Hating immigration and loving immigrants: Nationalism, electoral politics, and the post-industrial white working-class in Britain

Andrew Dawson
University of Melbourne, dawsona@unimelb.edu.au

Abstract

Recent years have witnessed the rise of neo-nationalist sentiments, especially for immigration controls amongst the post-industrial white working-class in Britain. However, this trend visibly faltered in 2017 as unexpectedly large numbers of the post-industrial white working-class voted against political parties with implicitly neo-nationalist agendas. On the basis of ethnographic research conducted in post-industrial northeast England, I explain this unexpected turn of events as driven, in part, by a backlash against the implicit xenophobia in the agendas of neo-nationalist political organisations. I argue that the backlash is grounded in widespread perceptions of immigrants embodying locally valorised forms of sociality and personhood that are intimately linked to experiences of work and industrial work in particular. Simultaneously however, I argue that the very same members of the post-industrial white working-class often remain opposed to immigration because it enables access to an international labour force that obviates the need for the development of local human capital and, thereby, the possibility of many of 'their own' people having access to the means by which they can develop these same valorised types of sociality and personhood. In this way, commonly the post-industrial white working-class is opposed to immigration whilst, however, being positively predisposed towards immigrants.

KEYWORDS: white working-class, post-industrial, elections, nationalism, immigration, anthropology of Britain

Introduction

De-industrialisation, neoliberal economic restructuring, and the after-effects of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) have led to increased precarity and immiseration in the United Kingdom (UK). Allied to immigration, these have resulted in rising neo-nationalist sentiment. A key manifestation of this was the country's 'Brexit' vote to leave the European Union (EU). The phrase in the *Leave* campaign that resonated most was, *Taking Back Control*, especially of the country's borders and, thereby, of immigration.

The cohort of the population most affected by the combination of precarity, immiseration and immigration has been the working-class, especially the white working-class in de-industrialised areas. This is reflected in the post-industrial working-class' status as key agents in the Brexit decision and, more generally, in the ability of neo-nationalist political organisations to co-opt its support recently in significant numbers. The ability of these organisations to do this has been further enhanced by a process of political disen-franchisement. In particular, the Labour Party, the traditional party of Britain's working-class, had increasingly abandoned class-partisanship and adopted both neoliberalism and multiculturalism, approaches to the management of economy and society that would appear to militate against the interests of the white working-class the most.

Having said this, the advance of these neo-nationalist organisations stalled in the 2017 General Election, as many working-class voters returned to the Labour Party fold. Based on a comparative analysis of recent ethnographic research on the British post-industrial white working-class and on ethnographic fieldwork in the former coalmining conurbation of Ashington in northeast England, which I have conducted since 1985,[1] this article attempts to shed light on this largely unexpected turn of events.

Beginning from 1979, the period after which the "Butskellite" political consensus (consisting of support for a strong Welfare State, regulation of the economy, nationalisation of industry and Keynesianism) was abandoned, I review the key transformations that have taken place in work, welfare, and immigration. I go on to review the ethnographic record on how these transformations have affected the post-industrial white working-class. Then I describe the political disenfranchisement of the post-industrial white working-class and the rise of neo-nationalism. Finally, after outlining the Ashington case-study, I identify key reasons for the return of the post-industrial white working-class in significant numbers into the Labour fold.

Principally, I demonstrate that the unexpected return of sections of the post-industrial white working-class into the Labour fold was, in part, a backlash against anti-immigrant xenophobia articulated by these neo-nationalist political organisations. Importantly, I argue the backlash was rooted in the existence of forms of sociality and personhood that are highly valorised by the post-industrial white-working class, and that are seen as fundamentally determined by the experience of work, and industrial work in particular. Furthermore, through recent transformations, such as austerity measures that include cutbacks in training and retraining, certain members of the post-industrial white working-class' "own" (especially the young) are seen as being excluded from access to the means to cultivate these valorised forms of sociality and personhood (Dawson 2018). In contrast, since their very reason for being in places like Ashington is to work, immigrants are seen to be able to cultivate these forms of sociality and personhood with ease and, in turn, to belong. Herein lies a key basis of a commonplace and ambivalent attitude to immigration that I suggest has been largely unrecognised by neo-nationalist political forces. On the one hand, sections of the post-industrial white working-class are opposed to immigration

---

[1] Research for this paper was conducted with a group of informants on whom I have conducted research since 1985.

because it enables access to an international labour force, thereby obviating the need for the development of local human capital. On the other, they welcome the presence of immigrants who are seen to promise the reproduction of locally valorised forms of sociality and personhood. As one informant explained to me his apparently paradoxical vehement support for Brexit and immigration control whilst granting the multiple virtues of his new Polish neighbours – 'There's nothing hard to understand about it. It's just a case of hating immigration and loving immigrants.'

Transformation: work and welfare

The end of Butskellism on the election of the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher in 1979 was followed shortly after by rapid privatisation and then de-industrialisation. This led to a significant transformation of local labour markets. The loss of jobs in heavy-industry was only partially offset by employment in light industry and the emerging service economy, in sales, customer services, leisure, and similar trades. Furthermore, the demand for skilled labour, which the populations of former industrial contexts were largely ill-equipped to supply, was often not as great as that for what several authors describe as "poor work" (Shildrick et al. 2005), which refers to work that is not only unskilled and lowly paid but also to new and precarious forms of employment that emerged as part of a neoliberal restructuring designed, in part, to facilitate greater labour market flexibility. The key symbol of such precarious employment is, undoubtedly, the "zero-hours contract". The zero-hours contract entails no obligation on the part of the employer to provide minimum working hours and, in its most pernicious manifestations, demands that workers provide labour whenever required by the employer.

