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'To belong or not to belong': Is that the question?' Negotiating belonging in multi-ethnic London

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Abstract
In the wake of terrorist bombings in London, Madrid and New York, and civil unrest in Northern England in 2001 and Paris 2005, some political and media discourses have portrayed migrants and ethnic minorities as a threat to security, social cohesion and to the welfare system. In response to this perceived lack of integration, the ways in which migrants and ethnic minorities belong in and to Britain has come into question. In this paper ‘belonging’ is defined as feelings of community, home, acceptance and affiliation in and to spaces and places in and beyond the UK. Belonging emerges through the relationship between self and structure and is firmly placed within the idea that belonging requires a lens on the globally-oriented state and citizen. Our results indicate that in a transnational world in which both states and citizens act and experience belonging across national borders, the boundaries between here and there, abroad and at home, foreign and domestic, become rather blurred.

Key words:
Belonging, ethnicity, transnationalism, foreign policy, citizenship, anti-terrorism, racism.

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Introduction

Over the past decade there has been a growing conviction among policy makers in several European countries that their models of immigrant and ethnic minority integration have failed, leading to a 'moral panic' about immigration and ethnic diversity. In the wake of terrorist bombings in London, Madrid and New York, and civil unrest in Northern England in 2001 and Paris 2005, some political and media discourses have portrayed migrants and ethnic minorities as a threat to security, 'social cohesion' and to the welfare system. While elements of diversity and transnationalism are at times publicly supported, by bodies such as the Department of Communities and Local Government (Commission for Integration and Social Cohesion June 2007) and the British Department of International Development (DFID 2007, 21), it is still accompanied by a public discourse uneasy with cultural pluralism and transnational citizens that sits at the traditional junction between security and 'integration' agendas. It is argued that too much (ethnic/cultural/religious) diversity undermines social cohesion by challenging western democratic values such as freedom and rights. It is claimed that the presence and recognition of such different values or, put another way, the loss of common values, and the promotion of cultural diversity through multiculturalism, have failed due to a misplaced tolerance for cultural difference (Koopmans 2006), will only exacerbate the problem (Goodhart 2004) and lead to segregation (Phillips 2005). Closely related to these critiques is the argument that social cohesion and integration is impeded by ethnic minorities' deliberate refusal to take on the dominant[1] national culture, language and values (Vasta 2007). In response to the perceived lack of immigrant and ethnic minority integration, some mainstream political parties and governments have been shifting away from the multicultural policies introduced in numerous European countries since the 1970s towards more assimilationist policies, with emphases on 'integration' and 'cohesion' (Kudnani 2007). The ways in which migrants and ethnic minorities belong in and to Britain have come into question. Muslims in particular have been subjected to constant public scrutiny where traditions and beliefs are constantly judged against vague and ill-defined notions of 'Britishness' (Brown 2007). Ultimately, such discourse is characterised by conceptualizations of belonging as a zero-sum process of being and belonging either 'here' or 'there'.

This questioning of belonging is often linked to ethnic minorities' relationships to people and places beyond official UK borders. These relationships may be identified arbitrarily as a matter of shared culture, ethnicity or affiliations, or real relationships involving transnational

[1] 'Dominant' refers to a position of privilege within power relations, rather than a numerical fact. Indeed, the cases of many (post) colonial countries demonstrate how the majority group is not necessarily always the dominant group within power structures.

lives. Ideas that national governments should compel migrants to 'integrate' through a system of fines and other sanctions are gaining currency, as well as ideas that (prospective) migrants should pass language and citizenship tests in order to obtain visas, residency permits or citizenship. Another characteristic of this line of thought is growing opposition to dual citizenship, which is increasingly seen as an obstacle rather than a tool for 'integration'. Dual citizenship is increasingly associated with 'double loyalties' which concomitantly seem to signify a lack of belonging in the 'receiving' societies. Accordingly, migrants and ethnic minorities should shed one national attachment and identity for another, especially if they become citizens (Entzinger 2003). Within these discourses and practices, 'here' and 'there' are being reified as separate entities to which belonging can only or must be mutually exclusive. Thus, a false dichotomy is set up between solidarity and diversity (Parekh 2008). Furthermore, the relationships of majority dominant ethnic groups to peoples and places outside of the UK seem to receive less attention and scrutiny amongst scholars and public commentators.

The research presented in this paper explores the ways in which belonging is constructed and negotiated in the shadow of these exclusionary discourses and narrow understandings of belonging. We explore how various Londoners define London and the UK, in ethnic and cultural terms, and how they construct and negotiate their sense of belonging. By interviewing Londoners from diverse ethnic backgrounds, including white 'English' and those of mixed heritage, we move beyond the usual scholarly frame of studying belonging in relation to a single 'ethnic-minority' group. Conceptually, this paper argues for a more sensitive and differentiated lens on constructions of belonging in culturally plural societies, one that neither seeks the celebratory dis-embededness of cosmopolitan transnationalisms, nor the perceived conflicted terrain of 'multiple belongings'. The aim rather, was to consider what happens in everyday life, taking into account the discourses and practices that locate people according to their ethnic, cultural, religious or national background. Moreover, we attempt to show how public discourses on the relationship between transnationalism and integration are much caught up in dominant nationalist conceptions of belonging. This paper reveals the many layers and shades of belonging.

Background Literature

The notion of belonging intersects most debates around identity, transnationalism, multiculturalism, migration, integration and social cohesion, although it is not always specifically referred to. Despite the process of 'othering' experienced by many migrants, up until recently, the prevalent view in Europe and North America has been that immigrants would migrate from one country to another, would settle for good in the 'receiving' country, whilst integrating into the dominant society's economic, political and socio-cultural institutions. At the same time, they would progressively disengage from loyalties and attachments of their home countries. Accordingly, migrants would shed one national identity for another, especially if they become citizens (Guarnizo, et al. 2003).

