

# Hierarchies, scale, and privilege in the reproduction of national belonging

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It is increasingly recognised both that belonging divides hierarchically and that people have different capacities to be seen as belonging. However, while the existence of hierarchies of belonging is well documented from the perspective of ethnically minoritised and migrant groups, what characterises, produces, and underpins these hierarchies is largely unaddressed, as is a geographically informed analysis of their reproduction. This paper, based on interviews with white British people in the suburbs of London, takes a novel approach, examining the reproduction of national belonging among people for whom such belonging is relatively privileged. The paper identifies three constructions of national belonging within white British narratives – “belonging in Britain,” “belonging to Britain,” and “being of Britain” – and argues that, although not always recognised as such, the three constructions are hierarchical in their differing temporalities and connections to whiteness. The elucidation of these different belongings and, crucially, the recognition of their hierarchisation and scalar reproduction, represent major contributions to research on belonging, and also help to explain the exclusion from a full sense of national belonging articulated by British people of colour.

## KEYWORDS

belonging, British, hierarchies, nation, scale, whiteness

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Through 2016, the Brexit campaigns, debates, and vote to leave the European Union showed how Britain's citizens and residents are differently positioned within a national “hierarchy of belonging” (Wemyss, 2006), with some people understood to belong more, or more rightfully, than others (Bhambra, 2016). Although not a new argument (Back, 1996; Gilroy, 1987), this differential belonging has taken on renewed significance as domestic events and policies have repeatedly exposed the powerful symbolic boundaries that surround the British nation<sup>1</sup> and hierarchies of belonging embedded within it (Bhambra, 2016, 2018; de Noronha, 2018; Virdee & McGeever, 2018; Yuval-Davis et al., 2017).

Existing research on boundaries and, to a lesser extent, on hierarchies of national belonging has interrogated their existence and negotiation from the perspective of migrants and ethnically minoritised groups (Back et al., 2012; Jacobson, 1997; Lulle et al., 2018; Phoenix, 2011; Vadher & Barrett, 2009) and examined their reproduction in discourse (Wemyss, 2006, 2009), institutions (Aliverti, 2018), and policy (Jones et al., 2017; Yuval-Davis et al., 2017). In contrast, this paper, based on interview narratives produced with white British middle-class adults on the edge of London, draws attention away

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from the ethnic or immigrant “other” to focus on the ways that hierarchies of national belonging are reproduced by people whose belonging in and to Britain is relatively privileged. The intention is not to ignore or belittle the agency of minoritised individuals, nor to suggest that everyone in Britain should feel (or want to feel) British, but to shed light on the ways that dominant imaginings and discourses sustain more or less inclusive constructions of belonging. After all, as Boardman notes, “someone or something is doing the exclusion” (2010, p. 10).

While not necessarily privileged in all ways, spaces, and times, Britain's heterogeneous white middle classes enjoy relatively privileged and “automatic” belonging in Britain (Back, 2009, p. 207). They are, broadly speaking, people whose national identity is taken-for-granted and unquestioned (Skey, 2010), whose belonging is validated in everyday “economies of recognition” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 24), and for whom Britain is generally experienced as “a homely place ... that is both familiar and comfortable” (Skey, 2011, p. 234).<sup>2</sup> In attending to the discursive reproduction of national belonging among white British people – that of themselves and of others – the paper lies at the vanguard of a new agenda in migration geographies focused on the role of dominant groups in processes and politics of belonging. Responding to calls for new research on the power of the mainstream (Alba & Duyvendak, 2017; Antonsich, 2012; Nagel, 2009), its contributions highlight the value of this research agenda.

The paper makes three important theoretical contributions. First, in elucidating three different constructions of belonging within white middle-class participants’ narratives – “belonging *in* Britain,” “belonging *to* Britain,” and “being of Britain – it highlights the plurality of belongings that exist in relation to the nation and that entail both possibilities for and limits to the national belonging of migrants and minoritised Britons, offering a schema for conceptualising belonging in future research. Second, through examination of the three belongings” differing relationships to temporality and whiteness, it contributes new understanding of differential belongings. Third, by engaging with scale it offers new insight into the role of scale in the reproduction of hierarchies of belonging. In addition to these theoretical contributions, the paper provides nuanced empirical data on dominant groups’ understandings of national belonging in the UK, data which are also situated in relation to power and privilege. Although located in the south-east of England, these contributions have broader relevance to international debates in Geography on the potential for more inclusive nationalisms, which have often privileged analysis of boundaries over hierarchies (Antonsich, 2018a; Erdal & Strømsø, 2018; Matejskova & Antonsich, 2015; Strømsø, 2018), as well as the burgeoning literature on urban belonging and conviviality in the UK and beyond (Botterill, 2018; Nayak, 2017; Rishbeth & Rogaly, 2018; Wessendorf, 2016; Wise & Noble, 2016).

I begin the paper by introducing its theoretical framework, reviewing contextual literature on national belonging in Britain, and outlining the research methodology. The empirical part of the paper then outlines three discursive constructions of belonging identified in participants’ narratives and examines the extent to which they divide laterally or hierarchically (Brah, 1996, p. 90). Finally, I conclude by discussing the paper's contributions and significance for understanding hierarchies of belonging.

