

***What does migration mean for
the ‘white working class’ in
the UK?***

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Key questions

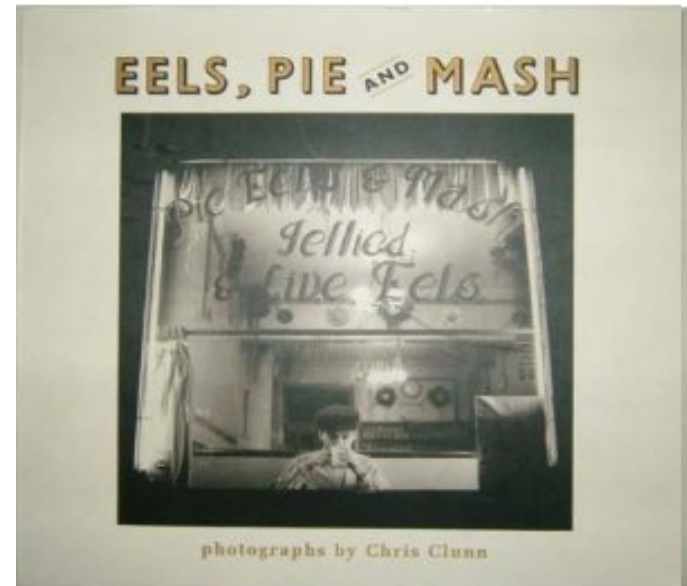
- How has the ‘white working class’ featured in media and policy debates?
- What is the evidence regarding the impact of migration on ‘white working class’ communities?
- Are there more helpful ways of framing existing debates?

How has the white working class featured in policy and media debates?

The 'chav' phenomenon



The 'beleaguered native'



What is the evidence regarding the impact of migration on ‘white working class’ communities? (1)

- The House of Lords Select Committee 2008 report found that ‘in the long run the main economic effect of immigration is to enlarge the economy, with relatively small costs and benefits for the incomes of resident populations’.
- Specific sectors of the economy rely heavily on migrant labour. Chappell et al (2009) point to the importance of post-2004 migrants in particular in supporting the rural economy, including agriculture, food processing and hospitality.
- There is a new geography to post 2004 migration. In 1991-2006, three quarters of international net immigration in Britain took place to just three regions, London, the South East and Yorkshire and Humber; between 2004 and 2006 this figure declined to under 60 per cent.

Czarek: *Windsor, to Winchester, Chichester, Brighton...* and, where is that sandy beach? Jesus... *Bournemouth. I worked in Peterborough. I worked to this place where Lady Hamilton lived. Yes, is big....* Part of the palace was burned and my job was to carry outside those things which survived the fire and archeologists would recreate them. .. I worked there *six months*. They liked me there.

And how did you find jobs?

Czarek: I got that address from my friends, I went there, and second time, at 7.00am a guy would come, asking 'work, work, work', there was a long queue there, lots of coloured people... And with them I worked in *Mansion House*, I worked there for three months, I worked in Peterborough, I worked in Hammersmith, I worked in Wimbledon, *opposite London, Watford*, I worked also, a big sports centre outside London, Guildford.

(italics indicates spoken in English, interview otherwise in Polish).

What is the evidence regarding the impact of migration on ‘white working class’ communities? (2)

- There is an acknowledged knowledge gap especially around short term immigration to the UK; the distribution of migrants at the local/regional/national levels; and most of all around the issue of illegal immigration.
- Evidence points to ongoing discrimination in the labour market against migrants, for example, almost all of the immigrant groups outrank the UK-born in terms of length of time in education, but few groups seem able to translate this into positive labour market outcomes (Sriskandarajah et al, 2007).
- Impact of migration varies depending on time-scale (short versus long term), definition of migrant, locality/region.

Magda: I was working in this restaurant in Camden, a Mexican restaurant. It was a funny place, because it was a Mexican restaurant, and the chefs were from Algeria, Sudan and Poland. But it was a nice place, because we were paid a low wage, for a day, £20...

So you weren't working legally, were you?

Magda: No. We were all illegals, all Polish there. Almost all Polish, but the owner's absolutely crazy. One day he would explode and shout at you, then another day he would be fine. He was absolutely bananas.... after I worked in an internet cafe, and I was working for three Algerian guys. And they were paying me some shit money. Like £3 per hour. When they paying me, because most of the time they weren't paying me. They were some crazy guys, troublemakers. They still owe me £500. I never managed to get it back. They were not normal. One of them hated me, another of them wanted to date me. I have plenty of stories like this...

