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New countryside? New country: visible communities in the English national parks.

> "The question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilled prophecy - it is always the production of an 'image' of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image … identity is never an *a priori*, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an 'image' of totality."
>
> (Bhabha, 1986: xvi-xvii)

Introduction

Terminology: I use the term 'visible communities' (after Alibhai-Brown, 2001) to describe people of Asian, African and Caribbean backgrounds. This is to avoid the homogenising tendencies of the term 'black' (Modood, 1992) and the power-laden term 'minority'. It is not *intended to reify or fetishise physicality/phenotype, nor to deny the power inequalities endemic in English society, but is used as a political signifier to highlight that these inequalities are commonly grounded in perceptions of inferiority/threat attached to* visible difference from a white 'norm'*.*

The 2001 Census re-confirmed that England *is* a multi-ethnic society. Indeed, there has been much recent debate regarding ethnicity and difference, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, hybridity and multiple identities within academia, among policy makers and across the wider public realm in the UK. The Parekh Report (2000), in particular, addresses the complex political and social issues surrounding identity, citizenship, difference, cohesion and equality (see also Alibhai-Brown, 2001; Kundnani, 2001). However, these debates are invariably connected to the urban sphere, while the dominant representation of the English countryside continues to portray a racialised (white) country scene as a symbol of idyllic innocence and, crucially, as repository of a 'true', originary Englishness (Short, 1991; Matless, 1998). That is, the English countryside continues to be interpreted as the 'real' England for 'real' English people, in a construction that appropriates 'real' as 'white', excluding a range of groups from accessing the countryside, both physically and emotionally (Cloke and Little, 1997; Milbourne, 1997). The perceived absence of 'ethnic minorities' in rural spaces - as visitors, residents or in its symbolism - continues to belie the description of English society as multi-ethnic (Agyeman and Spooner, 1997).

There is, then, a substantial gap between the burgeoning discourses of multi-ethnicity, and the 'traditional' institutional representations and social understandings involved with rural public space. Visible communities are often theorised, researched and written as 'rural others', in recognition of the structural inequalities and cultural prejudices that non-white people face in English society, which both constitute and are reinforced by a dominant racialised version of the countryside. This chapter is not intended to challenge the paradigm that calls for greater examination of the racisms affecting visible communities in rural spaces, in the effort to tackle those racisms and the exclusions they sustain. However, I want to come at the issue from another perspective, because there is a danger that if we *only* focus on visible communities *as* 'rural others', we reconstruct people from non-white backgrounds as *always already* marginalised in the countryside. Such categorising denies visible communities' own claims to rural space and national identity. To disrupt the dominant understanding that 'real' Englishness is tied up with a 'rural idyll', and that both are white, involves not just an examination of racism in the countryside, but demands rethinking Englishness itself.

The chapter draws on quantitative and qualitative research concerning visible communities' perceptions and use of the English national parks. Questionnaires were conducted with people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds in Middlesbrough and Sheffield[1] (referred to as the 'urban survey'), which asked about the North York Moors (NYM) and Peak District (PD) national parks specifically, and the wider countryside more generally. Six focus group interviews and twenty individual in-depth interviews with visible communities were undertaken to explore perceptions in more detail[2]. Participant observation during day visits to the national parks, organised for focus group interviewees, allowed the study to test perceptions in context, as did involvement with the Mosaic Project, a three-year initiative co-managed by the Council for National Parks and Black Environment Network, which facilitated residential trips to national parks for visible community groups. A visitor questionnaire survey across the NYM and PD (referred to as the 'visitor survey') was also completed[3].

The national parks of England and Wales were originally designated under the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act. This legislation was the response to pressure from the 1920s onwards, from groups concerned about rural recreation, access and landscape protection (eg. the Ramblers Association, the Youth Hostel

Association), demanding free access to privately owned rural areas for the general public, in particular the urban-bound working classes. In 1932, a mass trespass on Kinder Scout (an area in the Peak District) was staged to highlight the social exclusion of lower socio-economic groups from the countryside, and in 1945 the Dower Report finally recommended the designation of national parks, which should be "extensive tracts of beautiful and wild countryside which would provide scope for open air recreation". The national parks currently work to 'twin purposes', adopted in the 1995 Environment Act's review of national parks and wider conservation policy:

- to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the national parks; and
- to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the parks by the public.