## 2 | BELONGING, RECOGNITION, AND POWER

In connecting matter to place, belonging is “inherently geographical”; yet, as a concept, it remains relatively ill-defined (Antonsich, 2010; Mee & Wright, 2009; Skrbiš et al., 2007). Belonging is affective but material (Mee & Wright, 2009), political and relational (Phoenix, 2011), involves being and longing (Probyn, 1996), occurs at different scales (Antonsich, 2010; Wood & Waite, 2011), and is negotiated in places and landscapes (Cresswell, 1996; Trudeau, 2006; White, 2015). Belonging is not natural but produced, performed, and maintained (Wood & Waite, 2011) and, while self-identification, attachments, and feelings are fundamental to any sense of belonging, belonging requires more than emotional attachment. As Jones and Krzyanowski explain, “at some level belonging needs to be supplemented and recognised by the ‘others,’ those who already belong to the group,” and to a lesser extent by external others (2008, p. 49; Paz, 2013). Belonging is, in other words, as much about being *recognised* as belonging as it is about self-identification, a substantive sense of belonging requiring recognition – if not acceptance – in the eyes of existing members (Taylor, 1994; Wood & Waite, 2011; Yuval-Davis, 2011). Where recognition is denied, or people are misrecognised, there can be severe psychological effects. As Taylor explains, non-/misrecognition “can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being” (1994, p. 25). However, the importance of being recognised as belonging goes beyond individual well-being, having historically translated into real differences in power, opportunity, and resources.

Within the field of ethnicity and nationalism, research notes the significance of boundary-maintenance to the persistence of communities, although the boundaries are never fixed and who is included and excluded changes over time (Anderson, 1983; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). In her work on the politics of belonging, Yuval-Davis (2006), Yuval-Davis (2011) explains that belonging involves active and ongoing processes of boundary-making and shaping that operate within frameworks of power to separate “us” from “them” and involve “the inclusion or exclusion of particular people, social categories

and groupings [...] *by those who have the power to do this*" (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 18, emphasis added). Despite their central role in processes and politics of belonging, there is surprisingly little empirical research documenting the ways that dominant groups – who have such power – produce and maintain boundaries of belonging, with calls for research to correct this oversight (Alba & Duyvendak, 2017; Antonsich, 2012; Nagel, 2009). At the same time, Anthias explains that belonging "is also about hierarchies which exist both within and across boundaries" (2008, p. 9).

While boundaries are formed through processes of differentiation and constitute "lines of separation or contact" between individuals or groups, hierarchies divide vertically through processes of stratification (Anthias, 2016; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Leitner & Miller, 2007; Newman & Paasi, 1998, p. 191). Both concepts are inherently relational, their position and meaning shifting over time, and both are entangled with power dynamics, boundaries produced and maintained by existing group members and hierarchies suggestive of top-down relations (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Leitner & Miller, 2007). The point at which the two intersect is important as this is where "difference" comes to be organised hierarchically and operates as "a vehicle for the legitimation of domination" (Brah, 1996, p. 91). Similarly, since boundaries are not necessarily hierarchical and a lower position in a hierarchy does not necessarily constitute exclusion, it is important to recognise when and where they are produced as such. Thinking not only about boundaries but also about hierarchies of belonging draws further attention to the complexity of belonging but is also vital in plural societies where those marginalised within hierarchies often include formal citizens who, in other spaces and times, are constructed as belonging.

### 3 | NATION, BOUNDARIES, AND HIERARCHIES OF BELONGING IN BRITAIN

It is often claimed that "British" is a civic/state identity and "English" an ethnic/national identity (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015). Although, as Leddy-Owen explains, it is "important not to exaggerate the extent to which British identities can be characterised as civic or as somehow deracialised" (2013, p. 1), research consistently finds Englishness to be more exclusive and more racialised than Britishness (Garner, 2016; Hickman et al., 2005; Leddy-Owen, 2012). Britishness is more inclusive, partly because people have fought to make it so, but also because Britishness was always multiple – with separate statuses for its overseas territories and specific English, Scottish, Welsh (and Northern Irish) formations – and historically applied to citizens of the UK and colonies (Bhambra, 2016). As Shilliam notes, imperial Britishness "set aside" the racial exclusivity associated with Englishness precisely so that colonial subjects "could, by vicarious association and at a secure distance from the metropolis, find a place of belonging in an empire normatively guided by the cultural competencies of Englishness" (2016, p. 244), albeit one that limited this belonging to empire and arguably never included people as national (Anderson et al., 2011). Today, Englishness remains an elusive identity for migrants and racialised minorities who are routinely excluded from Englishness, even when they are recognised as British (Garner, 2016; Leddy-Owen, 2012).

While citizenship in many ways "epitomizes" a politics of belonging, the boundaries it defines rarely match to national belonging (Anderson et al., 2011; Erdal et al., 2018, p. 707). Despite their formal inclusion as subjects, and later citizens, Britishness was historically defined against the colonial "other" and through its connection to racial whiteness (Lentin, 2008) and, in various ways and over time, this has shaped how Britishness is understood. In particular, the racialisation of Britishness as white (Parekh, 2000, p. 38) has consistently worked to marginalise and/or exclude those Britons descended from darker skinned colonial (later Commonwealth) citizens, legally (Hampshire, 2005; Paul, 1997) and normatively (Gilroy, 1987; Modood, 2010), from a full sense of belonging, despite attempts to re-brand Britishness as multicultural (Fortier, 2005; Solomos, 2003).

