violin. When other children find out that someone is unique they can be badly teased and bullied; but all children are unique in many ways and all can be teased and bullied. In every class one child will be tallest, shortest, fattest, thinnest, have the most spots, the least friends, go through puberty first, or last. Being the only white boy in a class is just one of the only things your boy may be. Hopefully, it may well be the least of any problems he has. And it may well be your problem, not his.

However, if your child is being bullied because he is white, that is different from being bullied for having spots. Racist bullying is not equal to other types of bullying; it can lead to race hate violence. Racist bullying is usually worse because it is more structural and systematic, and it is more likely to persist and then translate into other forms of discrimination later in life. Being bullied for being the only child playing the violin is unlikely to follow that child into the job market. No bullying should be tolerated but especially racist bullying. Your child's skin colour will not disadvantage him in the job market, but no form of racist bullying can be tolerated because of where it leads a society. Would you want your son to adopt racist views because he was bullied? If the problem is teasing and bullying, then like any parent, you should expect the school to take it seriously and talk to all the children responsible – and their parents too.

If all children went to their nearest school there would be slightly fewer schools in which a single child was white, or of any other category. There would still, however, be a great number where there was only one child who was not white in a class. But if all children went to their nearest school it is likely that far fewer people would notice this anymore. That is because if there was one non-white child say in a village school, it would be because there was one non-white child in the village, not because that school had an admissions policy making it harder for other non-white children to gain entry (being 'faith' based for instance, linked to a particular denomination).

'But How Do We Stop Schools Becoming More Segregated?'

There is no evidence that schools in Britain are becoming more segregated by ethnicity but they are more segregated than are the neighbourhoods they draw from. It is very likely that they will become less segregated over time as the areas the schools are in have been becoming less segregated.[178] The way in which schools are becoming more segregating is by whether the children in them come from poor, average, or rich homes. The great new range of schools that the current government has created has been compared to Britain introducing a new caste system, with differing schools, academies, beacon and 'bog-standard' establishments catering for children thought of as being of differing inherent abilities. This is very bad news for all our children, rich and poor, black or white. If children walk to the nearest school: 1) they can walk rather than be driven; 2) the schools mix; 3) almost all children from the same street go to the same school so know each other; 4) fewer schools will appear to be very bad, nor will parents have to worry so much about trying to get into 'good' schools; 5) there will be fewer schools where your son is the only white (or black, or brown, or whatever) boy in the school; 6) there will be no single sex schools..

Why in some cities are schools more segregated than the residential areas which surround them? The reason for this is mainly the government's 'choice' agenda; in reality, low-income black and Asian parents find it harder to exercise choice and tend to downgrade their options.[179] Most will send their children to the nearest secondary school due to size of family, convenience, lack of access to own transport and avoidance of high crime areas. Importantly this is not an issue of self-segregation, as most BME parents prefer their children to go to ethnically diverse schools. Rather, it's an issue of resources, and will therefore almost certainly have such impact on white working class families as well, although the Runnymede Trust's study[180] which tells us about these issues did not include white working class pupils in their sample.

If we reverted to the system of our parents' time, when almost all children went to their nearest

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178 Finney and Simpson (2009)
179 Weekes-Bernard (2007)
180 Ibid.

school, you might think that schools would become more segregated by wealth as areas are so segregated by wealth and poverty. This is not necessarily true, however, as part of the attraction of some wealthy areas is that local schools are seen as especially good, tend to be over-subscribed, and those parents more able to argue their child's case to get their children in. Here 'arguing' includes pretending to have religious beliefs for long enough to fool the selecting panels of the largest group of discriminatory schools in the country – the faith schools. If all children went to their nearest schools then the few poor children living in richer neighbourhoods would be almost certain to go to their neighbourhood school and the school would appear slightly less 'exclusive', house prices would become slightly less elevated and so on. Similarly, if all children in poor areas went to their local school, schools in poor areas would not appear as poor as they currently do. That is because currently there is massive commuting out to schools from poor areas.[181]

