



Birkbeck Institute for Social Research

Colloquium

Racism and Nationalism after the Scottish Referendum and 2015 General Election

Friday 13 November 2015, 10.00am – 4.30pm
Room 101, 30 Russell Square, London WC1B 5DT

Programme:

10.00 Registration and coffee

10.25 **Opening Remarks** (Dr Brendan McGeever, Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism, Birkbeck)

10.30 **Panel 1: Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland**

Dr Bethan Harries (University of Manchester), *Yma o Hyd? Gwyn o Hyd? (Still here? Still white?)*. *Race, Identity and Nationalism in Post-Devolution Wales*

Dr Robbie McVeigh, *What Do They Know of England Who Only England Know? Racism and Nationalism at the Edge of the Union*

11.50 Coffee

12.10 **Panel 2: Scotland and Britishness**

Dr Nasar Meer (University of Strathclyde), *Looking up in Scotland?*

Dr Brendan McGeever (Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism, Birkbeck) and Prof Satnam Virdee (University of Glasgow), *Scotland and the Breakup of Britain: Implications for Racism and Nationalism*

13.30 Lunch

14.30 **Panel 3: England**

Prof Anoop Nayak (Newcastle University), *Whiteness, Racism and Nationalism in North East England*

Dr Steve Garner (Birmingham City University), *Racism in Southern England*

15.50 Coffee

16.10 **Concluding Remarks** (Prof Claire Alexander, University of Manchester)

16.30 Finish

Abstracts and Biographies:

1. Dr Bethan Harries (University of Manchester), 'Yma o Hyd? Gwyn o Hyd? (Still here? Still white?). Race, Identity and Nationalism in Post-Devolution Wales'

Questions about 'what is Wales?' and, 'when is Wales?' have dominated Welsh social history. Contemporary responses to these questions remain embedded in the close articulation of a territorially defined (and often land 'derived') people and cultural claims to tolerance and moral worth. This is perhaps best epitomised by the folk concept of 'Y Gwerin' that depicts a class-less society and can be extended to infer a race-less one. Formations of class, race and nationhood present a romanticised image of unity, but to grasp how such an identity has gained purchase it is necessary to understand this through Wales' relationship to England. This paper will reflect on the way Welsh national identity has been constructed and what this means for how forms of exclusion and nationalism work. In light of the forthcoming UK referendum on EU membership it is also timely to reflect on how Wales has positioned itself in Europe, especially since the decline of interest in a 'Europe of the regions'. Much has changed in more than ten years since devolution, yet it's hard not to dwell on Benedict Anderson's question, which seems especially prescient in a nation with newly devolved powers... 'Why do nations celebrate their hoariness, not their astonishing youth?'

Bethan Harries is research associate in Sociology and the Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity at the University of Manchester. She is the author of the forthcoming book *Talking Race in Young Adulthood: Race and Everyday Life in Contemporary Britain* (Routledge).

2. Dr Robbie McVeigh, 'What Do They Know of England Who Only England Know? Racism and Nationalism at the Edge of the Union'

The BBC famously situated its banned 1985 'Real Lives' documentary on Northern Ireland, 'At the Edge of the Union'. Much has changed since then – not least, of course, the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement. Thirty years on, however, the GFA and its institutions look far from secure – straining against the toxic synergy between political instability and austerity. Ironically, 'peace' also created a context in which Northern Ireland has become widely identified as the, 'race hate capital of Europe'. In this paper the author suggests that racism and nationalism assume particularly dangerous forms in Northern Ireland because they sit in a specific relationship with the state. He develops his recent work on British Nationalism in Northern Ireland with a specific focus on external political dynamics. He suggests that the movement towards independence for Scotland has provided a profound challenge to contemporary unionism. He addresses the question of how further seismic shifts in the constitutional position of the UK over the next few years may shape things in Northern Ireland.

Robbie McVeigh is a writer and researcher based in Scotland. Much of his research and academic work has focused on racism and sectarianism in Ireland, north and south. His publications include *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland (Beyond the Pale, 2002)* and *After Optimism? Ireland, Racism and Globalisation* (Metro Eireann 2006). His ['Living the peace process in reverse: racist violence and British nationalism in Northern Ireland'](#) was published in *Race & Class* April 2015.