Today, the contemporary politics of belonging in Britain is one in which "pride in shared national belonging" and so-called "British values" are promoted, often specifically to migrants and minorities, while racism and discrimination against them are sidelined (Kundnani, 2007). Alongside the production of a hostile environment for unwanted migrants that disproportionately affects racialised groups (Jones et al., 2017; Yuval-Davis et al., 2017), widespread conflation of "immigrants" and "ethnic minorities" (Gilroy, 1987; Lentin, 2008), and untiring debate over the integration and loyalty of (some) migrants' children and grandchildren, which in connecting them permanently to ancestral "homelands" positions these Britons as "forever non-British and never belonging" (Raj, 2003, p. 201), this politics reinforces the idea – made glaringly visible in the Brexit debates (Bhambra, 2016) – that some British people are more British than others.

In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that research with ethnically minoritised Britons repeatedly evidences their feelings of exclusion and marginalisation from dominant constructions of nationhood, despite birthplace, citizenship, and self-identification as British. Exclusion is empirically documented from the perspective of minoritised Britons in relation to leisure and social life (Fletcher & Spracklen, 2014; Raman, 2014), terrorism and security (Phoenix, 2011; Tufail & Poynting, 2013), recognition (Modood, 1992, 2010), affective encounters (Nayak, 2017), Britishness (Jacobson, 1997; Vadher &

Barrett, 2009), and notions of Englishness (Leddy-Owen, 2012; Tyler, 2012). Within this empirical literature, the relationship between boundaries and hierarchies of belonging is largely unaddressed; while some research mentions boundaries of belonging, very little talks about hierarchies.

The literature on hierarchies of belonging is largely dominated by sociologists whose work has tended to fall into one of two camps. On the one hand, this research shows how hierarchies have been formalised in institutions (Aliverti, 2018), discourse (Wemyss, 2006, 2009), law, and policy (Bhambra, 2016; Hampshire, 2005; Yuval-Davis et al., 2017). Here, researchers have attempted to shed light on the structures and logics that underpin existing hierarchies to show how they exclude/marginalise migrants and minoritised Britons. On the other hand, research has examined the experience and negotiation of hierarchies of belonging by minoritised groups (Back et al., 2012; Phoenix, 2011), including ostensibly white minorities (Hickman et al., 2005; Lulle et al., 2018). In their work with young migrants, Back et al. (2012) identify complex hierarchies of belonging involving selective and conflict-ridden processes of inclusion and exclusion that position people as “contingent insiders.” Contingency is also evidenced by Phoenix (2011), who documents Somali girls’ strategies to “shift up” hierarchies of belonging, for example, by distancing themselves from other low-down groups (a tactic also used by EU migrants in the UK (Lulle et al., 2018)). As this suggests, migrants and minoritised Britons are not passive in relation to hierarchies of belonging, in many cases constructing new identities and belongings outside of existing hierarchies (Back, 1996) or within new hierarchies of belonging (Back et al., 2012). Yet, this agency does not negate a general lack of power relative to other groups (Valentine, 2007) and, as Phoenix (2011) points out, it can be the experience of racism and exclusion that underlies the construction of new identities.

With its novel focus on the role of Britain's white majority, this paper builds on a small international body of work on dominant groups’ involvement in processes and politics of belonging. Notable within this is the work of Hage (1998), who identifies two distinct and hierarchical modes of national belonging in the Australian context. One is the “passive belonging” of people who feel “at home” and part of the nation, the other the “governmental belonging” of those who feel “legitimately entitled” to make managerial statements about the nation (p. 46). The latter is a more entitled belonging associated with white Anglo-Celtic Australians, which reflects their position at the top of a hierarchy of belonging and betrays a fantasy of dominance in which the individual is “master of national space” (p. 17). Following Hage, Skey (2011, 2013) has documented the privileged belonging of Britain's white middle classes, showing how their “taken-for-granted status” as nationals “underpins claims to belonging and entitlement” (2013, p. 81). While Skey does little to examine the reproduction of hierarchies themselves, Wemyss’ (2006, 2009) research demonstrates how the imagined autochthony of London's white working classes is consolidated through discourses of tolerance – understood as “the conditional withholding of force by those at the top of a ‘hierarchy of belonging’” (2006, p. 15) – and specifically the construction of local Bengalis as objects of toleration (see also Tyler, 2012). Her work clearly demonstrates how local hierarchies of belonging connect to, and are supported by, hierarchical understandings of belonging at other scales, including the national. It is, therefore, vital that research goes beyond national (Hage, 1998), urban (Back et al., 2012; Bauder, 2016), or local (Wemyss, 2006) to study belonging *across scale*. Geographers have already contributed significantly in this regard, demonstrating how places, spaces, and scales combine in the production of belonging, and highlighting a scalar dissonance among migrants and minorities, for whom local belongings are often experienced alongside national exclusions (Antonsich, 2018a, 2018b; Isakjee, 2016; Koefoed & Simonsen, 2012; Nayak, 2017; Wilson, 2015). There is, however, a need for more research on how scales work together (or not) in the *reproduction* of belongings.