The initial proposal for this research arose from concern among national park management that visible communities were absent from the parks, and uncertainty as to how to tackle this issue in terms of their duty to 'promote opportunities' to the public. The study, though, revealed a far higher number of visitors from visible community backgrounds than had been anticipated, and this chapter is an attempt to think through the implications of visible community *presence in* the national parks. The focus, therefore, is on visible communities who *are visiting* the national parks. Those voices speaking of exclusion from a racialised English countryside are missing from this account, but it is important to hold onto the exclusions they describe, as the chapter will implicitly argue throughout.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first addresses the concept of resistance, and considers visible community challenges to a mythologised absence in the countryside through both their *presence in* the rural and their *desire to be present*. It also examines the vulnerability of such contestation, and the ways in which power relations enable hegemonic society to limit and recuperate visible community resistance to dominant discourses and practices. In particular, I explore the ways in which entanglements between ethnicity, gender, socio-economic and generational positions affect visible community visitor patterns, and unpack how the construction of stereotypes, based on visual recognition and socialised understandings of (absolute) difference, is caught up in these entanglements.

The second section is concerned with visible community 'claims' to the countryside that go beyond resistance, and focuses on the variety of ways in which rurality may be implicated in, and/or extricated from, national identity formation. The diversity of identifications encountered in the research disrupts any 'easy' reading of attachment and belonging in the English countryside, and points to the need to think identity and belonging *relationally* - to be inclusive of visible communities' heterogeneous positions and perceptions of their 'place' in the countryside, and the countryside's 'place' within national identity. However, I caution that relational understandings must also incorporate the materiality and historicity of power relationships if they are to be transformative rather than simply descriptive.

limited/ing resistance

> "Essentialised notions of 'blackness' or 'Asianness' … are imploded through the intervention of alternative or transruptive discourses – the potential for more than a transitory transformation remains, however, uncertain."
>
> (Alexander, 2000:145-6)

In the urban survey, a quarter of the questionnaire respondents in Middlesbrough and a third of those in Sheffield stated that they *had visited* the NYM or PD at some time. Additionally, 8% of the visitor survey respondents identified as coming from non-white backgrounds. These statistics are somewhat problematic due to methodological concerns[4] ('8%' almost certainly overestimates the situation), but what both sets of figures show is that visible communities are certainly not absent from the English national parks. The qualitative data also supports visible community presence in the countryside, with over half of the individual interviewees describing personal experiences as repeat visitors to the NYM/PD, for example:

S9   I'll go to see a good view and stop and usually there's an elderly couple there and I have a chat with them ... I'll go for a drive just ten … fifteen minutes and you're there it's so peaceful ... and calm and it relaxes me … I come back more motivated
(Individual interview in Sheffield: man, 55-64, Black British[5])

In addition, one of the focus groups had visited the NYM together prior to taking part in the research:

F2   [talking about bad weather] at least we enjoyed it … it didn't stop us enjoying it

F1   'cos we like to go in groups don't we? ... you know it's better ... it's like more socialising you get together ... you take your food along you have a picnic there ... it's like a day out for …

F5   we should be going go to the countryside more

[general chorus of 'yes']

(Focus group in Middlesbrough: 9 women, aged between 25 and 64, variously identified as British Asian, Pakistani, Pakistani English)

Most notably, socio-economic position emerged as central to perceptions and use of the national parks. The majority opinion among respondents to the urban survey was that national parks are middle class spaces, an opinion supported throughout the interviews by statements to the effect that higher socio-economic positions enable access to the countryside, and lack of money prevents visits:

B1   I don't go all that often sometimes take my son ... we'll have a drink buy a souvenir but it's expensive out there though … and going there too the cost puts you off

(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: man, 25-34, British Asian)

The impact of socio-economic position was further evidenced through visible community visitor patterns, in particular *how and where* people accessed the rural. Taking the 'how' issue first, it is instructive that many Mosaic Project participants believed that they would not have visited the national parks without the intervention of Mosaic, and discourses concerning lack of opportunity *because of class position* were prevalent. For example, a women's group visiting the NYM for three days clearly desired to visit the countryside "*at least three or four times a year would be good*", but identified lack of community group funding as the key barrier, reinforced by the women's low income and lack of private transport. 'Lack of finance' echoed throughout the research:

S5   I get funding for each trip wherever I can … but it it really is the biggest problem … we would go do many more visits to countryside if we could get the money to take the groups … the lack of money to get transport … minibuses … that is the only thing stopping us

(Individual interview in Sheffield: man, 25-34, British Pakistani)

5

This quote also highlights a common discourse among respondents, namely that visible community visits to national parks are (always) undertaken in large groups. Indeed, extended family/community group trips were generally conceived as either organised by community leaders or facilitated and led by expert bodies (the national parks, Mosaic Project), and visible community trips to the countryside often described not only as requiring grant funding, but also in the context of targeted projects or specific initiatives.