However, such views have been contested by a wealth of empirical evidence that migrants have become increasingly transnational in their orientations (including transnational activities and identities) and can thus be simultaneously involved in two or more societies at the same time. There is evidence this does not necessarily impede integration, and these processes can even be positively related (De Haas 2005). For example, Granovetter (Granovetter 1995) showed how economic transnationalism of the diasporic Chinese led to integration and upward mobility in the US, and also contributed to generational mobility. On the other hand, Landolt found that the hostile reaction experienced by Salvadorians in the US strongly influenced the tendency to maintain strong links with their home country (Guarnizo, et al. 2003; Landolt, et al. 1999).

For migrants and ethnic minorities, both integration and transnationalism are linked to sense of belonging. In general, belonging has been explored in two distinct ways. It has been examined as political struggles between ethnic majority and minority groups over issues of identity, citizenship, limited housing and health care, issues relating to multicultural education or to political representation.[2] The other main approach has been to explore belonging in relation to the construction of borders and boundaries, usually of the nation-state (Mostov 2007). This paper seeks to bring these two approaches together. It is widely agreed upon that belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling 'at home' and, as Michael Ignatief (Ignatief 2001) points out about feeling 'safe'. Linked to this is the idea in much of the literature that membership and acceptance within a 'collective', is an essential component of any sense of belonging without which, as Cousineau (1993, 141) argues, 'it is impossible to

2 See for example **Geddes, A. and Favell, A**. (eds) 1999 The Politics of belonging: Migrants and Minorities in Contemporary Europe, Aldershot: Ashgate. **Koopmans, R., Statham, P., Guigni, M. and Passey, F.(** 2005) Contested Citizenship: Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

contemplate a citizen's willing participation in a collective project of the state'. The underlying assumption is that sense of belonging or not belonging within pluri-ethnic societies is derived from the actions of the state and the citizens around them. While belonging is most certainly a relational process and state of being, much is dependent to varying degrees upon others and political structures. The focus often placed on the existence of a collective within which belonging must be defined, disables us from being able to understand how belonging might be constructed without such strong reference to a (national) collectivity (see Williams 2007).

However, the correlation made between the constructions of belonging and the idea of 'a collective' is if anything indicative of how nation-states (or simply nation builders) attempt to define their populations in terms of belonging or not belonging to 'the nation'. Benedict Anderson (1983) and others have shown how the nation-state is indeed an imagined collectivity bound to and bounded by a particular territorial space upon which are placed legally enforceable rules. Indeed, nation-building, as place and collectivity building, has something to say about who can be in and belong to a certain territorialized space (Maier 2007). In other words, the 'here' of the nation, it seems, defines both people and place. Thus, both the 'collective' and the nation as a place have been historically defined in ethnic and culturalist terms. Hussain and Bagguley suggest (2005, 414):

> There is no common culture, first language, or robust set of values shared by British citizens, nor is there a shared way of life that could provide a basis for a shared national identity. In this sense Britishness is a political construct, associated with notions of empire, while Englishness is a cultural, even ethnic, construct that 'racializes' the politics of citizenship.

What thinking around race teaches us is that in the UK the nation is often imagined in the popular press and political discourse on immigration and diversity, as ideologically, culturally and ethnically belonging to the dominant majority population – the 'natives' (Kundnani 2007). Belonging for those not considered natives becomes therefore, a matter of assimilating into this predefined mainstream.

This nationalist approach has often found its counterpart in scholarship and research on integration and migration. In debates and theorising on integration, belonging has traditionally been treated as a matter of mixing with the 'native' group. It is conventionally measured by looking at levels of intermarriage, mixed-friendships, residential mixing and the likes, but gives little thought to the power dynamics of these friendships or neighbourly relationships (Kudnani 2007; Lewis 2005). At the same time it is understood that people can

indeed have 'multiple belongings' that stretch beyond the bounds of the nation-state (Ghosh and Wang 2003). An abundance of literature on transnationalism has documented how people forge and maintain social relationships in more than one country almost simultaneously (Levitt 2001; Portes, et al. 1999). Alongside this literature has come the implicit understanding that while mixing and integrating into dominant national groups can most certainly inform constructions of belonging, it cannot be taken as an equivalent or a sole indicator. More recent theorising of belonging, therefore, rather than looking at degrees of mixing per se, has begun to explore belonging along the power structures that socially locate people as belonging or not belonging (Yuval-Davis, et al. 2006).

For centuries, political discourse, policy and practice have attempted to define the nature and terms of belonging to the socio-political structure that we may call the nation-state. Belonging to the nation-state, as a place and a people, is keenly, and sometimes bloodily, policed. Who can be here, who can stay here, who can lay claim to being of here, who can define here, and perhaps most importantly who can feel comfortable here, are the lines around which systems of exclusion and inclusion are maintained. Indeed, 'here' is a concept that underpins these relentless national and boundary-building exercises and will follow, or perhaps lead, us through this paper's explorations. The idea of a shared national identity or a national sense of belonging has long been problematic in Britain (Kumar 2002). National belonging is problematic for many who find that 'Britishness' is largely a White identity' (Hussain and Bagguley 2005, 410). Hussain and Bagguley found that because their Blackness, immigration status or religion is constructed as 'other' in relation to 'White ethnic homogeneity and unity…For these minorities to make sense of "their" citizenship involves a re-definition of national identity'. The British Pakistanis they interviewed 'have developed their own concept of national identity as citizenship which accommodates the idea that a person may have multiple identities, for example, British/Pakistani/Muslim' (2005, 413-415).