#### 4 | RESEARCHING NATIONAL BELONGING ACROSS SCALE

This paper is based on analysis of interview data produced with 26 white British residents in the suburbs of north-east London and west Essex. Contrary to dominant representations of suburbia (Vaughan et al., 2009), the area has a large and well-established (British)-Asian population, as well as a sizeable, albeit declining, Jewish population. However, ethnic diversity is spread unevenly, as is the foreign-born population: from the London end of the research area to the Essex end, the proportion of foreign-born residents falls from 22% to 8% as the percentage identifying as white British/English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish rises from 62.6% to 89% (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

As an instrumental case study, the case was intended to facilitate “understanding of something else” (Stake, 1995, p. 17) – here, the area's diversity and settled ethnic minority populations facilitating the examination of different bases and forms of belonging in contexts of postcolonial multiculturalism. Locating the research in a specific geography also provided opportunities to explore how national belonging works out in local places. Indeed, while Berg and Sigona assert that “the very local level is more important than the national level for understanding questions of belonging and expressions of diversity” (2013, p. 349), their division of the two is unnecessary (and arguably impossible). The national is always already

“dialectically intertwined” with other scales (Jones & Fowler, 2007, p. 338) and local places inevitably connect to broader narratives and imaginaries (Anderson & Taylor, 2005; Nayak, 2017; Watt, 2010). In this case, the area's proximity to the super-diversity of London and to East London, with its long histories of migration and significance within the national immigration imaginary, was especially relevant.

Between March 2015 and May 2016, I conducted multiple interviews with 26 men and women aged between 30 and 75, during which I asked about their national identities, local change, integration, and notions of Britishness. The first interview – a largely unstructured subject-oriented oral history – provided a view of the world from participants' points of view. This interview laid the ground for subsequent conversations and allowed me to see what meanings participants gave to places, events, and peoples, as well as how key concepts were located in their lives. The second interview, adapted from Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) conceptual interview, attempted to chart the structure of participants' conceptions of nation, integration, and belonging by “exploring the meaning and the conceptual dimensions of these central terms, as well as their positions and links within a conceptual network” (p. 151). Where possible, a third interview asked participants to reflect on the interviews, having already received a verbatim transcript. Repeat interviewing ensured that interviews were a suitable length but also allowed me to gradually build rapport and, in the case of the third interview, created space for clarification.

Although individual articulations of class and whiteness varied, all participants were broadly recognisable as part of Britain's white middle classes, characterised by engagement in processes of class distinction, narratives of individual agency, and an ability to establish and maintain their lifestyles and values as normative and implicitly superior (Lawler, 2005; Skeggs, 2004). The majority of participants took their whiteness for granted and some looked confused when I asked their ethnicity, presumably assuming I could see it. Only one participant – a middle-aged Jewish man – queried his whiteness. Initially, participants were recruited online through posts in local fora and offline via strategically placed posters and flyers. While initial participants were largely self-selecting, later participants were purposively recruited to produce a more age- and gender-balanced sample, in some cases drawing on connections made through local participation. All participants had had British citizenship from birth and identified as British in some way, albeit with differing intensity and sometimes alongside other national identities. Participants often represented Britishness as open and inclusive and, contrary to findings from the south-west of England (Garner, 2016), most articulated positive views of multiculturalism and recognised it as part of the lived reality of Britain's cities.

My positionality as a young, white British/English woman from the research area affected the conduct and content of the interviews, as well as my interpretation of participants' narratives. I often had the sense that participants felt able to classify me, not only because of our shared membership of Britain's middle classes (Benson, 2011) but also because of our shared geography. In some cases, my relative insider status seemed to affect participants' ability to open up, particularly where they assumed that I would understand them. However, it is important not to assume that this is the case and in some cases my social proximity appeared to increase awareness of difference (Ganga & Scott, 2006).

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using a combination of thematic coding – based on themes in the literature and ideas that had arisen iteratively during fieldwork – and narrative analysis. In the next section, I outline three constructions of national belonging identified through this analysis. Together they offer a new schema for thinking about belonging. However, it is important to note that these are by no means the only ways to belong in Britain (Tolia-Kelly, 2006). Moreover, participants did not equally narrate all three forms; in practice, they were variously deployed in ways that highlight the discursive power of white middle-class narratives.

## 5 | THREE CONSTRUCTIONS OF BELONGING

### 5.1 | Belonging in Britain

“Belonging in Britain” shared many characteristics with dominant understandings of integration, defined as “processes of interaction between migrants and the individuals and institutions of the receiving society” (Spencer, 2011, p. 203). This belonging was characterised by local involvement, interaction, and/or a sense of an individual/group “fitting in” locally, and notably people could be recognised as belonging *in* Britain without being, or being seen as, British.

Participants' narratives revealed the inclusion of migrant and ethnically minoritised Britons locally. Indeed, in this geographic context – with its proximity to London and established migrant and minority ethnic populations – it was clear that a “different” ethno-national background did not necessarily position people as any less part of the local area. Migrants and minorities were generally recognised as part of everyday life, as Jane<sup>3</sup> a woman in her 40s who had lived in the area with her partner for 15 years – implied when she talked about Mr Chopra, who she identified as Uganda Asian, and the “people in the Chinese”:

If we ever moved away, um, we would miss... [...] we've got friendly people in the Chinese 'round the corner. We've got Mr Chopra where we get our papers. We've got our friends in, you know our friends, 'shop friends' [...] It's not 'I'm going to get the bread,' it's 'I'm going to go and see Sally,' or 'I'm going to go and see Mr Chopra.'