A policy of children only receiving free state education and going to their local school would probably reduce segregation in schools by income, wealth and race, but not by much because children are already so segregated geographically. To further reduce segregation between schools would require parents to have less incentive to segregate themselves by geography, would need them to live in less fear. If schools were better resourced according to the needs of their pupils then it would make less sense for a parent to try to get their child into a 'good' school by living in a 'good' area. More would be spent on their education were they to go to a school where children needed more resources. In practical terms a primary school at the 'bottom of the hill' in the poorer district might have two classroom teachers and two teaching assistants for a class of thirty children as compared to one as the 'top of the hill' having half as many staff. The precise ratios should be set at the levels at which it no longer matters to a rational parent where on the hill they live. You can tell when it no longer matters as then more parents choose the 'poorer' school. It is, in effect, a policy of 'bussing' additional staff to schools with low demand. It would only be a policy that would be feasible when people in this country realize the value of

educating their children as higher than many other ways we currently spend tax money (supporting American war efforts for instance).

'Multiculturalism or Britain, I Have to Choose Sides Don't I?'

British society is a multicultural society so it is difficult to see what you would be choosing between if you were to try to choose. Every so often a politician or journalist suggests that it is time to make some choices. Some form of patriotism is needed. Often sport is involved or a perceived aspect of a thing they call 'Britishness'. These events are usually embarrassing. The temptation is to shy away and leave them to their ramblings. Occasionally, however, other people pick up on such suggestions and so it might help to choose to be on the side that knows a little bit about British and World history, cultures and multiculturalism, rather than on the side of ignorance.

For example, often things that are thought of as being especially British, 'tolerance' is an example, are not especially British. Often people in Britain are not especially good at things thought to be especially British, such as fairness. What people in Britain are unusually good at, compared with almost all of the rest of the rich world, is multiculturism. Most countries in Europe do not have people from such a range of places as in Britain. People from different ethnic groups are permitted to mix far less in a country like the United States of America as compared to Britain. In the United States you will rarely see black and white couples together on television; there is a taboo against it. In contrast again, that often forgotten large population of the rich world, Japan, currently severely limits immigration to Japan. Japan is the fastest ageing large population on the planet. A majority of adults in Japan are now living on their own in single person households, such is population aging there. People in Japan are going to find coping with the immigration to come there much harder than we do in Britain. We could perhaps help.

Multiculturalism is Britain. It is one of the things that is quite special about Britain and which makes Britain less like other countries. If Britain were a less socially divided country, if working class people were not so poor compared to middle class people, and if middle class people were not so poor as compared to upper class people, then there may not be such recognizable differences in Britain.

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181 Dorling (2005)

Countries with much lower income inequalities, such as Iceland and Japan, have become far less concerned about the different cultures within those countries. You hear very little talk of different Japanese of Icelandic ethnicities. This is not because these two sets of islands are home to remarkably homogeneous ethnic groups, but because income and wealth inequalities are so much lower there. We often mistake the wealth divisions of Britain for multicultural differences. Britain is a country divided by wealth, but brought together by the many cultures that have found their way here over the centuries.

Incidentally, attitudes to immigrants in both Iceland and Japan are hardly a model of tolerance; people can appear overtly racist and are far less careful about their language than in Britain. Those few migrants that there are, from Eastern Europe and mainly Korea respectively, are greatly exploited. In both countries income inequalities are growing, yet in both, because of their more equitable social histories, life expectancy is much longer than in that third set of islands: of Britain. In the case of Iceland, as in much of the rest of Scandinavia, the rarity of resources made greater equality more necessary and a redistributive welfare state attempts to maintain that (although wealth inequalities are growing). In Japan it was the confiscation of land from the aristocracy and its redistribution by the American occupying forces that had the same equalising outcome (and it is very different mechanisms that maintain it). In Japan, wealth inequalities are currently falling but income inequality is rising. Had the histories of both countries been different, had Iceland been the centre of a world empire with American colonies, had Japan entered the Second World War on the side of America, race and ethnicity would mean very different things in both places.

'What's Worse than Getting Polish Workers in your Town?'

Not getting Polish workers in your town! Have you tried getting someone to fix a leaking tap recently? More seriously, hardly any Polish immigrants are plumbers, but the Polish workers who have come to Britain are generally highly skilled and almost all go to where they are needed. If there are none where you live it is most probably because people where you live are not making enough money to employ them; businesses where you live are not expanding

enough to need them; or where you live is really not that desirable a place to come to. Often Polish workers are vastly over-skilled for the work they are doing in Britain.