We do not wish to adhere to the tacit assumption found in much discussion on belonging and integration, that belonging, as either cultural integration or citizenship, is a *natural* prerequisite for meaningful social and political action or wellbeing. As we have just noted, people construct their own definitions of citizenship, identity and belonging. Modood suggests that belonging cannot be assimilationist or undifferentiated (Modood 2007). Like identity, belonging is formed through the interplay of the subjective self, individual agency and structural positioning. Parekh's (2008) definition of 'common belonging' is instructive because he pushes it beyond the usual understanding of the term in which we include common interests and shared feelings of belonging to a common system of rights and

obligations. His definition includes the idea that we are dependent on each other for our well-being, and that this *interdependence* should help us sort out the tensions of sharing a common life. Thus, common belonging requires the *expansion of identities* as well as a convergence of identities of the various parties that are central to our national identity. Furthermore, he develops the notion of the *'globally-oriented citizen'* contrasting it with the global citizen, who as he claims, 'is in exile everywhere'. The globally-oriented citizen is based on the idea that 'humankind too is a moral community' and that 'human beings are citizens of particular communities but also members of the global human community' (Parekh 2008, 87, 248).

The globally-oriented citizen is an inclusionary citizen, but where inclusion in all aspects of a singular national structure fails, the transnational arena can kick in to fill this gap. Likewise, with the opening up of ever more transnational political and social contexts, people may gain from not belonging to all aspects of the national order of things, as Favell and Geddes (1999) have also suggested (see also Walker 2008 on 'partial belonging'). More importantly, however, the assumption of a total national belonging would disable us from critically exploring the national imagining and building mechanisms that normalise its lines of inclusion and exclusion and posits them as a 'natural' good. In the interviews[3] and in this paper we define 'belonging' as feelings of community, home, ownership of, acceptance and affiliation in and to spaces and places in and outside the UK, and more specifically in London. Belonging emerges through the relationship between self and structure and is firmly placed within the idea that understanding belonging requires a globally oriented lens on states and individuals. Rather than look at what it is to belong or not belong, our concern is with how belonging, in all its shades, is lived and negotiated within and beyond discursive and material practices that seek to include or exclude along ethno-national lines. With diversity and transnationalism as one of our main frameworks of reference, we look at what role 'abroad' and 'diversity' play in Londoners' narratives of belonging in relation to transnationalism, integration and participation.

3 The research presented here is based on interviews conducted with 20 Londoners of various backgrounds. Interviews were conducted in homes across London, in cafes in east and west London, school classrooms in Hackney and Haringey, an NGO, and a local business 'Second Time Round'. Interviewees were initially identified through local residents known to interviewers on a number of professional and neighbourly counts. Snowballing brought in further participants. Interviewees were mainly of English, Ghanaian and Moroccan heritage, and four participants were of 'mixed' heritage – Irish/Indian, English/Spanish and Irish/Egyptian. Those of Ghanaian and Moroccan heritage had moved to the UK in the last four decades, some as children, and others as adults. The interviewee group is gender balanced and consists of a range of socio-economic backgrounds. This article takes a 'voices' approach in which the voices of those we interviewed are privileged in the text.

Defining 'here'

During our interviews and analysis we became very interested in how people were defining 'here' – the place around them, the neighbourhood, London, the UK – in terms of culture and ethnicity. The definition of 'here' turned out to be diverse and contested. One English man, from Hackney, complained about the behaviour and dress of Muslims in his neighbourhood:

> I think, when in Rome, you do as the Romans do. Right. But they walk around, slits in their eyes [referring to the wearing of the niqab which covers the whole face except for the eyes], they're driving big Mercedes they can't see the end of the bonnet, right? They should conform with *our* way of life (Tom).[4]

The question here is what is Rome and who are the Romans? It has been modestly calculated that London has 54 ethnicities, while more than 26 languages are each spoken by at least 1000 schoolchildren in the capital.[5] Indeed all interviewees agreed that London was a multi-cultural city, although some did not feel comfortable with this fact. According to Tom and others, to live in Rome does not qualify you as Roman. There is a specific predefined 'Rome' quite abstract from the ethnic and cultural makeup of London's dwellers that weaved its way through their narratives of belonging. The significance of looking at how 'place' is constructed lies in the fact that it can be seen to create the empirical and theoretical framework in which integration is conceptualised by scholars and in which belonging is empirically experienced. Much scholarly debate (see Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) takes the 'here' – the 'national' or the 'local' setting – as a granted analytical and ethnographic framework without attending to the way the 'local' or the 'national' is produced. Conceptualising Rome and the Romans has wider significance than merely identifying specific imaginings or facts. What we saw emerging was the formation of a place with a respective ethnicity, namely London/UK (Rome) and Londoners/Britons (Romans) respectively, as the effect of a certain kind of knowledge. Here, following Foucault (1979) we might usefully connect this process of place and group formation with a project of governmentality in which migrants and non-dominant ('minority) ethnic groups are subjected to strategies of maintaining order and establishing codes of behaviour.

This is well illustrated by the discourse on cultural pluralism that weaves its way through the government's cohesion agenda. Like Tom, the integrationist perspective of 'cohesion' does

4 Names of some respondents have been changed.

5 Barbara Franz, 'Europe's Muslim Youth'; data (collected in 1998–9) also from the National Centre for Languages, available at: http://www.cilt.org.uk/faqs/langspoken.htm (accessed 1 October 2006).

arguably accept the UK's de facto ethnic and cultural diversity. Yet, it is marked by the assertion that the 'host' or 'receiving' society should define the terms of integration and belonging and that the primary responsibility for integration and constructing a sense of belonging lies with migrants and those defined as minorities (Back, et al. 2002; Lewis and Neal 2005; Yuval-Davis, et al. 2005). The point here is that it is within this discursive and structural framework that Londoners materially and emotionally negotiate and reify belonging.