Regardless of their ethno-national "difference," the various people in Jane's account were seen as part of local life and landscapes and had contributed to Jane's sense of place and belonging through the repeated unfolding of actions over time (Back, 2007). While she knows some of their names, Jane explained that this knowledge was less important than the familiarity of people's presence.

Being recognised as part of local communities and landscapes did not mean that migrants and ethnically minoritised people ceased to be seen in relation to fixed ethno-national categories, simply that ethno-national difference was not antithetical to local belonging. Below, for example, it is clear that being "Asian" or "Polish" does not denote out-of-place-ness or negate local belonging for Kate, a woman in her 30s who grew up in north-east London:

I find [this area] much more straight-forward, and that's one of the things I like about it. And I think I'm here for the same reasons that a lot of people are which is, whether they're white or Asian or Polish or whatever, which is basically that it's a nice area and ... It's a nice place to live.

However, as Kate's comments suggest, local belonging was also read in relation to place. In this case, Kate predicates her fellow residents' belonging in the area on them being there for the same reasons as her, implying the significance of "fitting in" and complying with local "schemes of order" (Wimmer, 2004, p. 10; Cresswell, 1996), likely centred around white middle-class suburban norms (Tyler, 2012).

Despite the tendency to privilege ethnicity as a form of difference (Valentine, 2015), the majority of participants' presented it as less important for local belonging than an engagement and involvement in local life. Although not limited to migrants, the significance of local engagement as a basis for belonging was often clear in participants' assertions of migrants' belonging:

My husband's a migrant and he—... he does consider ... I mean he, he considers himself dual-national, and he's fitted in. [...] He was, erm, a churchwarden at the local church, he was a governor at the school. He got involved with things locally and took an interest. (Linda, 50s)

Where local belonging was perceived through local involvement, care, and commitment to local places, it was entirely possible for migrants like Linda's husband to be recognised as belonging in the local area and, by extension, as belonging in Britain.

For some migrants (including Linda's husband), local and national belonging may start to fold into one another. However, migrants' claims to national belonging were not necessarily recognised within wider economies of recognition (Antonsich, 2018b). Many participants distinguished, more and less explicitly, between local belonging and nationhood. Therefore, while local belonging provided opportunities for integrated migrants to be recognised as belonging in Britain, it did not guarantee recognition *as* British or produce a recognised belonging *to* the national community in the eyes of white British people. Even when positioned firmly within local places and landscapes and as part of British society, integrated migrants often remained exogenous to the nation. They were able to belong in Britain without being seen as British or as belonging to the nation.

The limited potential for local belonging to "scale up" as a mode of *national* belonging is suggested below, as Oliver – a man in sixties, originally from south London – describes rejecting the national claim made by his son's friend's father, despite what he implies is a significant period of residence:

His dad was Greek [...], you know, the World Cup was on or something and then he said, 'How do you think we're going to do?' And I thought 'Hmm' [laughs]. So, he meant England, which was quite interesting. But, er, he'd been here a while.

Although it is not clear whether Oliver recognises the man as belonging locally and therefore as belonging (*de facto*) in Britain, the dissonance between local and national belonging was clear in Oliver's understanding of his own belongings; his local involvement (or lack thereof) appeared entirely irrelevant to his personal taken-for-granted sense of national belonging.

## 5.2 | Belonging to Britain

Despite participants' various assertions that it is relatively easy to become British, that being British is just/mainly about formal status, and that migrants can become "more British than the British" (Oliver, 60s), possibilities for migrants to be recognised as belonging to the national community were limited and citizenship was only part of the story. "Belonging to Britain" relied on recognition of a shared culture and upbringing, albeit often with the underlying assumption of formal citizenship.

Several participants suggested, more and less explicitly, that while integrated migrants could belong in Britain, actually being British in the sense of belonging to the national community usually required someone to be "born and bred" in Britain. Phil – who was in his 40s and had lived in Latvia throughout his 20s – seemed to imply such a distinction when he reverted back to talking about integration despite having been asked about migrants' possibilities for becoming British:

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| Author | Do you think it's possible for migrants to become British?  |
| Phil   | You'll be part of the–, part of the community, once you–, your children are part of the community and you know they may have been born, or they may have grown up here. Those are already pretty strong ties. I suppose in a sense, you know they don't have that sort of common cultural thing [...] if they grew up outside the UK but [...] I think you can become integrated, yeah. |
| Author | Do you think–, is there a difference between being integrated into a country and kind of being part of the nation of the country?   |
| Phil   | Yeah, I think ... Yes, I think there probably ... Yeah, I think you've put your finger on it there. [...] You know integration is one thing but actually being–, being British or being–... because you've grown up with it, I think is, that's something much deeper that perhaps takes a generation or two.   |

As Phil's comments suggest, within the powerful idiom "born and bred," upbringing was particularly important (Edwards, 2000). Phil understood national identity as developed through embeddedness in a common culture and this made it harder for him to recognise people who had migrated to the UK as adults *as* British nationals. While it was not necessarily how he thought things should be, Phil's was a practical understanding of nationhood, based on his own experience of migration. When I asked what he thought it would have taken for him to be seen as a national where he had lived in Latvia, Phil explained that after 10 years people still recognised him as nationally "other." In the end, he said: "I couldn't have ever become Latvian I think, even if I spent the rest of my life there ... I just feel myself to be too different."