Recent Polish immigration is not qualitatively different from other recent streams of immigration from abroad. Luckily for people in much of Britain in 2008[182] we are still seen as a desirable destination for significant numbers of migrants from abroad. The numbers who come here roughly match the numbers of people born in Britain who travel to work and live overseas. It is only because people come here that we have the freedom to travel and work abroad without there being a great detrimental effect on the economy in Britain. Every so often a few more people come into Britain than leave. Now is just one of those times. It is very fortunate for us that they do so because since the early 1970s women in Britain have been having fewer than two babies on average. Sadly many of the Polish workers are likely to move on before they have children. Britain has 1% of the world's population but only ½ % of the world's children.

As the British economy enters recession it is very likely that fewer people from Poland and other places will choose to come here. Countries like Germany will soon be opening up their borders to free movement of labour with Poland. People from Britain in a recession tend to go to work in places like Germany, to become immigrants abroad. This is especially true for working class men; usually their wives and children are left at home in Britain while they work abroad. You will be able to tell when the bad times are coming when the migrants from abroad stop coming, and some start leaving. Whether you will be able to carry on living where you live, or whether you will have to move to look for work elsewhere, or even go abroad, will depend on the extent to which your government decides to look after people in Britain. During the last major long-lasting recession, in the early 1980s, government chose not to do this. Far more people left Britain than came in during those years. Many never returned.

'Living Separately is a Problem, Isn't It?'

We all 'live separately' and we all have links outside where we live, even if just outside the street. More

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182 At least up until figures released by September 2008, although the economic shocks of that month might well result in far fewer migrants arriving in total in the months to come (and many may leave).

and more of us live separately despite being in long term relationships, and families in Britain now tend to be far more spread out and separated between places than they have ever been. Living less crowded lives is part of what we secure from being more affluent, but that is not what those who use this phrase are really talking about when they say there is a problem. What they are concerned about is a perception that people of Muslim faith tend not to mix, shop, play, go to school, or work with other people, as much as they might if such things were random. However, life is not random.

People don't mix from different areas in all sorts of ways. People don't tend to mix from Hinksey and Barton on opposite sides of Oxford, or Dore and Brightside on opposite sides of Sheffield. If we meet different kinds of people it tends to be in the centre of town. Should we be worried about this? Not really, unless someone sets us against each other or says we should move when we don't want to. In fact, we live separately in all sorts of ways – according to our income, how ill we are, what kinds of jobs we have – and that separation is getting worse at the same time as separation according to our race or colour is getting less (these things are measured by segregation indices).

People who have looked at it find that the level of separation between Muslims and others is not at all large in regions such as Yorkshire and Humberside. When you think of 'Muslim' areas in the region you will usually think of places that actually are very diverse. Of the 35 districts in Britain that had one ward at the last Census with fewer than 50% White residents, only one of them was in Yorkshire and Humberside. That one district is Bradford, and even there it's a minority white ward – called 'University' ward – which had 25% white residents, hardly a separation. During the year before the Census, more white residents came to that ward from other parts of the UK than left it and more black and Asian residents left the ward than came to it: so it is becoming more mixed from migration, not a separate ghetto.

Mixing takes place at the most intimate level too, in spite of all that talk about what people would let their daughter, and occasionally son do! According to the Census, a greater proportion of Muslims marry non-Muslims than white Christians marry outside 'their' group. That's simply because most white Christians live in areas where there is no-one else to meet, and it shows how much easier it is for white folk to segregate than it is for other people to keep to themselves. People in mixed relationships are often ostracized. It was far worse in the 1970s and early 1980s when mixed couples often had to give up their children to adoption due to pressure from families and friends. Those days have gone for most, but not for all.

'Why Don't They Speak English? – They are Holding Themselves Back.'

The government in England wants everyone to speak English fluently, but has cut funding for English classes. It says we should speak more foreign languages, but criticizes those who do! The administration in Wales wants more people to speak, read and write Welsh, but the government in England often forget this. There are very few people who cannot speak English at all in England. There are very many people in England who can only speak English. Most people in the world can speak more than one language, but not so in England. We are holding ourselves back by not expanding our vocabulary.

Almost all people in England welcome help to speak and read or write better. But just like anyone they do not relish being insulted or put down in their attempts to improve. By far the largest group of people who need help with their English speak, read a little, and write even less *only* English. Millions of adults in Britain are functionally illiterate. Everyone who finds English or Welsh difficult and who wants to learn should be helped to do better. Equally we need to learn other languages to better understand the rest of the world and each other. Otherwise we really are holding ourselves back.