[INSERT PHOTO: lakewalk1.jpg]

Where people choose to go was also framed in part by economic positions - visible communities tended to visit the periphery rather than venture deeper into a national park. Dovestones, on the fringe of the PD close to Oldham, sees mostly working class visitors including families and groups of young men from Asian backgrounds, while Bakewell, a 'honeypot' market town near the centre of the PD, receives mostly middle class white visitors. The *proximity* of Dovestones to the place of residence of substantial Asian communities enables access for those visible communities who identified lower incomes as preventative to going further into the national parks.

In foregrounding a lack of financial means as the main factor limiting trips to national parks, people rarely linked economic position to ethnicity. However, there are two key issues regarding how socio-economic position influences visible communities' access to the countryside. The first is that visible communities are over-represented in the lower classes: 77% of 'ethnic minorities' live in the 88 most deprived wards in the country (CRE, 2004) - a statistic resulting from structural power inequalities in England, grounded in historical colonial attitudes towards visible (racialised) difference/inferiority (Donald and Rattansi, 1999), and reiterated by the ongoing failure of policies and strategies aimed at improving 'race' equality and relations (Bourne, 2001). Economic barriers to visiting the countryside, therefore, unequally affect people from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds.

The second issue is that the impact of socio-economic positions on visiting national parks *does not preclude* the possibility that perceptions of exclusion and a sense of 'otherness' may *also* be involved in visible communities' choice of group size and destination. That is, alongside lack of funds to go in communal groups beyond the periphery of the national parks, an understanding of the rural as unwelcoming may

also influence staying closer to spaces of everyday experience, and being among people from similar backgrounds. Moreover, these two issues are interconnected, and suggest that *resistance against* ethnic stereotyping may, at the same time, be limited by the same processes involved in producing those stereotypes in the first place.

Similar issues are raised when exploring generational difference. While national parks' own visitor surveys invariably indicate high numbers of 65 year old plus visitors (NYM, 2003), in the urban survey 56% of visible communities in this age group stated that 'lack of interest' inhibited visits above anything else. Tellingly, there were proportionally higher numbers of individuals on lower incomes among the 65 plus visible community respondents than across other age groups, and older participants described having little interaction with society beyond local visible community networks. Support and friendship were drawn through long-term relationships with individuals from similar (often the same) backgrounds, who had arrived in England at roughly the same time and experienced decades of more open racism than their younger relatives - majority opinion among the older respondents was that they would receive a negative reception in rural areas.

Lack of interest in visiting national parks was also clearly evident amongst 15-24 year olds in the urban survey[6]. Those who visited the countryside did so to take part in specific activities such as kayaking, archery, canoeing (physical and 'exciting' activities), but not 'just' for a walk or 'to look around the towns'. This echoes national park experience of young people generally - the late teens and early twenties are often described as 'the missing years' in national park visitor profiles. More pertinently here, younger visible community respondents' perceptions and experiences of reception in the English countryside ranged from racist comments to quite the opposite:

F4   [discussing a recent youth group trip to the NYM] there are people there so …
it's not not what I thought like it would be like
Fac   what do you think of the people?
[everyone talks at once]
Fac   [to F3] did you say you think people there are unfriendly or/
all   /NO
[the group are very loud and definite about this]
F3   they're all nice

F2   very friendly

F4   yeah … everyone was nice

all   YEAH

F1   it's just that there's just not much facilities that's why everybody's nice because there's only a few people living there … but if more people lived there it'd become more more unfriendly [as in the city]

(Focus group in Middlesbrough: 8 young women aged 13-16, all identified as Pakistani)

For this group of young women, from working class backgrounds, the rural was synonymous with friendliness *because* of the small numbers of people living there, whereas the city was constructed as unfriendly and hostile. This understanding defies the stereotype of small, close-knit rural communities suspicious of all strangers, especially those most visibly different, commonly described by older visible community participants.