In suggesting that being national requires common cultural upbringing, moulded through being brought up in place, Phil recognised the limited potential that migrants have for being recognised as British. Although he acknowledged their ability to fully integrate and belong in Britain – having felt "very much at home" abroad himself – nationhood was simply less transferrable. Other participants made similar arguments. Following an essentialist logic, Ivy (60s), for example, suggested that she would always think "Ah but you're Polish" and Ross (30s) described the impossibility of becoming "somebody of a country" if you were not raised there:

In a sense if you're not born and raised here you will always be a foreigner, even if you're naturalised British. [...] I could go and live in France for the rest of my life but that won't make me French. You know even if I–, even if I speak fluent French, I eat French food, I, erm I don't know ... do kind of–, listen to French music etc. it still won't make me French. I'll still be British because this is where I was born and brought up. [...] To some extent you can adopt the values of another country but you'll never be the same as somebody who's been born and brought up in that country.

Ross' comments suggest a distinction between acting national and being national, in which the latter is more authentic. Similar distinctions were also evident in participants' deliberations over other people's national identity claims. Below, for example, Rob – a man in his 30s who had grown up locally – undermined the Britishness of British Asians when he described them as "fitting in" and "enjoying" British things rather than being British:

Rob: I always remember there's the thing [in *Goodness Gracious Me*] where they go to a British restaurant and they say 'I want Fish and Chips and I want it really bland' and all that.<sup>4</sup> So ok, yeah, they [British Asians] can mock us and what have you but they get it and fit in. So yeah, if Indian people do like fish and chips and

that then yeah, they're enjoying the British side of it [...]. But it's like us, we don't mind going and having an Indian meal.

While constructing the long-established local British Asian community as “fitting in” and “enjoying” Britishness, Rob simultaneously constructed a pre-existing (and implicitly white) British “we” against which “they” are positioned and to which multiculturalism is added. In his eyes, this supposedly indigenous “we,” reified through his use of the word “us,” does not merely fit in and act British – as British Asians do; they are British.

Although Rob undermined the Britishness of British Asians, for others, the idea of questioning their Britishness was laughable. Several participants used the accents of British people of colour to evidence their upbringing in Britain and, therefore, to legitimise their Britishness. Thus, while accents are capable of excluding migrants after many years, even decades (Joyce, 2010), an understanding of accents as signalling place of upbringing (Kiely et al., 2001) makes them a relatively easy way for British people of colour to be recognised as belonging to the national community. Of course, this relatively easy inclusion needs to be read in relation to the area's long-established ethnically minoritised populations; indeed, in several cases, participants described the normality of hearing British accents from people of colour. Even so, during fieldwork I noted various instances of surprise at both the regional accents of British people of colour and the audible difference of white migrants, suggesting that British accents are still naturalised onto white bodies in ways that they are not naturalised to black and brown ones (Hage, 1998).

The naturalisation of “national capitals” (Hage, 1998, p. 62) – those styles and dispositions recognised and valued as national – to white bodies is symptomatic of the historically constructed connection between Britishness and whiteness, which also positions white people as generative of British history, culture, and tradition. While belonging *to* Britain is not limited to white bodies and non-white skin can be countered by an individual's accent and cultural “fit,” the imagined link between Britishness and whiteness means that the cultural markers of normative Britishness – within which people “born and bred” in Britain are expected to fit – continue to be marked by whiteness. This does not mean that belonging to the national community is always or necessarily drawn along colour lines, nor that only corporeally white people can be recognised as British, but that whiteness itself, as a non-corporeal idea or code, shapes ideas of Britishness, so that the closer someone appears to the “norms of whiteness” (Garner, 2012, p. 446), the more likely they are to be recognised as belonging to the national community. This has clear implications for British people of colour, for whom recognition as belonging *to* the nation comes to rely on their ability (and willingness) to “inhabit whiteness” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 153).

### 5.3 | Being “of” Britain

While “belonging to Britain” required an inhabitation of (non-corporeal) whiteness, “being of Britain” revealed the continued significance of corporeal whiteness. Based on ancestry and genetic ideas of Britishness, this form of belonging was reserved for those bodies recognised as part of Britain's “genealogical community of shared descent” (Nash, 2016, p. 2). Here, it was not only formal citizenship that was of limited relevance; cultural markers of belonging were also marginalised.

Paul – a man in his 60s, originally from west London – described himself as a “Native Briton, Englishman and European,” labels he understood through biological conceptions of race. Building on contemporary discourses of European “indigeneity” and “ancient Britons” (Nash, 2013), Paul claimed autochthonous belonging based on the idea that his ancestors have “always been here”:

I'm Native Briton, with a capital N, you know in the same way that you have Native Americans or Aboriginal Australians, you know people who have been there for thousands of years, whose roots are there. You know, my ancestors didn't sort of come here, I don't know, two generations ago; but they've always been here, probably since the last Ice-Age.