Likewise, much of the literature exploring the relationship between ethnic minority integration and ethnic group belonging is typically premised on a binary between the 'wider' (white) society on the one hand and the 'ethnic community' on the other (see for example Vermeulen and Penninx 2000). Although this research has been useful in exploring ethnic group formation (or ethnicisation) and maintenance, it has broadly failed to acknowledge that integration in a country, city or neighbourhood does not always entail integration into the norms, structures and values of the national dominant group, namely white anglo-saxon.[6] One study that explicitly recognises this uses the terms 'adhesive assimilation' and 'ethnic-path assimilation' to denote integration into the settled ethnic minority group (Morawska 2004), although a clear distinction is still assumed between assimilation into the 'mainstream' and assimilation into ethnic groups.

Moreover, such methodological nationalism often conflates ethnicity (of minorities) with 'places of origin' whereby identifying transnationalism becomes akin to identifying links with a particular 'ethnic group'. This common approach fits with the common usage of the term 'integration' to signify a process of immigrant and ethnic 'minority' incorporation into the realms of the (white) dominant national society, with an outcome marked by the absence of distinctions between a national 'majority' and 'minorities' (e.g. Alba and Nee 1997; Uslaner and Conley 2003). There is a dominant definition of integration, despite the two-way rhetoric (Lewis 2005; Portes 2008; Vasta 2008). 'Integration' and belonging in the country of settlement has come to generally denote in much of the literature therefore integration into only a section of the country of settlement, namely the majority ethnicity and systems and structures perceived to be theirs.[7] This constitutes an empirical, methodological and theoretical limitation (with nonetheless real social consequences).

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6 In the London borough of Newham, for example, 'White British' constitutes a 'minority' of 36% of the population (Newham Council website).

7 The danger with this approach is that it conceptually places minority ethnicities outside of the country of settlement.

The 'ethnic community' and belonging

Belonging is usually dealt with as a set of relationships - to belong to a place means to belong to the (dominant) people there and vice versa. Underpinning this approach are two theoretical and empirical assumptions. Firstly, that place and the dominant group are synonymous. Secondly, that belonging to place (or people) can naturally only be formed through a certain personal relationship to the dominant group. Our findings show quite the contrary – people maintain senses of belonging independently of personal relationships with any majority group. In some cases, belonging to Britain and the neighbourhood was expressed as strongest where the British majority group were not particularly present in everyday life.

Likewise, the relationship between belonging and ethnicity cannot not be treated as a natural given. When we look at any of the complexities of belonging within, around and across ethnic/racial categories, the ethnic group/belonging paradigm appears of course rather constructed. Let us take the case of Nadia. Nadia describes herself as a Moroccan national and of a Moroccan ethnicity. At the age of twelve, in the early seventies, she moved from Morocco to an area in London where she continues to work in an NGO that provides services for Moroccans, although she moved house to another part of London in the early 90s. When speaking about belonging she points to the various lines of belonging and non-belonging she experiences amongst self-identified Moroccans – ethnic, gendered, age, regional, political. She feels passionately attached to Morocco and particularly Moroccan women. She holds a strong sense of belonging to this area in London in which she grew up and works, and where she is in contact with people of mainly Moroccan origin in a way that disallows a distinction between personal and professional. Yet her friends are mainly of German, English, Moroccan and Russian backgrounds. At the end of our conversation it was clear that taking the usual 'Moroccan' identification as the starting point for exploring belonging was rather misleading. Her brother, for example, considered his main attachment to that neighbourhood and to a football team located in another English city. Interviews in fact showed that the very notion that there is a natural link between ethnicity and belonging underpins dominant discursive and material practices of ethnic minority exclusion.

This is not to simply say that people have multiple belongings. What we hope to show is the way in which these ethnic categories are taken as the premise from which belonging, integration and even loyalty is analysed by both scholars, policy makers and public commentators alike. This is informed by a community cohesion and integration discourse

that places the 'ethnic minority' apart from a 'wider society', that essentialises the ethnic minority as somehow more likely to belong elsewhere than over here (cf. for example Yuval-Davis, et al. 2005).

The interdependence of 'here' and 'there'

It became clear in our interviews that respondents had varying notions of belonging. For some it meant a sense of community, for others it meant feeling safe and secure in their neighbourhood. Some felt a sense of belonging in absence of a sense of community while others said they belonged to England but didn't always feel an emotional attachment. Ray, a man of mixed Egyptian/Irish/British heritage appeared to have no problem in feeling a sense of belonging within a neighbourhood he considered 'dodgy'. Belonging was for most respondents not automatically set in relation to 'mixing' with the dominant group. Interestingly, even where they felt belonging was being challenged, through for example experiences of racism or cultural diversity, all interviewees asserted and claimed belonging to London**.** Similarly, Hussain and Bagguley found that younger generations of British Pakistanis in Bradford feel that their citizenship is 'ascribed' simply because they were born 'here' (2005, 411). These findings stand in stark contrasts to the prevalent notion, as propagated in the Cantle Report (Cantle 2001) on the 2001 riots, that belonging and 'integration' are contingent upon ethnic minorities' assimilation into a so-called 'mainstream'.

At the same time, among our interviewees, an interdependence of people and place was highlighted that undermined the customary distinction between 'here' and 'there'. Amongst those who moved frequently between the UK and a second country, we found that 'home' was seen to stretch across and between countries. Eddie, a pastor and teacher, explained how 'home' in Ghana can be seen as an extension of home in London:

> Well so far as all my children are here [home is here]. You know Ghana or in our society, when we talk of family, you talk about the extended family, it's very difficult to put your finger on what you are talking about. But if you think about immediate [family], it is here. I have my wife, I have my children here. But when you talk of an extended home, you know, then of course Ghana's case also comes into place. Because you can't ignore them. After all you are looking after them in disguise, you are sending money and all that. So, immediately it's here. If everything is wrong here it goes wrong there too. Because it's here first, it must be here (Eddie).