Recently there has been official advice against providing translation services, documents in other languages, even providing translators when mothers are giving birth or people are at criminal trials. It should only take you a few second to imagine how terrifying it would be for you to be giving birth and for no-one around you to understand you, or to be trying to defend yourself in a court of law in your second or third language. The British are amongst the least literate people on the planet, partly because they can mostly get by just in English. But we expect things to be in English when we go abroad, or buy goods on the internet. We don't call ourselves immigrants when abroad, but 'ex-pats'. We need to learn

more about English and no longer behave as if we run a global empire.

'Does White Flight Really Have Wings?'

No. People move when they can get better housing and a better environment, when they can no longer afford the house they are living in, or when they grow up and leave home. They tend to move short distances unless they move to get an education or to a job a long way away. Those who have a bit more money can afford to move where they want to go, and move a bit further. The research on migration shows that the things that are associated with moving are the same for all ethnic groups in Britain.

In Yorkshire and Humberside there are only five districts with a concentration of black and Asian residents as high as 20% in one of their wards. If there was white flight you might expect there to be white people leaving those wards. But the census shows that white people did not leave Batley East in Kirklees, or University area in Bradford, or Burngreave in Sheffield, for other parts of the UK: more white people went to those wards than left them.

And in the other two districts, where there was movement of white residents out of the 'black and Asian concentrations', there is also movement of black and Asian residents out of the same areas. So for example in the year before the census, both white and other residents left Harehills in Leeds, and St Johns in Calderdale, the areas in each district that had the lowest white population.

But we can see that some areas are becoming 'more Asian' and 'less white'. Whatever people say about why they move, the figures show that this isn't because White people are moving out more than Asians. The inner areas are getting 'more Asian' for two other reasons. First it is because there are few older Asians yet – those who immigrated mostly did so only 30 or 40 years ago – so there will be relatively few Asians dying until the next couple of decades. Second, it is because there is still some immigration of wives and husbands.

This circulation of immigrants and their families first to inner city areas where there is cheap housing, and then out to better housing when they can afford to do so, is the same as the Irish and Jewish immigration last century. Over time people get used to each other – unless there is continued racism or discrimination that keeps some people in the worst housing. Where social inequalities between people are allowed to be high and rise, racism follows.

Conclusion – 'How Would you Like It if You Lived Here?'

I wouldn't. I don't live in a poor neighbourhood, but I do live in an increasingly ethnically mixed neighbourhood. Thinking that your neighbours are your problem is a distraction from looking out at who really has what you don't have. Ask yourself this:

Why are there people who can live in a flat in the middle of your city during the week, but are living somewhere else at the weekend? Why are there people who only come to their 'homes' a few times a year? Where else are they living? Why is there no longer any social housing in the countryside, or almost none? If you are poor there are unlikely to be many second homes near where you live, but where you live will be more crowded than if people today were spread between flats and houses as they were a couple of decades ago. In London the very rich are converting previously subdivided houses back into their original grand sizes, reducing the stock of housing for everyone else. Many of the richest million people on the planet own a house or flat in London as well as many homes elsewhere. Although there may be a servant household living in their London home, these second, third and fourth home owners have removed up to one million homes from being available in the capital alone.

There is enough housing in Britain for everyone to be housed. There are at least twice as many bedrooms in homes in Britain as there are people to sleep in those bedrooms. The same can be said of school books, of medicines, of jobs, of money. Britain is an extremely rich country, but it is one of those rich countries of the world where people have found it harder to learn how to share than elsewhere. Because we find it harder to share, we tend to be mistrustful. That mistrust results in fear, fear in the rich of the poor, fear in the poor of immigrants, fear in immigrants of prejudice. We need somewhere to go in place of fear. We live mostly in fear of monsters we have created in our dreams, but those monsters then become very real. It is our ignorance and stupidity, and our ability to be taken for a ride by those who already have most, which we should be most frightened of.

Biographical Information on Contributors

Wendy Bottero worked at the Universities of Abertay, Cambridge, and Southampton, before joining the Department of Sociology at the University of Manchester, where she is a Senior Lecturer. Wendy's research interests are in the areas of stratification and class, and she has written widely on issues of social divisions, differential association and identity; and on social mobility and social change (most notably in her recent book *Stratification: Social Divisions and Inequality*).