Do you feel like you've got any long-term plan?

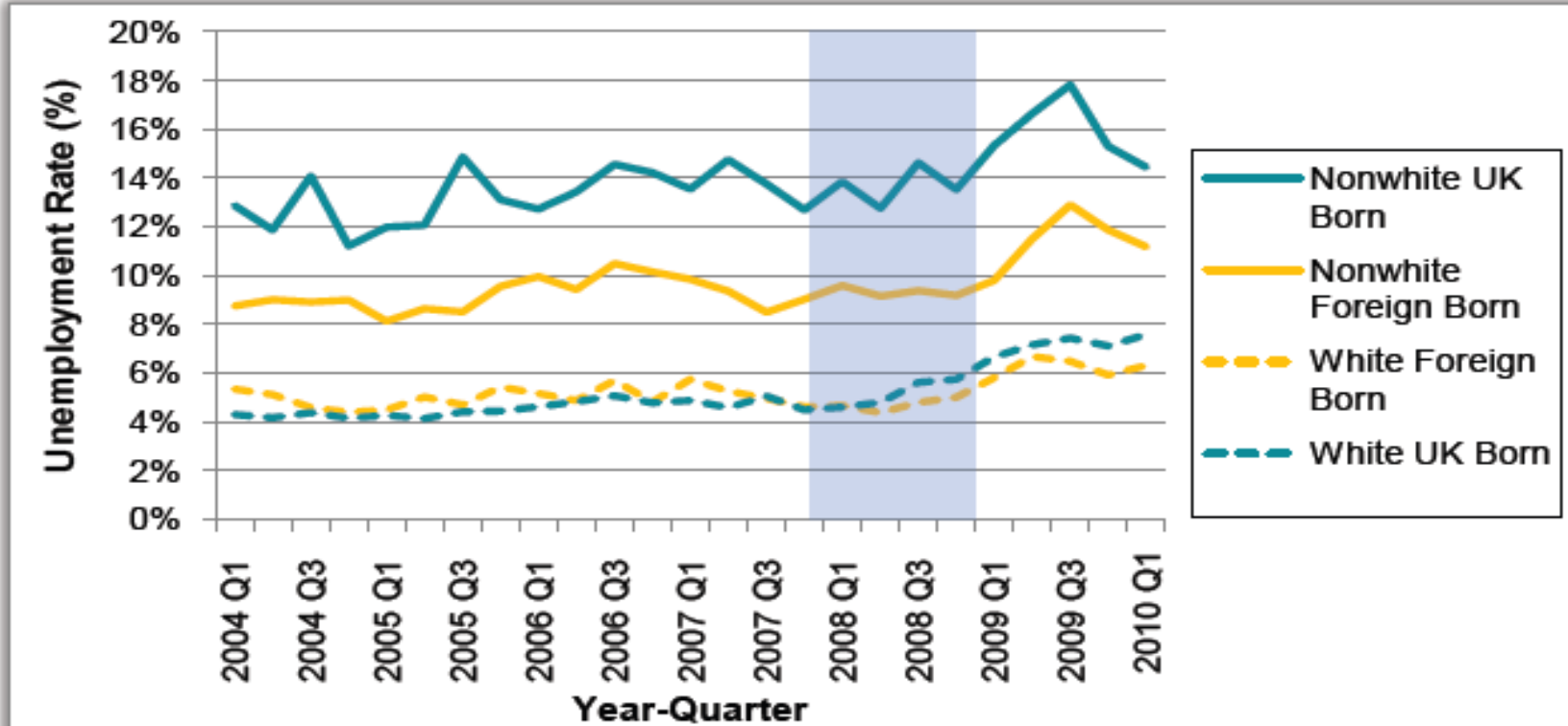
Magda: Now I'm so stuck that I'm not really sure what I'm gonna do. I'm still planning to go back to Gdansk, go to the university, because of this I cannot carry on like this now. I don't like my job... But I'm stuck in a place where, if I go to Poland it's not gonna be OK, because all my friends, they've moved on now, they usually have families and good jobs.... When I came here, because I didn't have a visa, the only places I could look was cafes and restaurants, and I just got stuck in that. (interview in English)

Wages

- Significant evidence from a range of studies of the EU and on UK showing that overall the effects of migration on wages are ‘either insignificantly different from zero, or slightly positive’ (Reed and Latorre, 2009).
- When overall impact is broken down by occupation, there is some evidence to suggest a ‘significant, but small negative impact’ on wages in areas of high in-migration, especially in semi/unskilled occupations.
- The House of Lords Select Committee report called for government to adequately enforce minimum wage legislation.