While this may appear a very personal and familial and perhaps even culturally specific deconstruction of here and there, it immediately problematises the binary here-there conceptualisation of the nation-space. The study of transnationalism per se or belonging

within an assumed entity has tended to be carried out, without enquiring into the normalizing effects of positing the zones of 'here' and 'there' as distinct in the first place. This is not to overlook, as celebratory cosmopolitanism often does, the rupturing moments, where the construction of 'here' and 'there' materialises in very concrete ways, with for example the denial of a visa or with deportation. The point is, when lives are forged across boundaries that at times seem permeable and non-existent, and at other specific times come into force, the construction of these borders and distinctions come to light. In this light, understanding integration and belonging, and even cohesion, requires a more global framework.

Nadia provides another poignant example of interdependence of the 'here' and 'there'. Through her NGO in London she has been working with women's groups in Morocco to protect the human rights of Moroccan and British-Moroccan women. One British-Moroccan woman who had divorced her husband and had remarried found herself detained when visiting Morocco:

> [She was accused of committing] adultery by virtue of marrying someone else even though she was still married according to Moroccan law. So I got in touch with a couple of…Moroccan women's groups. And there are a lot of feminist groups, very very active, mainly university lecturers. So I got in touch with them … And I did a lot of work and we were very pleased to see that the law eventually was changed. It's changed on paper by the way…But I think I made enough noise to influence some policy makers…the council of human rights did the recommendations and sent it to the royal palace (Nadia).

Nadia is also involved in Moroccan politics 'to provide as much protection to our community living here' she says. Thus, she is liaising with the Moroccan government in an attempt to improve health cover for retired Moroccan-British elderly who would like to return to Morocco:

> They stay in the UK. They don't want to, some of them. They'd like to go back. But there is no health system. And I am saying to politicians in Morocco, you have made enough money out of these people, the financial institutions. Why don't you have an inbuilt system where they pay for health insurance or something. So that when they retire they also have health cover. Morocco owes it to these people (Nadia).

Nadia's work reveals the importance of transnational bridging and the inter-connectedness of 'here' and 'there'. Through her 'integration' or participation in civil society in London, her globally-oriented work has added another layer to the notions of belonging and commitment across national borders. Yet, there has been a tendency to understanding nations (often through the local) and globalisation in binary opposition to each other – even within

explorations of trans and post-nationalism. In the face of globalisation, Hobsbawm (1990) suggested the era of nation-building ended in the early twentieth century. Two assumptions underpin this dominant line of thought. Firstly, that nation-building only exists to the extent that it retains some sort of complete national sovereignty, as it is seen to have in the late 19th century; and secondly that the assumed sovereignty, of Britain for example, can somehow be conceptualised independently of the nation-state's actions in and discourses on 'foreign countries' (and 'foreign' people). In other words, the distinction made between nation-states and globalisation, completely ignores the fact that nation-states are themselves a globalising force. This model of thinking in effect ignores the interdependence of nations and globalisation. This separation of processes of globalisation, and of nation building is a nationalist approach that speaks to the heart of our analysis.

Bringing foreign policy home

The transnational nature of nation-states was very present in our interviews. How Britain was constructed as an homogenous and clearly territorialised entity was touched upon by many of our respondents, especially in relation to foreign policy on the one hand, and the issue of terrorism in the UK on the other. There was an acute awareness and discontent with the ways in which government discourse and practice on 'domestic' terrorism speaks overwhelmingly to a presumed dominant group. Al points towards how national rituals, such as the two minute silence in remembrance of 7th July, are part of an attempt to define a very specific 'us' and a 'here' devoid of any notion of Britain's transnationalism:

> I know that lots of people die in the world everyday and there's lots of other suffering … some of these acts are deliberate … we've known about poverty and starvation for so long that it amounts to a premeditated act. Particularly as I've reached middle age, year after year, every day, so many children around the world are dying of hunger and thirst - so when I have had to - when I've ended up in one of these two minute silences - in my mind I've gone around the world with it rather than just thinking about how terrible it was here – and actually we know somebody who was killed in the London atrocity [July 7th 2005 London bombings] last year. I do internationalise it in my mind and I would say that that's probably the direct result of living *here* (Al).

Al quite clearly connects the 'here' with an international and global sphere. He highlights the sense that the national story encapsulated in these two minute silences are cut off from their counterpart stories – that of the transnational British state and economy. The 'us' and 'here' presented in such national rituals hold the abroad as quite a separate space – it is an arena from which comes radical ('islamist') forces, rather than an 'us'. The white paper 'Secure Borders – Safe Haven' published by then home secretary David Blunkett in 2003, is a perfect

example of this line of thought. It propagates racialised immigration policy as vital to the nation's security and in particular to its social and cultural integrity (see Yuval-Davis, et al. 2005). The white paper says nothing about the dangers of a migrating state and its military. Thus, the nation state indulges in separating the here and there.

British people have much to say, however, about the effect of transnational states on community cohesion. In a survey of more than 450 Muslim students in further and higher education after the July 2005 bombings, 62 per cent said that British foreign policy had played a 'major' or 'complete' part in leading to the attacks.[8] In the face of a systemic refusal to acknowledge the state's global nature along with de facto transnational nature of many British homes, government calls for integration and cohesion appear somewhat ironic. Brahim describes what this irony looks like for many Muslims:

> American or British foreign policy seem to have hurt many, many Muslims … the British troops involved in Iraq, and little support in resolving the Palestine problem, and also being involved in Afghanistan and Kashmir. There are so many problems that seem to hurt many Muslims here. And I'm talking about what I would call moderate Muslims. Any human being whom I consider to be an ordinary human being, Muslim or otherwise, would not like anybody to be harmed by anybody else. Unfortunately many of these, what I call ordinary, decent Muslims feel pretty hurt by so much hurt being inflicted upon, say Iraq - the destruction of Iraq and the destruction of Afghanistan - by the British troops. And in particular the government involvement in sending troops is not as it appears, to help, but more to change regimes. And many people think that the expedition of troops was not really to establish peace but more so for the oil. And that makes many, many people very unhappy and they do not know what to do. They do not know what to do, because many people feel that your own government is trying to disturb your own home, or the people you care for. And that is really pretty hurtful to many Muslims and I'm one of them (Brahim).