Gendered perspectives resonated across the research too. Despite previous visits and a desire to return, many women described a lack of confidence in their ability to access the countryside independent of wider community organisation and national park input. They explicitly linked this to having limited knowledge of the areas and no experience of organising trips to rural places themselves, but also highlighted safety issues:

S3   a lot of people don't have cars I know there are a lot of people that do but ... I mean ... women that might just want to take off for the day with the kids their husbands might have the car and not them so ... but they don't want to use the buses it's too much hassle … you don't know what's gonna happen I mean it could break down or or … there could be trouble

(Individual interview in Sheffield: woman, 25-34, Black British)

This woman was not alone in attaching a degree of fear to being in the countryside, or in outlining a need for specific initiatives/support to enable/encourage her to visit a national park. Among men from Asian and African Caribbean backgrounds, lack of confidence and safety issues were far more muted, and financial issues highlighted as the predominant barrier to accessing the countryside (as discussed previously). Men also stressed a need to be together within familiar groups, but they placed emphasis on doing what they wanted to do because *they chose to*, not as part of

specific projects or initiatives: the key message was one of self-determination. Within such discourses, singular importance was placed upon visiting the rural as a way of reiterating and strengthening (ethnic) group bonds. Gender differences, however, emerged through the study as closely linked to class position: among middle class visible communities visiting national parks, differences between women and men were far less perceptible, as we shall see later in the chapter. In this way, gender positions are also caught up in the entanglements between class and ethnicity that can serve to limit resistance.

(dis)placing the stranger

Thinking about the examples offered so far in this chapter, what I want to highlight is the continual push-and-pull between rural presence and limiting factors that was played out through the research. Barnor Hesse's (2000:17) conceptualisation of resistance attempts to capture this ongoing interplay between challenge and subjugation. He uses the term 'transruptions' to describe:

> "interrogative phenomena that, although related to what is represented as marginal or incidental or insignificant … nevertheless refuse to be repressed. They resist all attempts to ignore or eliminate them by simply recurring at another time or in another place."

Visible communities' presence in the national parks can be described as a transruption to the dominant construction of the countryside as a white/racialised space. While actual presence in the rural was often limited by physical and emotional barriers, a refusal to be repressed was evidenced *in* that limited presence as well as in the more constant *desire* to go to the countryside.

Thinking about such transruptions in the context of this research, it is necessary to address the 'visibility' of non-white people in rural England. Sara Ahmed's understanding of 'the stranger' is useful here. Ahmed (2000) writes that 'we' actually recognise 'the stranger' not as someone unknown to us, but as already constructed *as different*. That is, people unknown but recognised as the same as 'us' go unnoticed, but someone recognised as unknown *but different* is always identified as a stranger. Such identifications are tied up with the history of previous encounters/experiences between 'us' and 'them' attached to this moment of recognition. Moreover, they are entangled within socialised understandings of the

previous encounters between 'our' group and that of the stranger. Crucially, stranger stereotypes incorporate ideas of potential threat, but it is through unequal power structures and notions of territorial ownership that these constructions lead to social exclusion based on visible difference.

With this in mind, Ahmed goes on to question the assumption that we can have an ontology of strangers - that it is possible for anyone to be a stranger (unknown), because strangers *are presumed known* via the social construction of stereotypes. She argues that such productions of difference should be theorised through:

> "thinking about the role of everyday encounters in the forming of social space … Such differences are not then to be found *on the bodies of others*, but are determined through encounters between others; they are impossible to grasp in the present."

> (Ahmed 2000:9, orig. emphasis)

Ahmed's concept of 'the stranger' as always already socially produced foregrounds the historicity and materiality of social relations embedded in the imagery of stereotypes, moving us beyond simplistic notions of visible difference. To accept the figure of the stranger as simply present conceals the antagonistic social relations that produce the stranger as a figure in the first place, and how 'the stranger' comes into being through the 'marking out' of space, bodies and 'terrains of knowledge'. (Re)cognition cannot be based on the very present encounter, then, but on perceptions built up over time as to who has the authority to be in a particular space.