3. Dr Nasar Meer (University of Strathclyde), 'Looking up in Scotland?'

At a time when all the political parties of Scotland are trying to establish a persuasive vision of the nation, inquiry into where ethnic and racial minorities fit into these debates provides one understudied means of bringing together questions on multinationalism and multiculturalism. Focusing especially on the lesser known question of how elite political actors are positioning minorities within projects of nation-building, this paper outlines new research in which three predominant clusters emerge. The first centres on an aspirational pluralism, in so far as political elites see themselves as less inclined – in contrast to counterparts in some other minority nations – to place ethnically determined barriers on membership of Scottish nationhood. The second concerns the competing ways in which the legacy of Scotland's place in the British Empire is appropriated by actors of different political hues, and so assumes a multiform role. The third cluster points to potential limitations in minority claims-making and recognition, especially in terms of formal multilingualism and corporate multifaithism, something that may partly be explained by the tension between multinationalism and multiculturalism. Taken together, the paper illustrates how elite political actors can play a vital role in ensuring that appeals to nationhood in Scotland can be meaningfully calibrated to include minorities too.

Nasar Meer is Reader in Comparative Social Policy and Citizenship at the University of Strathclyde. His research interests are in social policy and citizenship, ethnicity and migration, multiculturalism and identity.

4. Dr Brendan McGeever (Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism, Birkbeck) and Prof Satnam Virdee (University of Glasgow), 'Scotland and the Breakup of Britain: Implications for Racism and Nationalism'

In this paper we argue that in Scotland racism operates as a kind of 'absent present' through which the SNP - the hegemonic force of Scottish politics - has re-imagined the nation as one that is both politically progressive, and welcoming to migrants. This, we argue, has helped to consolidate an increasingly powerful myth that when it comes to racism, there is 'no problem here', that 'we're a' Jock Tamson's bairns'. In this presentation, we unpick how this re-imagining of Scottishness acquires its powerful appeal precisely through its capacity to define itself in opposition to that which it is not (e.g. British/ English). Within this nationalist re-imagining, the vision of a progressive, racism-free Scotland can only be sustained by projecting the history of the British Empire and postcolonial racisms onto England/ Britain. Moreover, such myth-making has the effect of deflecting attention away from the disproportionate role that Scots actually played in the British Empire, and occludes any discussion of racisms in the country today. Finally, the presentation also situates this analysis of Scotland in a comparative, relational discussion about England, where race and racism continue to shape the social formation in ways that are quite distinct from Scotland. We conclude, therefore, by exploring the ramifications that Scottish independence might have for the politics of racism and nationalism in England.

Brendan McGeever is Early Career Fellow at the Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism. In April 2016 he will take up the position of Lecturer in the Sociology of Racialisation and Antisemitism at Birkbeck, University of London.

Satnam Virdee is Professor of Sociology at the University of Glasgow and Deputy Director of the ESRC Centre for Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE). He is a historical and political sociologist whose research interests focus on racism, class formation and capitalism. He recently authored the monograph *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014).

5. Prof Anoop Nayak (Newcastle University), 'Whiteness, Racism and Nationalism in North East England'

In this think-piece I loosely sketch out some of the historical-geography of North East England with regard to racism and nationalism. As a mainly-white region the North East is neither a site for convivial forms of multicultural interaction nor a space of thriving cosmopolitanism generated from living in super-diverse urban environments. However, archaic stereotypes of the region that purvey it as mono-cultural, nationalistic and hostile to outsiders are overly simplistic. Instead I argue that English nationalism is not of 'high capital' in the North East. Rather, there is a much stronger identification with local and regional identity, linked to its industrial past and formative of deeper 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1977). Recently changing patterns of global migration and asylum are also altering the landscape, creating new geographies of belonging. Everyday encounters with difference suggest that popular racism and banal forms of whiteness still structure many interactions at a time when geopolitical issues, nationalism and citizenship are called into question.

Anoop Nayak is Head of Geography and Chair in Social & Cultural Geography at Newcastle University. He has published widely in race and ethnic studies; masculinities and social class; as well as youth cultural formations. He is author of books including *Race, Place and Globalization* (2003); *Gender, Youth and Culture* (with Mary Jane Kehily 2013, 2nd Ed.) and *Geographical Thought* (2011 with Alex Jeffrey).

6. Dr Steve Garner (Birmingham City University), 'Racism in Southern England'

This presentation seeks to raise some questions about the post-2015 direction of travel in terms of racist ideas and action - loosely in the provincial Southern half of England: the geographical centre of UKIP and Conservative support.

The presentation is based partly on work completed for the recently-published book, *A Moral Economy of Whiteness* (Routledge). A significant thread of that narrative focuses on the relationship between Britishness, Englishness and 'race' in the ways white English people talk about 'nation', 'welfare' and 'immigration'. The frames people use to interpret these discursive objects enable responses that more often than not, engage highly selectively with the material side of these issues, while responding in ways that accentuate the emotional politics of identity and inequality.

Steve Garner's work has focused on racialisation, particularly that of white identities, in England and Ireland, as well as the intersection of 'race', nationalism and social class both in Britain and other geographical sites. He has published a number of books and articles including 'A Moral Economy of Whiteness', 'Racisms', and 'Whiteness: an introduction'.