Unemployment

Figure UK-5. UK Unemployment, by Minority Status and Nativity, 2004-2009



Source: Labor Force Survey, 2004-2009

Note: excludes individuals who identify their ethnicity as "other race".

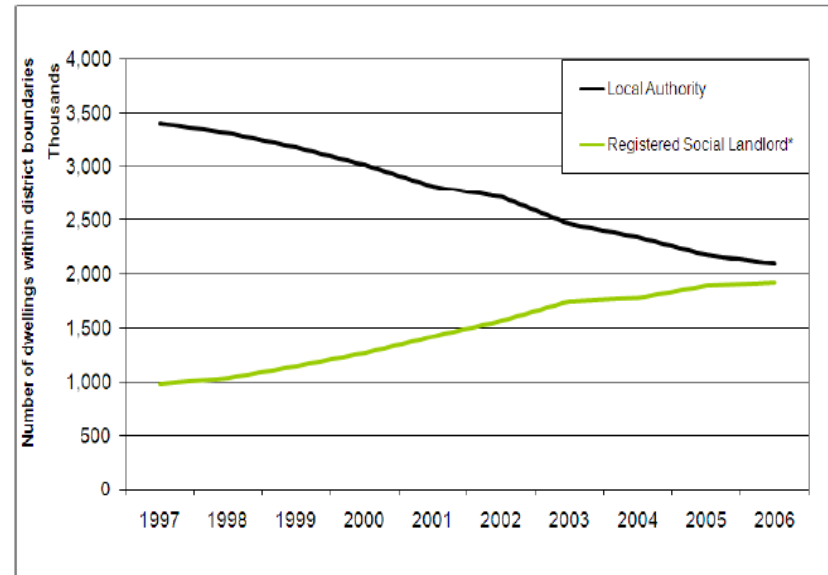
Benefits

- De Giorgi and Pellizzari' s (2006) European-wide survey found that generosity in levels of state welfare is a factor in immigrant decision making, but not as much as wage levels: **wage level effects on location choice are x10 that of benefit impacts.**
- Barrett and MacCarthy' s 2008 study using British Household Panel Survey of 2005 found **that 'immigrants' were only 4% more likely than 'natives' to receive social welfare benefits.**
- Dustmann et al' s (2010) study of A8 migrants arriving in the UK after 2004 looked at those who had been in the UK for more than a year, and therefore were legally entitled to claim benefits. **They found that they were 59% less likely than 'natives' to receive state benefits/tax credits.** If this was adjusted to reflect the same demographic profile of the existing population they were still 13% less likely to receive benefits.

Housing

- Since the 1980s there has been a large reduction in the social housing stock (especially local authority housing) caused by existing tenants exercising their right to buy their properties, as well as a reduction in the numbers of new build social housing.
- Right-to-buy policies and less new-build social housing has occurred at a time when there has been an increase in the number of households in the UK caused by greater longevity, marital breakdown and, to a lesser extent, immigration.