When I laughed at the idea that Paul could trace his family back to the last Ice Age, assuming he was exaggerating for effect, he asserted that based on my appearance the same could be said for me. The assertion showed that, for Paul, ancestry (and by association autochthonous belonging) is read from the skin, while also revealing his belief in a historically homogenous white nation.

For Paul, the national “us” was limited to white bodies. He justified this through a racialised imaginary of ancestral presence, which allowed him to distinguish the belonging of British people of colour from that of white British people:



They talk about ‘we,’ ‘us,’ ‘our’ British ... and they mean everyone. They mean you know all these ... And I say no. Bullshit ... When I listen to the radio and they talk about ‘our history,’ [...] ‘our culture,’ ‘our ancestors’ and I think, Well whose? Whose history? Whose ancestors? Whose culture? Not the woman's in the burqa or that black guy. That's not his history. No matter how— No matter how nice he is it's not his history! His history is in Africa or the West Indies or wherever, not here.

In distinguishing between white British people whose history is “here” and people of colour whose history lies elsewhere, Paul constructs their histories as mutually exclusive, despite the historical connections between them (including through British imperialism) and ascribes “otherness” to black and brown bodies. In doing so, he builds on “long-standing racialised structures of feeling” (Virdee & McGeever, 2018, p. 1804) that reproduce black and brown Britons as non-/less British. While white bodies are constructed as both generated by and generative of the geographies to which they are tied, those not recognised as part of the genealogical community are seen to have “no natural place in the nation” (Nash, 2016, p. 2), their exclusion and/or lower position within the hierarchy justified on the basis of perceived non-relatedness.

While Paul was explicit about the connection between race and nationhood, Rob (30s) articulated a racialised understanding of nationhood more implicitly through the logic of genetics. This allowed him to construct Britishness as open to white people in and from the Old Commonwealth yet exclusive of darker-skinned citizens from the Commonwealth and their descendants:

[Cliff Richard] was born in India but ... Yeah there's several people ... Spike Milligan, wasn't he born in India? There're several famous people who were born in India, but they're really not Indian. That's just where they were born, which is a physical thing rather than actually a genetic type thing.

Rob's reliance of blood and descent implicitly sanctions a racial vision of the nation (Erdal et al., 2018) and his idea of a “national family tree” (Nash, 2016, p. 2) allows corporeal whiteness to be privileged within constructions of Britishness, without being named as white (Caluya, 2011).

For Rob, British imperial emigration was little more than a blip in a much longer history of territorial connection and ancestral rootedness. When it came to imperial migrants, Rob constructed them not as migrants but exported ethnic nationals, “kith and kin” (Gilroy, 1987, p. 70), explaining that if they migrated to the UK he would see them as “moving back” because “England, is their country. They've only just like briefly moved over there.” Speaking about cousins descended from British emigrants to Rhodesia, for example, Rob explained:

In my opinion they are British because they look British and their DNA is all completely 100%, erm, you know British. So, if they then moved back to the UK and they then get a British passport, yeah in my opinion they are considered British.

That 300 years of settler colonialism could be considered “brief” demonstrates the weight of DNA as an “arbiter of truth” within performative narratives (Nash, 2013; Nelson, 2016, p. 4), as well as the flexibility of the genealogical imagination, which at times stretched as far back as the Viking invasion and Ice Age.

Through the lens of genetic genealogy, national identities only change through “miscegenation,” taking several generations, as Rob explained:

[She's] married into, erm, with a black man [...] and then they've got the kids so they've obviously got DNA from Britain and England and all that, so ... And then once they interact with other English then they carry on that DNA getting more, more English and what have you [...] But yeah over centuries it will pittle down to, erm, that they'll be considered as English, you know 90% English, or British, just like us back in the days of the Vikings, you know flying Norway flags. That's pittled out and now we're all flying English flags...

The fact that Rob thinks becoming British will take generations shows both the possibilities and limits for ethnicised minorities' future inclusion *as* British in his vision of the national community, as well as the potential for reinforcing essentialist notions of identity through genetic genealogy (Nash, 2012). It is also notable that in this construction of belonging “British” was used interchangeably with “English,” both denoting biological whiteness and genetic rootedness.

Although explicitly articulated by only a handful of participants, the importance of ancestry and “belonging in shared pasts” marked participants’ accounts, even when they asserted civic visions of Britishness, as they articulated their own national belongings in relation to the national (but also regional/local) histories of their families. In so doing, participants, often unintentionally, reproduced hierarchies and undermined the belonging of others (Skrbiš et al., 2007), excluding, or at least marginalising, British people whose roots lie overseas as “non-” or “less-authentically” British.