Thinking visible communities as 'rural others' attempts to take into account the relationships of social antagonism between white and non-white people in the English countryside, and as a political signifier retains its potency. But it also risks a focus on difference that reproduces boundaries. The irony is that emphasis on otherness may normalise a homogenised majority, even while trying to destabilise that majority: the very act of naming *as 'other'* can return visible communities to marginalised positions and perpetuate power imbalances. 'Visible communities' is an attempt to encapsulate the social antagonisms Ahmed describes without privileging the idea of *minoritised* otherness, though it can be argued that the focus on visibility traps this term in the same paradox. To deconstruct this 'always already' othering, then, we need to rethink the recognition of others in ways that shift emphasis away from the majority/minority binary. The examination of 'whiteness' is crucial in this

project (see hooks, 1992; Bonnett, 1998; Ware and Back 2002 – and other chapters in this book). However, interrogating heterogeneity within the 'white' ethnic category must be alongside consideration of differences within visible community categories, if we are to work towards more equal recognitions.

Returning to the idea of transruptions, foregrounding the socialised histories of encounters between 'others', and the power relations involved, helps us to think through the issues caught up in limited/ing resistance more carefully. As Ahmed (1999:89, original emphasis) warns:

> "There is a failure to theorize, not the potential for any system to become destabilized, but the means by which relations of power are secured, paradoxically, *through this very process of destabilization.*"

She reminds us that differences that threaten the 'system' may be recuperated by the hegemony to retain its position, since it has the power to do so. This power allows it to understand and promote transruptions *as displacement from social norms*, reclaiming the tactics of resistance within a structured ontology – often designating them as negative outcomes of social change. Thus examining strategies of resistance must also address the "complex social and psychic mechanisms for dealing with such tactics" (Ahmed, 1999:90), in order to better understand and dismantle processes of social and spatial exclusion. Three key recuperation tactics are briefly considered here.

First, the *ongoing denial of visible community presence* in the rural, by a majority of countryside agencies and in the dominant public psyche, is one such tactic. Media representations, for example, consistently reiterate 'ethnic minorities' as missing from the rural environment (*The Guardian*, 2004; *Radio 4*, 2004). Secondly, visible community individuals who visit the countryside are perceived as *not 'normal'* within 'their' ethnic group, and their actions as differing from majority visible community practices. As exceptions to the rule, their challenge can be brushed aside: if a visible community 'norm' remains different to the white majority, visible communities remain outsiders in the countryside, and not 'really' English. This discourse was common among white respondents in the visitor survey, but also among many visible community interviewees:

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S4   no nah it certainly black families and that type of thing [going to the countryside] ... it's unheard of ... but it's national park stuff and all that type of stuff potholing and all that type ... it's not what black people do
(Individual interview in Sheffield: woman, 35-44, Black British)

S8   in my experience I've seen a black guy or a black woman with a rucksack rigged up for walking me I just looked twice [...] because you know black folks and rucksacks aren't … and a sleeping bag and all the rest of it AIN'T what we DO [laughs] ... but in fact I've done it
(Individual interview in Sheffield: man, 35-44, Black British)

[INSERT PHOTO: Horse riding1.jpg]

Third, emphasis on the *actions* of visible communities *as different from social 'norms'* is employed to imply different behaviour *as* absolute ethnic difference. The stereotype of visible community absence from the countryside shifts to describe visible communities who are present as *behaving differently*: only visiting in large extended family groups, not wearing 'appropriate' (read 'normal') clothing for walking, and so on. This production retains visible communities as essentially different through contrasting the behaviours of white and non-white groups, maintaining the power-laden binary and, in eliding *action* with *the body*, re-inscribing difference as ontological fact.

I have so far explored some of the ways in which visible communities **contest** being positioned as 'rural others', but also how interconnections between ethnicity, gender, age and particularly class can serve to **limit** presence in the rural. In an ongoing interplay between challenge and suppression, transruptions continue to challenge hegemonic beliefs, especially in terms of the desire to visit the countryside, but remain caught in the dominant/minority binary. However, the transruptive was also surpassed, and it is to more transformative issues that we now turn.

claiming the countryside/claiming the country

Across the quantitative and qualitative research, some visible communities claimed the English countryside through constructions of place and identity that denied the recuperation of presence in the rural as marginal. Beyond limited resistance, these actions/accounts destabilised the 'white rural' myth by claiming identifications with

Englishness that were connected to being in, and being comfortable in, rural space. This is *not* to say that the rural was automatically, therefore, considered central to national identity, or nationality personified through the rural: Connections between nation, ethnicity and rurality were complex and shifting, and visible community claims to Englishness and/or the English countryside context- and person-specific.