Home abroad and home hear is almost indistinguishable in Brahim's words. At the same time, his 'own' government is threatening his 'own' home. The state and the transnational home become thus conflated in a way that renders illogical the idea that these entities – the national and the global, the 'there' and the 'here', the home and the away – could be kept distinct.

This very point has been conceded, though perhaps a somewhat tentative manner, by some policy makers, most importantly in a letter by Sir Michael Jay, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, to Sir Andrew Turnbull of the Cabinet Office, sent on 18 May 2004. Jay remarks: "… the scope of British foreign policy and the perception of its negative effect on

8 The survey was by the Federation of Student Islamic Societies. 'Muslims Admit Loyalty Conflict', Times Educational Supplement, 30 September 2005.

Muslims globally plays a significant role in creating a feeling of anger and impotence amongst especially the younger generation of British Muslims".[9] Feelings of 'anger and impotence' have also been documented amongst various non-Muslims in Britain in the months preceding and following the anti-war demonstrations that drew millions onto the streets from diverse backgrounds (Murray, et al. 2005) As such, reifications of clean cut distinctions between the national and the global or the local and the transnational, point towards a certain nationalist desire to keep them separate, at least in public discourse and in the public imagination.

Foreign policy – security and the creation of the other

The desire for security and for the creation of the 'other' is much rooted in the assimilationist nation-building exercises and rhetoric that promulgate an urgent need for Britishness, common values and cohesion. The neo-conservative model of diversity, as embodied in Huntington's (1996) clash of civilisation thesis, casts terror and racial conflict as a local (national) manifestation of a global clash of cultures. Culture becomes the explanation for conflict and the 'here' or 'there' binary is reified and naturalised on a local (national) scale, as it is on a global. Various ethnicities are sorted accordingly along this binary trail, which in effect casts British Muslims and anyone who doesn't look like that which has been deemed part of an ideal British civilisation, as belonging ultimately to the 'there', the 'abroad', the 'elsewhere', the 'them'. Ray explained, for example, how his 'loyalty' to Britain would be questioned in the army, by simple virtue of the fact that his father is Egyptian:

> I suppose nowadays, I bet if you join [the British army] now, I joined in 94 and I left in 2001, and you know with what's going on in Afghanistan and Iraq at the minute, especially someone with my background, people who don't understand the geography or whatever, and all they know is 'oh, you're Arab'. Well I'm British. I was born in Hackney and I'm British and I'm in the British army, sort of thing. But they would see it, you know, they are naïve, and they're just 'oh, his dad's from Egypt, they're Arabs'. And I could guarantee that I would be looked on with a certain amount of suspicion now. But then like I say, it's different, this is 14 years after I joined. When I joined it was a different ball game, it was Bosnia and Northern Ireland, a bit of Sierra Leone. And now it's all about Afghanistan and Iraq. And with my kind of skin colour or background, it's looked at with suspicion. You know. Definitely (Ray).

The suspicion with which Ray is met because of his 'skin colour or background', is rooted in something far more complex than an uneducated prediction that he may maintain a

9 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Sir Michael Jay to Sir Andrew Turnbull, 18 May 2004. Released on the website of The Guardian: http://politics.guardian.co.uk/foi/images/0,9069,1558170,00.html (accessed 9 February 2007).

transnational life and therefore multiple affiliations. Ray clearly reveals that the lines upon which belonging and loyalty are measured are both culturalist and situational – bending and adjusting according to geopolitics but continuously based on a notion that biology (ancestry) or culture (ethnicity) naturally displaces affiliations to 'elsewhere' – the elsewhere against which nation-states are busy constructing themselves in discursive and material terms. The complexity of international and local relationships and belongings that erupt and challenge these theoretical and material 'here/there' binaries, is circumvented in the dominant paradigm.

This is not simply an army specific case but is reflected in the arenas of everyday life. Nadia explained how following the fall of the twin towers and the July 2005 bombings and in the shadow of new cohesion and anti-extremism initiatives, she felt the belonging of younger generations of certain ethnicities has particularly come into question. She described how her son suffered a racist attack shortly after 9/11 and how she was approached by the government as part of the *preventing violent extremism* programme to encourage her involvement in tackling extremism amongst Muslim youth:

> Fighting extremism. Excuse me? Have you decided that our youth are extremist already? Why? Why? Why fight extremism? Just the words that they use. So everyone that is born into the Muslim faith is an extremist … I didn't have these problems in the seventies; my brothers didn't have this problem. My *son* is having this problem. Why?! I don't have an English accent, neither did my brother (Nadia).

Interestingly, Nadia is surprised that the belonging of her son, whom she considers less of an 'outsider' (with an English accent for example), is being challenged – through outright physical attacks as through government policy. She draws attention here to the 'catch 22' politics of belonging. Sameness, as denoted through accent, language, perhaps even culture are no longer taken as safe indicators of integration. Instead, ethnicity or 'race' is enough to count as a marker of (potential) non-integration:

> You see the word 'integration' is almost the way it's been introduced, the way it's been used is almost asking people not to integrate in a sense because people are not in their little shells anymore, there is satellite television, they know what's happening round them. You cannot ask a Palestinian child to integrate in the UK society when his family is being bombed, deprived of basic rights, of water or electricity or his cousin in the Gaza is being deprived from going to school - and asking him to integrate! The other thing of course is that this child probably doesn't need any integration because this child is British! Born and bred in the UK. Where do you want them to integrate? (Nadia).