## 6 | RECOGNISING HIERARCHIES AND THEIR REPRODUCTION

Recognising the central role of dominant groups in processes and politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011), this paper has sought to deepen understandings of national belonging through analysis of its reproduction within white British society. Participants implicitly and explicitly distinguished between “belonging in Britain,” “belonging to Britain,” and “being of Britain,” revealing differential hierarchies of national belonging in which the positioning of migrants and minorities is selective and contingent (Back et al., 2012). While belonging *in* Britain was open to immigrants, provided they integrated with local communities and complied with place norms, belonging *to* Britain was recognised through a perception of shared cultural upbringing, providing opportunities for differently racialised Britons to be recognised as belonging beyond the local. It was clear that migrants and ethnically minoritised Britons can be, and often are, recognised as belonging in and to Britain, the latter also denoting recognition as national. However, they were much less likely to be considered of Britain in the sense of belonging to a genealogical national community. Meanwhile, white British people were routinely recognised not only as belonging in and to Britain but also as being of Britain. Their place in national space was naturalised and, assumed to be part of the “genealogical community of shared descent” (Nash, 2016, p. 2), they were considered “generative of ... nationhood” (Anderson & Taylor, 2005, p. 3) in ways that British people of colour were not.

Contrary to claims that ethnically minoritised groups/individuals are not recognised as British because they are not considered native (Brah, 1996, p. 191), the research suggests that there are possibilities for being recognised as national and as belonging to the national community that do not require someone to be seen as native to it. The crucial question, then, is whether the different belongings divide laterally or hierarchically (Brah, 1996), that is, whether people are positioned hierarchically as more or less national or just differently national. In the British case presented, the three belongings have different temporal bases – read through behaviour, culture, accent, and ancestry – and seem to reflect, respectively, the civic, ethno-cultural, and genetic dimensions of nationhood (Erdal et al., 2018). However, analysing the different belongings in terms of whiteness reveals the extent to which they are also about proximity to (different kinds of) whiteness. Given their different temporalities and connections to whiteness, and the differential accessibility of these temporalities and whitenesses, I argue that the belongings presented are inescapably hierarchical, with “being of” carrying most weight. Even where participants explicitly challenged racialised hierarchies of national belonging, such hierarchies were often evident in their own individual and familial narratives of belonging.

That the most substantive belonging identified required connection to imagined national genealogical pasts provides an explanation for British people of colour's experiences of exclusion, as well as hierarchies identified within the ostensibly white majority (Gilbert, 2008; Hickman et al., 2005). However, recognising the different belongings as hierarchical has important conceptual implications beyond this fact. Most notably, without an appreciation of their hierarchisation, those excluded from exclusionary constructions of nationhood may appear included (e.g., as belonging in the nation) and the privileged belonging of others (e.g., as being of the nation) may be obscured. In other words, the marginalisation of minoritised groups within hierarchies of belonging can actually be masked by their inclusion within less substantive boundaries. The conceptual significance of recognising different belongings as hierarchical therefore goes beyond the British case, extending to all those multicultural and postcolonial contexts where top-down narratives assert inclusive nationalisms based on shared norms and participation in society, while overlooking their relative value as bases for belonging.

Through its engagement with scale, the research demonstrates the relative significance of different scales to national belonging, as well as how scale is entangled in the reproduction and maintenance of hierarchies of belonging. Particularly notable is the way that inclusive assertions of belonging at one scale can enable the perpetuation of exclusion at another. In the British case, for example, migrants and minorities are often discursively constructed as belonging in Britain's towns and cities yet remain marginalised in relation to the nation. This marginalisation is then obscured within white liberal discourses by a façade of inclusion in which their local and national belongings are collapsed into one another, drawing attention away from more exclusive constructions of belonging and, therefore, enabling hierarchies and more exclusive nationalisms to persist unchallenged. Although local and national scales are always embedded in one another, collapsing the two is therefore risky, especially given the limited potential for local belonging to scale up as a mode of national belonging. The limited potential of local belonging to scale up, which suggests that claims to national belonging grounded in the local may carry

little weight among dominant group members, is also highly significant in the context of burgeoning research on urban belonging and conviviality (Botterill, 2018; Nayak, 2017; Rishbeth & Rogaly, 2018) in demonstrating the importance of considering local belonging alongside other, potentially more exclusionary, scales of belonging.

While a plurality of belongings are possible and migrants and minoritised groups are by no means passive in relation to hierarchies of belonging (Back et al., 2012), their elective belongings must always be considered in the wider context of their ability to belong *and* to be recognised as such by people whose belonging is more privileged if we are really to understand the contingent experience of (non-)belonging as shaped by the politics of mis/recognition. With differential belongings evidenced in many national contexts, it is, therefore, crucial that future research not only considers what kinds of belongings are possible (and recognisable) for different groups but also acknowledges when different belongings are reproduced as hierarchical. In doing so, it is essential that research attend to the re/production and maintenance of hierarchies of belonging among dominant groups for these have greatest potential to translate into real material differences of power, opportunity, and resources.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Although there is disagreement over whether Britain is a nation, an understanding of Britain as an Empire (Bhambra, 2016) and/or as a state (McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015) does not necessarily negate its being a nation (Modood, 2016) and I argue that, to the extent that Britain is imagined as a meaningful community, research must be open to the idea of Britain as a nation.

<sup>2</sup> Within Britain's heterogeneous white middle classes, some people's Britishness is likely to be more ambiguous than others' (Gilbert, 2008; Hickman et al., 2005). Within my sample this was particularly the case with participants who identified as having a Jewish background.

<sup>3</sup> All names used are pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> *Goodness Gracious Me* was a late 1990s BBC sketch-comedy. The show, whose cast consisted of British Asian actors, explored aspects of British Asian life and often reversed roles to show white British people from a British Asian perspective, as in the 'Going for an English' scene referred to by Rob.

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