As outlined previously, socio-economic position was a key factor underlying people's ability to visit national parks (regularly). middle class identities were generally open and fluid, and cultural practices similarly hybrid and multiple. These practices included 'traditional' activities associated with particular ethnic groups, as well as incorporating not-connected-with-ethnicity occupations. Within interview discourses, the latter practices were ostensibly framed around knowledge issues, the privilege of having time for leisure, access to private transport and disposable income. In the following quote, the practice of rural recreation as prevalent amongst professional work colleagues is described:

S7   [talking about being non-white in the countryside] so I feel comfortable yeah but something that I'm very aware of … and what I notice is that you know a hell of a lot of social workers in the countryside [laughs] … you know it seems to be a really specific group of people … and like on Sunday in Grindleford you go there and you just meet so many people that you know [laughs] … so I think sort of it is it can be very one dimensional you know the people that go out into the countryside … very middle class
(Individual interview in Sheffield: woman, 25-34, mixed race (white and African Caribbean) English)

This woman experienced the rural as a place for specific groups, "very one-dimensional", but the principal frame of reference was class rather than ethnicity. She believed that her position as middle class had the greatest influence on her day-to-day life and practices, and her claim to belonging in the Peaks was centred on feeling part of English society through her work, her engagement in the local community where she lived and a "diverse social life". Moreover, she did not consider her position as *being against the 'norm'* for visible communities, but understood visible communities to be represented across all classes and other social positions.

Similarly, another interviewee explained that she did not perceive herself to be marginalised in the countryside in any way. This second woman identified as English

and was a regular visitor to national parks with her husband and children *because* the rural was a central component of their English identity, and countryside recreation was part of her family's cultural practice. At the same time, her Indian ethnicity and Sikh religion were also important to her self identity. Her sense of belonging in the English countryside was attached to a secure identity that was nevertheless plural and fluid – moreover, this identity was secure because its pluralism and fluidity stemmed from a middle class position that distanced her from dualistic constructions of self as marginalised by a dominant other.

[INSERT PHOTO: pram picture.jpg]

Numerous other examples of the rural as inherent within constructions of (their) Englishness point to the evolving nature of visible community identity in England. However, the majority of visible communities who visited the countryside understood and related to their English identity via a different set of values. Consider a situation observed during a Mosaic Project visit to the PD. A group of six young men from Asian backgrounds, aged between 15 and 19, were crossing a road, when a passing car slowed down and the three young white male occupants shouted "Pakis go home!" in a threatening way. The visible community young men, whose parents had all moved to England from India, responded by smiling and shouting back "Yes we are!" and "We are home!" in an affirmative, non-aggressive manner. In doing so, the group were claiming the space they were in, both countryside and country. In addition, they were subverting the very act of naming: they identified themselves as Indian, British, English and Asian, and various configurations of these depending on context, but rather than challenging the term 'Paki', they claimed their visible difference as positive identity, *intertwined with their Englishness*, refusing to be marginalised.

For these young men, their ethnicity was folded through their nationality. In later discussion, the group articulated their sense of belonging in the countryside via a rights-based discourse ('we are English therefore we have the right to be in all English space'). This was combined with attachment to, and a sense of being comfortable in, the rural, fostered through regular trips to the national parks as part of family life, but they did not consider English rurality as inherent to their national identity. The latter was rarely singular and highly ambivalent, with country of birth and ethnic background the main factors in ongoing negotiations with nationality.

Throughout the interviews, 'being English' was most commonly connected to being born and growing up in England, followed by claims to national identity through ownership of a British passport:

Fac   how do you identify your nationality?

S8   ... um … for me I was actually born here ... now my home is here and it's all I know … I'm not sure how to answer that ... no it's being ... born here really it's on my passport that's it [laughs]

(Individual interview in Sheffield: man, 35-44, Black British)

This man believed that white English people hold the countryside to be important as part of their national identity, but he did not "engage with it in that way", nor did he perceive that his cultural practices had anything in common with "your average English culture". As a consistent visitor to the countryside, though, he identified closely with what he described as the 'spirituality' of rural environments. He was also open to the possibility that his opinions might change over time as he reassesses his identity:

S8   um and I think even me calling myself Black British you know that that's only happened in the last 5 years really … I mean it's been a transition really from um … West Indian … to Afro Caribbean to now I feel quite comfortable with Black British … but it's not happened overnight it's been a 20 year journey 23 year journey … and it it isn't over

(Individual interview in Sheffield: man, 35-44, Black British)

While constructions of national identity drew heavily on discourses that featured birth and experiences of growing up in England, specific *values* were also important to how visible communities envisaged English nationality, and these values were embedded in the political and human rights realms rather than in any physical place[7]. Most notably, ideas surrounding freedom of speech and movement, and liberty and choice, were key to what English identity represented. In addition, safety (from crime and health risks) and security (in terms of a stable future) were listed as valuable components of Englishness, together with access to a state education system and health services, and a diverse employment sector. Furthermore, for those (predominantly middle class) visible communities who identified with Englishness in the ways described here, the construction of the countryside as inherent to (white)

Englishness was *not* an emotional barrier to visiting national parks, because it was irrelevant:

B2   feeling this sense of attachment … belonging or not isn't the issue … no being SEEN to belong isn't even the issue … if I want to go there [the countryside] I go there for the reasons I go there for … belonging doesn't come into it
(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: woman, 35-44, British Indian)

Alternatively, the importance of rurality within nationality was stressed as cross-national and cross-cultural. One participant, citing the 'tradition' of the rural in imaginations of Chinese nationality, queried the production of the countryside as *only* inherent to Englishness, and highlighted a commonality between constructions of English and other national identities. Indeed, the importance of countryside to many participants was discussed through notions of Indian, West Indian, Pakistani and Ghanian identities, for example. This allowed individuals to develop attachment to the English countryside via connections between one rural landscape and another, and research participants discussed visiting places that reminded them of countries of (parental) origin. The Lake District and Peak District, in particular, were often linked to both the Himalayan foothills and the Blue Mountains in Jamaica. Such links went beyond the visual sense, too, with people describing sounds and smells as indicative of other places.

Yet another perspective questioned the importance of the countryside within dominant perceptions of English national identity itself:

B7   I think the English don't have any value for the countryside … they only talk of it if … they talk of lots of things like Americans talk about apple pies and family but they have no family or apple pies all they have is Macdonald's … similarly I think the English use … countryside … queen these things when they are in when it suits them … but most of the time I've never seen half the English I've met who live in the town never have been to the country … but it's a nice myth of the past … it's handy you know like I would say Taj Mahal or something but I'm not bothered about the Taj Mahal … you know I think it's more a nostalgic thing the countryside … it's always there in the back you pick it up to show you're English
(Individual interview in Middlesbrough: woman, 45-54, Indian)

This woman's claims to the countryside were through her love of nature and being in natural surroundings, she regularly walked in the NYM, and described a sense of belonging there and attachment to the area. She believed that the rural is a symbol wheeled out only when nationality needs to be explained, but has lost its relevance in modern day England – a tactical device to denote a national identity that it is easier to leave unexamined.

towards new imaginations: national identity and the rural

What this chapter can only briefly highlight is the wide diversity among visible communities encountered in the research, regarding the ways in which the rural is (not) imagined in constructions of Englishness, drawing upon different heritages, experiences, cultural values and social positions. As such, it is not possible to correlate attachment to the English countryside, or a sense of belonging in the rural, with identification with Englishness – neither is Englishness itself a singular or fixed construct. This suggests the need to rethink ethnic and national identity/ies, and re-examine different models of constructing/seeing selves and strangers. Here I want to draw specifically on the work of Elspeth Probyn, whose central argument regarding how we think about space, belonging and identities is:

> "that the outside … is a more adequate figure for thinking about social relations and the social than either an interior/exterior or a center/marginal model. The notion of outside supposes that we think in terms of 'relations of proximity', or the surface, 'a network in which each point is distinct … and has a position in relation to every other point in a space that simultaneously holds and separates them all' (Foucault, 1987:12)."
>
> (Probyn, 1996:11)

She poses the term 'outside belonging' *against* categorising tendencies, and to incorporate the movement that the *wish to belong* carries: "to consider more closely the movement of and between categories" (Probyn, 1996:9). Working at the level of *desire to* belong sidesteps the 'actualities' of belonging or not, or being seen to belong or not, and works against constructions of identity as fixed within an ontology of the visual given. Desire proposes the notion of a continual *becoming* of identity, rather than static identification. This model is helpful in theorising the complex and various claims to the English countryside and Englishness made by visible communities, and, in holding white communities' identifications and becomings on

the same surface, it enables us to displace the dualistic 'norm'/'stranger' construction[8].