Figure 2 Social housing stock, UK, 1997-2006

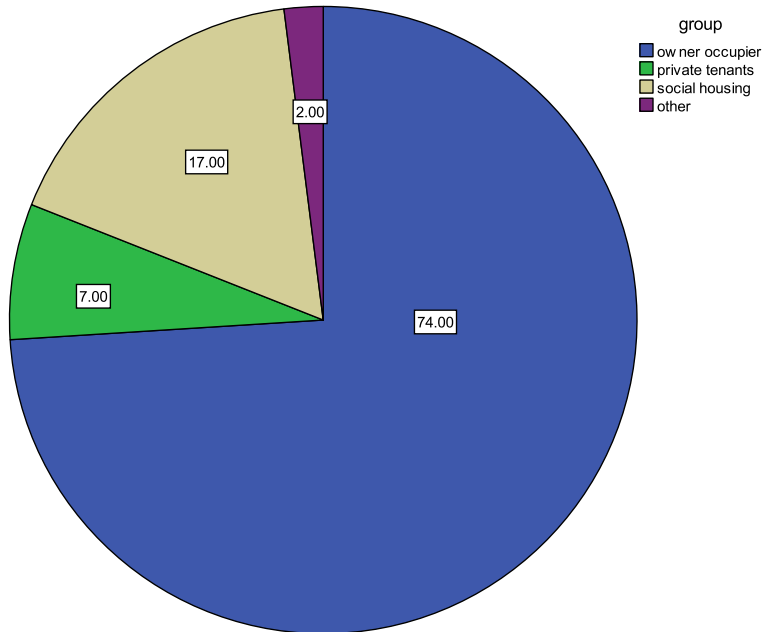


Source: Communities and Local Government Housing Statistics Live Tables (2008).

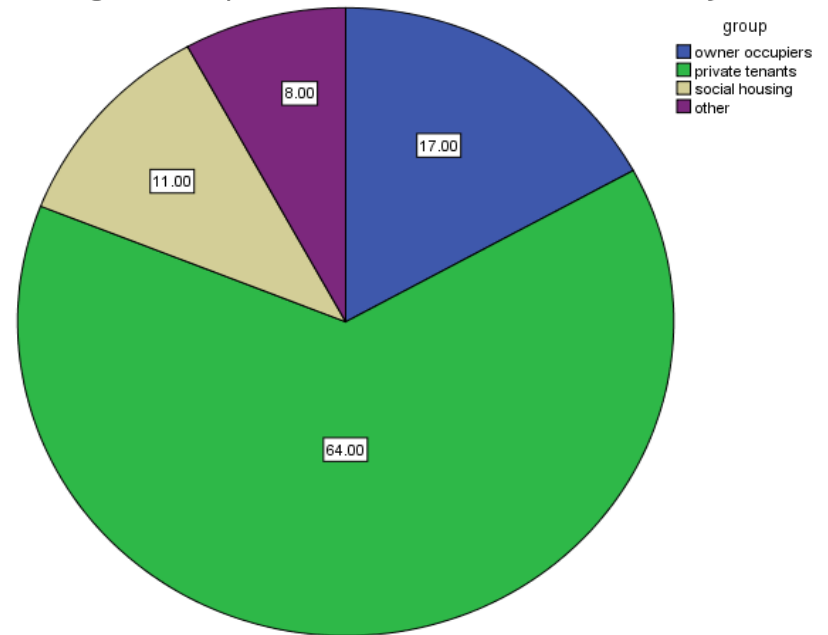
Note: * Figures before 2002 include self-contained units only and from 2002 bedspaces as well as self-contained units.


Housing

UK Born Head of Households: Housing



Foreign Born People Who Have Arrived in the UK in the Past 5 years: housing



A black and white photograph showing two elderly women in a room. One woman, wearing glasses and a light-colored button-down shirt, is leaning over a table. The other woman, wearing a light-colored t-shirt, is seated at the table and looking up at the first woman. They appear to be looking at a document or book on the table. In the background, there is a window with multiple panes and some indistinct objects on a shelf or wall.

"I do feel a lot different because I feel as if I haven't had the education but I've been educated by life. I've seen a lot. I've been a lot of places. I went through the Suez Canal on a troop ship... when I saw the film of Lawrence of Arabia and you see the line up as if that's in the sand I thought, 'I've been there, done that'"

Are there more helpful ways of framing the debate?

- De-racialising migration debates
- Checking out 'white working class' migration histories
- Bringing in internal migration and temporary British emigration
- White British people's transnational and translocal connections
- Moving away from an essentialised idea of Britishness and Englishness

Conclusion (1)

- White working class represented in two ways in media and political discourse – the ‘chav’ and the ‘beleaguered native’.
- In these depictions they are constructed as having opposing interests both to a notion of liberal middle classes at ease in a multicultural society or to (often implicitly black) immigrants. In neither formulation are they seen as having their own connections to either ethnic minority or immigrant populations. Their own spatial mobility is ignored.
- Although data shows that the impact of migrants on the British economy has often been positive and usually been very small, media, certain politicians (and not just right wing extremists) continue to depict migrants as stealing jobs, houses and resources from the native population.

Conclusion (2)

- Detailed oral histories actually reveal the extent to which the lives of 'native' British people are imbued with internal and international migrations.
- Through highlighting the migration histories and 'indigenous' transnationalism of the British population we can significantly shift the terms of the debate and break down the false dichotomy between 'British' and 'immigrant' groups.