The spectacle of the 'enemy within', or the 'home-grown terrorist', is part of a culturalist (cf. Stolcke 1995) discourse that sees violence as emanating from cultural diversity which in turn

is seen to originate from abroad. As Nadia has shown, these discursive practices in effect seek to make so-called minorities uncomfortable with being and belonging here. While pushing for impossible assimilation it also upholds the notion that migrants and ethnic minorities can never truly belong to the 'us' and the 'here' or at least don't belong in the first place. Through the discursive separation of an ethno-cultural-national 'here' and 'there' and the essentialising relegation of certain 'minority' cultures and ethnicities to the 'abroad' space, it is possible to legitimate very material systems of inclusion and exclusion. The numerous examples above and our analysis indicate various forms of racism experienced by some of our respondents which reveals a common-sense, accumulated and taken-for-granted set of assumptions by those who have the power to construct migrants and ethnic minorities as the 'other'. Essed (1991) poignantly describes how a pervasive culture of everyday racism can also lead to practices of institutional racism. Racism, often experienced as discriminatory discourse, as physical violence or as harassment, undermines or negates citizenship and sense of belonging (Hussain and Bagguley 2005).

'English' transnationals and sense of belonging

We shall now turn briefly to look at one group of UK transnationals that, in comparison to 'ethnic minorities', has drawn very little attention in debates on integration, transnationalism, security and cohesion – white self-identified English. There are large numbers of white British people forging and maintaining social relationships in more than one country - as students, entrepreneurs, political activists and missionaries (O'Reilly 2007). There are those who buy property and others who travel on vacation. Tom and Nina are two of these, though both travel specifically to visit their families. Tom is one of hundreds who travel every year to second homes or families settled outside the UK. He travels a few times a year to Spain to live with his daughter and her family for weeks at a time. He spoke of a community of English 'expats' there. Nina, a retiree, lives at different times of the year in France with her youngest daughter, and in Wales with her oldest daughter who has recently moved from East London. Yet, in comparison to ethnic minorities, these transnational beings have drawn little attention in public and political discourse on integration and cohesion. Indeed, none of our white English transnational respondents felt that their involvement in countries other than the UK *was* or *should* be a problem in terms of loyalty or integration.

On the other hand, one white English family's transnational orientation was strongly influenced by the ethnic diversity and cultures of their neighbours, colleagues and children's school friends in Hackney, London. This family took three months out from work and

school and visited the home countries of their neighbourhood friends such as India and Vietnam, and other countries of interest including China, Thailand and the United States. The diversity in which they live in London has influenced their transnationalism. Their integration into their multi-ethnic neighbourhood has made them more globally-oriented.

Just as Nadia and her brother feel a strong attachment to the neighbourhood in which they grew up and where they now work, so too do other white English respondents have a strong attachment to their neighbourhood:

> Don't know. It's like security innit. It's secure knowing that I've attached myself to here. Or I've been attached to here, you know, it's not that I chose it, I just feel like my mum made me attached to here, do you know what I mean? From growing up here all the time. So I just feel you do, you feel you belong somewhere so you feel you are secure (John).

The maintenance of social and political relationships within second nation-states is often seen as detrimental to the security and stability of the nation-state. The obvious question would be why has the transnationalism of white British not been met with the same kind of academic and political interest as 'ethnic minorities' and migrants? The 'ethnic' and the 'minority' each appear to be the important components in this tale. Nadia sets an answer in motion:

> This kind of idea of transnationalism and how the western worlds, especially within the EU, people are very worried about people having this kind of loyalty. Well I ask them one thing, just look at the British Council. It has existed for decades! Why is it ok for the western world to have that kind of transnational relations…But when a Moroccan does it, it's not acceptable. The Dutch have got a tremendous problem with it now, with the Moroccans, they call it 'divided loyalty'. You couldn't possibly be Dutch and Moroccan [they say]. Well what about the Afrikaans? Why was it ok for them? You can't have one rule for you and one rule for others. It's just not on (Nadia).

What is clearly suggested is that it is not simply transnational living that is problematic for nation-states and nation-builders, but more specifically the transnationalism of certain ethnicities and those cultures and religions seen to be too different from 'us'. Indeed, *who* is living and moving across material and imagined national borders is the bigger question. The implicit argument underlying the oversight of the transnationalism and local(national) integration of dominant majority groups is that it is somehow not *real* – that their cross border and diverse cultural living does not hold the same meaning. It is assumed that, in belonging to a dominant ethnic group, they cannot possibly construct the same questions about integration, social cohesion and security. Because ethnic attachment is seen as natural, biological, emotional, such thinking is made possible. It is about identification with an

assumed common 'us' against an assumed common 'them'. As Hesse et al. (1999) and Massey et al. (1999) have argued, globalization has a racial grammar. It has a set of practices to which 'race' gives rise in the context of migration and diversity, so which bodies go where and why and what their cultural make-up is becomes highly significant for nation-builders. It is through a highly racialised/ethnicised lens that transnationalism and diversity are perceived and responded to. Counter-narratives to the dominant paradigm do however exist. Some white 'English' interviewees did not intentionally or overtly challenge claims to belonging that do not fit the dominant paradigm, but rather were keen to express the normality of diversity and share the ways in which they supported processes of 'ethnic minority' claims to belonging. One spoke of her work teaching English to 'immigrants'; others spoke of their children's friends from 'non-English' backgrounds.