It can be argued that theorising the social as a surface, in terms of an outside, leads to a relational model that does not allow for any recognition of the structural inequalities that do violence to 'minority' groups, consideration of power struggles, or acknowledgement of the oppression that constantly threatens agency. However, my aim here is *not* to sweep these issues aside, but to contend that these inequalities must be *held in tension* with a new way of looking that tries to realign the power geometries. Probyn (1996:12, original emphasis) writes that this can only be done if the surface is understood, *not* as an object, but as a *process*:

> "as a way of configuring the lines of force that compose the social, lines of force that are by their very nature *deeply* material and historical."

Thinking relational identities and becoming as a process opens up the possibility of unpacking 'the stranger' by moving away from bodily recognition, while at the same time holding the central role of visual recognition in identification, and the exclusionary processes it is implicated in, in this surface too. 'Outside belongings' allows for a project of Englishness always in construction, fluid and negotiable, that draws on people's own conceptions of and desires to identity - without ignoring that those identities exist politically as well as personally. It suggests that the rural can continue to play a role in national identity construction and becoming, not as an exclusionary phenomenon but alongside (on the outside with) various imaginations of Englishness.

[INSERT PHOTO: Rock pooling.jpg]

I want to restate here that visible community voices speaking of racialised exclusion from the English countryside were present in the research, and there is a need to interrogate processes of exclusion and racism in rural areas, and examine how 'rural others' are (re)produced, in order to disrupt those very productions. But there is also a need to disrupt the construction of visible communities as 'others' in the countryside, and to envisage use and imaginations of national parks and rural space - by visible communities and white communities - in ways that circumvent any allusion to a 'norm'.

This chapter has been suggesting that there are ways of being in the countryside that refuse an objectifying gaze, and inscribe desires and identities that refute dominant presumptions and stereotypes. In rejecting an ontology of the 'other' as recognisable in the present, we are forced to consider historical social relations between groups (and across space) as inherent in the structuring of hegemony, and in its ability to recuperate resistance against it. Thinking identity and belonging as becoming (as desire to become) in a more relational way – crucially *together with* the processes of dominance that impact on these identifications and desires – offers a way of disrupting ingrained positions, and may move us closer towards renegotiating social relations. As the Parekh Report (2000:8) clearly states, a genuinely multi-ethnic England needs to re-imagine itself:

> "The key issue … is one of English identity and how previous conceptions of English identity have excluded so many people who live in and richly contribute to English society."

Exclusion from rural space may be equated with an entrenched dominant Imaginary that constructs Englishness as implicit in a racialised rurality. Addressing such exclusion requires English society to rethink and redefine its *identity as a nation **in inclusive ways***, allowing for multi-ethnic and multicultural belongings that incorporate diverse visible communities alongside diverse white communities. The research points to the multiple, hybrid and fluid ways in which visible communities recognise themselves as English, and the variety of connections through which they construct a sense of belonging in and attachment to the English countryside. *Englishness* must be recognised as *not only white*, if the entrenched Imaginary is to lose its relevance:

> "As the writer Andrea Levy says: 'If Englishness doesn't define me, redefine Englishness'."
>
> (Alibhai-Brown, 2001:258)

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Notes

[1] 310 people took part in the research in Middlesbrough, 296 in Sheffield.

[2] The interviews were equally divided between Middlesbrough and Sheffield.

[3] 295 questionnaires were completed in the NYM, 300 in the PD.

[4] In brief, 'random sampling' was skewed by potential respondents' dis/interest in the survey themes: many white visitors declined to participate in the survey, while the majority of visible community visitors approached agreed to take part.

[5] Interviewees were asked to 'tick boxes' regarding gender and age, but to describe their identity without a list of choices in front of them.

[6] 52% in this age bracket stated lack of interest as the main reason that they did not visit national parks; 29% identified lack of knowledge of the parks as key barrier.

[7] That is, cities were not simply substituted for countryside as emblematic of Englishness.

[8] Furthermore, the acceptance of *no desire* to becoming a certain identity (or being in a certain place) can be incorporated in this outside. This opens up the possibility of not wanting to be in the rural through personal choice, rather than absence as always already reduced to exclusionary processes and practices.

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