Danny Dorling works in the social and spatial inequalities group at the University of Sheffield (department of Geography). He has lived all his life in England. To try to counter his myopic world view, in 2006, Danny started working with a group of researchers on a project to remap the world (www.worldmapper.org). He has published with many colleagues more than a dozen books on issues related to social inequalities in Britain and several hundred journal papers. Much of this work is available open access (see www.shef.ac.uk/sasi). His work concerns issues of housing, health, employment, education and poverty.

Dr Steve Garner is a Lecturer in Sociology at Aston University He is the author of Whiteness: an Introduction (Routledge, 2007), Guyana, 1838-1985: ethnicity, class and gender (Ian Randle Press, 2007), and Racism in the Irish Experience (Pluto, 2004). He has published articles on racism and white identities in Sociology, Patterns of Prejudice and Parliamentary Affairs, among others.

Over the past five years, he has carried out qualitative research on white identities in England with colleagues from Bristol-UWE, and later for the Department of Communities and Local Government.

Kate Gavron is the co-author, with Geoff Dench and Michael Young, of *The New East End* (2006). After a career in publishing she studied at the LSE, where her PhD research was on the Bangladeshi community of Tower Hamlets, London. She is vice-chair of the Runnymede Trust, a trustee and fellow of the Young Foundation, a trustee of George Piper Dances and chair of Carcanet Press, a poetry publishing house based in Manchester.

David Gillborn is Professor of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London. Recently described as Britain's 'most influential race theorist in education', he is the author of numerous books and articles, including *Rationing Education* (with Deborah Youdell) which won 'best book in education' from the Society for Educational Studies (SES). He is recognized internationally as a leading writer in the field and was recently honoured for his work 'promoting multicultural education' by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) special interest group on the Critical Examination of Race, Ethnicity, Class and Gender in Education. David's most recent book (*Racism & Education: Coincidence or Conspiracy?*) uses 'critical race theory' to expose how racism continues to saturate education policy and practice.

David also works closely with policy and advocacy groups, including the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust, the Runnymede Trust and the National Children's Bureau. In addition to his own research and teaching, David is also founding editor of 'Race, Ethnicity & Education', a leading international journal for the critical analysis of race and racism in education.

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Ben Rogaly is Senior Lecturer in Human Geography and a member of the Centres for Migration Research and for Life History and Life-Writing Research at the University of Sussex. Prior to this he lived in Norwich for seven years, working at the University of East Anglia. Ben has written widely on migration issues. His most recent book, co-authored with Becky Taylor, is entitled *Moving Histories of Class and Community: Identity, Place and Belonging in Contemporary England*. It will be published by Palgrave MacMillan in May 2009.

Beverley Skeggs worked at the Universities of Keele, York, Lancaster and Manchester before joining the Department of Sociology at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has worked in the areas of Women's Studies, Cultural Studies and Sociology. Her main publications include *The Media* (1992), *Feminist Cultural Theory* (1995), *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997), *Transformations: Thinking Through Feminism* (2000); *Class, Self,*

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Kjartan Páll Sveinsson is a research and policy analyst at the Runnymede Trust. Largely as a result of travelling the world, where he developed a thirst for knowledge about the nature of cultural diversity, he decided to study social and cultural anthropology. It seemed, however, that with every one question anthropology answered, two new ones were raised. Thus, Kjartan has aspired to put his academic knowledge into practice and promote social justice. He works on Runnymede's Community Studies programme which explores small, less visible minority ethnic communities. His latest publication is *A Tale of Two Englands: 'Race' and Violent Crime in the Press* (Runnymede Trust, 2008).

Becky Taylor is a Lecturer in History at Birkbeck College, University of London, where she is interdisciplinary historian specialising in twentieth century social history. Combining archives, oral histories and field work she explores the impact of state expansion and the welfare state, as well as migration, and discourses of inclusion on marginal groups. She has recently published A minority and the state: Travellers in Britain in the twentieth century (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), and is co-author with Ben Rogaly of *Moving Histories of Class and Community: Identity, Place and Belonging in Contemporary England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, forthcoming May 2009).

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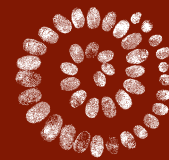
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