'Us' over there

It is not insignificant that deeply rooted in older narratives and histories of the British nation-state is the presence of those defined as 'its own' abroad: as missionaries, imperial workers and enforces, anthropologists and traders. As accepted extensions of the nation-state, these individuals and groups were not simply tolerated or invisible to the national eye but in fact *needed* for the creation and reification of the British(English) as an imagined people and for the material assertion of their territorialised space. While colonized places provided Britain with the material and human resources its growing domestic industries needed, public discourse and cultural representations in arts, literature, religion and photography, constructed the non-white foreigner as underdeveloped, simple and uncivilized, against which the British people were cast as developed, sophisticated and civilized (Said 1978). The assimilation of white Brits abroad was actively hindered through various gendered and racialised discourses and practices, including culture maintenance clubs and magazines that spoke of the dangers of 'going native' (see for example Ware 1992). At the same time, institutions and discursive practices worked to 'civilize' various parts of the globe – which, like today meant propagating loosely defined British values and civility. Steve, an artist and an employee of the trade shop in Hackney, spoke of what seems like a paradox in nationalist discourse and action:

> There was something that Tom was saying earlier that when you're in Rome do as the Romans do. And that when people come here that they should calm down how they should dress and what they do with their religions or whatever. And I was thinking that the British never did that when we invaded India and the other places that were British Empire. We not only colonized them but we tried to Britishify them a hell lot more than they do when they come up here. We went over there and we said you will accept

> us and not only accept us but work for us and what we'll give you back is, by dint of it being British, it's obviously better than what you have got already. Which is not really fair (Steve).

These double standards should not simply be seen as the result of ignorance or historical amnesia. On the contrary, what we have attempted to show is how double standards lie at the very heart of the discursive and material practices that displace 'ethnic minorities' to elsewhere. Like Tom, when (then) Chancellor Gordon Brown spoke of common British values he also seemed to forget large parts of Britain's story, past and present, within but most poignantly beyond national borders. For Brown, the 'common qualities and common values that have made Britain the country we… [are] our belief in tolerance and liberty which shines through British history. Our commitment to fairness, fair play and civic duty' (*Guardian*, 16 January 2006). The histories of British colonialism and current immigration, security and military discourses and practices reveal a far less clear cut picture of Britain's presumed values and virtues than expressed in the public discourse (Kudnani 2007).

Certainly the administrative apparatus of the empire state no longer exists as it once did. Yet, the slogan used by antiracism and migrant rights activists world wide 'we are here because you were there' needs yet to be grasped to its full extent. It is as relevant for understanding the claims to belonging of postcolonial ethnic minorities as it is to understanding current politics of belonging in the face of the double edged sword of foreign policy and cohesionism. The discursive and material machinery by which London and the UK was built, as a place and as an imagined community (and by which it continues to attempt to build itself through racialised integration, security, foreign and immigration agendas), plays a significant role in assertions and experiences of belonging in multi-ethnic London and the UK today. It legitimises for some and delegitimizes for others their occupation of this imagined and real place.

Conclusion

Most recent government attempts to define what it means to belong to Britain have focussed on developing a sense of 'Britishness' and common values. This debate is predicated on a search for simplicity and commonality (Phillips 2006) rather than complexity (Brah 1996) and diversity (Dalal 2002). Belonging to Britain, and indeed Britishness, on these terms would seem to be fairly narrowly constructed. They do not seem to include the full extent of the social rights of citizenship and difference. This dominant notion of what it means to belong is more the property of the real or imagined dominant group than of a diverse Britain. Indeed as we have seen, the outcome of negotiations of difference within Britain in the search for core values and a common identity is, in the present climate, very much set against diversity (Anwar and Baksh 2003).

In a complex globalized world, sense of belonging is a complex social process which for many entails multiple affiliations across space and place, as well as multiple identities and expanded identities. How states act 'abroad' and how 'abroad' is being constructed must be taken into any consideration of belonging. Our study shows that in a transnational world in which both states and citizens act and experience belonging across national borders, the boundaries between here and there, abroad and at home, foreign and domestic, become rather blurred. Within this light, there is a sense that discourses and practices that cast particular ethnic categories as *truly* belonging elsewhere, and certain cultural ways as more *of there*, rather than *here* appear engineered. They reveal much about the methods of nation building. 'Here' is a complex place, multilayered in narratives and formations of belonging and lines of inclusion and exclusion. We have traced through voices of our respondents a particular trajectory of nation-building – one that conflates ethnic diversity with an 'elsewhere', a 'there', an 'abroad'. These voices were either complicit to such notions or were highlighting their exclusionary force.

The 'here' of cohesionism, of Tom's 'Rome,' is located in relation to a whole set of notions about territory, about where is 'here' and where is 'there', about what is of 'us' and what is of 'them'. In the same way that a British nation is imagined, so is the material and cultural distinction between 'here' and 'there'. There is some sort of original imagining upon which today's material ruptures of border controls, state and all the socio-cultural territories that emanate thereabouts are constructed – an imagining often lost within the methodologies of scholars of integration and cohesion.

Stuart Hall (1997) in his essay on the relationship between the local and the global points us towards how the idea of 'Englishness' is finding it difficult to withstand the cracks that globalization brings to it. Indeed, there is much evidence of the challenges trans-national living places on nation-builders intent on imagining and materially practicing a very specific nation-state. Yet, what we hope to have highlighted here is how global thinking and global action also stands at the heart of today's and yesterdays constructions of the 'us' and the 'here' – we cannot forget that foreign policy allows us to speak of a kind of transnational state. It is indispensably interlinked. In this sense the borders of the nation-state are clearly beyond those it works to assert around Britain. The notions of territory and nation underlying the utterance of the sentence 'when in Rome do as the Romans do' are inferred with great ease in the utterance but produced with great historical effort. To borrow Hall's (1997, 37) words, 'it comes from a place, out of a specific history, out of a specific set of power relationships. It speaks within a tradition'.

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