Besides precarity, the immiserating effects of these processes have been considerable and exacerbated by other policy reforms. Notably, there have been marked falls in the real value of and restrictions in the availability of welfare payments. Moreover, perhaps most importantly, housing reforms have had a dramatic effect. Since the late 1980s, tenants have been granted the right to purchase their local authority's rentals properties. However, these authorities have been prohibited from reinvesting the income into the construction of new housing. This has contributed significantly to a housing shortage and dramatic increases in the costs of purchasing and renting homes.

The immiserating processes described above were undoubtedly accelerated markedly post-GFC, especially by pay freezes in both the public and private sectors and further cutbacks in welfare. The overall freeze is the centrepiece of the "austerity economics" that has come to define the era since the GFC. Its effect has been significant: between 2008 and 2015 real incomes in the UK fell by 1% per annum. Putting this into stark comparative perspective, of the thirty-four developed nations that are members of the OECD, only Greece experienced weaker household income growth than the UK did (Tily 2017).

Transformation: immigration

Dispute regarding the extent of net immigration into the UK is commonplace. Furthermore, it has been and continues to be subject to considerable fluctuation as many immigrants

return home either permanently or temporarily in the increasingly commonplace practice of circular migration, especially in response to specific events such as, most recently, the dramatic decline in the value of the pound sterling following Brexit. However, claims of the UK being beset by comparatively high levels of "mass" immigration are greatly exaggerated, despite their being standard fare in media representation and much popular perception. For example, even at a relatively high immigration watermark in 2011, the percentage of the foreign-born UK population was only 1.9% higher than the average for the EU as a whole (Eurostat 2011).

Nonetheless, experiences of immigration have fluctuated massively as the types, origins, and geographical distribution of immigrants have changed. Broadly speaking, the period up to the 1990s was characterised mostly by the settlement of economic immigrants, especially from former-colonies and the Republic of Ireland. This waxed and waned according to labour market needs. The majority of these people first settled in actively industrial areas. Then, as de-industrialisation accelerated, they settled increasingly in major metropolitan centres, such as London. This situation changed markedly from the 1990s onwards when the numbers of forced migrants increased from conflict-zones, such as the Sudan, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Initially, they too settled largely in major metropolitan centres. However, there was a significant change at the beginning of the new century. In 1999 a "national dispersal programme" was put in place. This was a response to pressure from local authorities in popular sites of settlement such as London that were relatively overburdened with the costs of care entailed in settling the new wave of forced migrants (Dawson & Holding 2001). Instead, immigrants were "resettled" in places with "excess capacity" in housing and the like. Inevitably, many of these were former industrial and now de-industrialised areas (Dawson 2012). Additionally, non-European immigration rose significantly from 1997 onwards following policy changes that made it easier for UK residents to bring foreign spouses into the country, especially for many of the migrant demographic described above. Finally, and of greatest significance, was the expansion of the EU in 2004, which led to migration into the UK of vast numbers of people from the new Member States, roughly 1.5 million between 2004-2008 for example, the largest quantity of which was from Poland and numbered approximately 600,000 (UK Border Agency 2008).

The Anthropology of the British Working-Class

Moving on from the genre's erstwhile predominant concerns with communities (Cohen 1985), especially rural, and the diversity of British cultures (Rapport 2002), recent work in the anthropology of Britain has given considerable attention to the attitudes and practices of the post-industrial white working-class, especially in relation to immiseration and immigration. Studies of racism (Evans 2006) are outweighed by those concerned with the processes by which white working-class people incorporate immigrants within their communities (Edwards 2000; Fortier 2007; Watt 2006; Rhodes 2012; Tyler 2015) and, indeed, how new working-class cosmopolitanisms have emerged (Werbner 2006; Wise & Velayutham 2009; Howard 2012;). These studies are, in part, reactions to the common-

place stigmatisation of the working-class by its most significant other, the middle-class (McKenzie 2013). This stigmatisation has a number of facets including, most pertinently the working-class' perceived inabilities to adjust to an increasingly multicultural society (Ware 2008; Haylett 2001; Lawler 2012), and to new economic realities (Edwards et al. 2012) in what is sometimes described as "povertyism".

However, another strand of work that echoes the "Culture of Poverty" thesis (Lewis 1969) and celebrated 1970s Humanist Marxist ethnographic scholarship on educational underperformance amongst the British white working-class (Willis 1977) has the potential of undergirding said stigmatisation. A salient example of this is recent sociological eth-nography on the "ethnicisation of class". This presents the structural inequalities faced by the working-class as bases for the development of deep-seated cultural practices – akin to those of ethnic groups – that serve to perpetuate the structural marginality of the class (see, for example, Bottero 2009; Nayak 2009). It needs to be stated that this is largely excellent scholarship. Nonetheless, when stripped of its subtleties and best intentions by the New Right,[2] for example, it runs the risk of becoming a handmaiden of neoliberal discourses of individual and cultural group responsibilisation for poverty in this case (Shildrick et al. 2012).

Perhaps as a reaction to the above, more recent anthropological work has been attentive to charting the pernicious effects of immiseration on the working class, and its members' responses to them. This turn is hardly surprising since, as Joel Robbins (2013) has so effectively argued, concern with the "suffering" of our research subjects has been a hallmark and traditional dispensation of the discipline (2013). In recent anthropological work on the British working-class attention has been paid to a broad range of issues, in-cluding working-class solidarity economies (Laville 2010), informal economies (Mollona 2010), crime (Hall et al. 2008), and charity-dependence (Caplan 2016). If the key symbol of workplace precarity is the zero-hours contract, it is the emergence of the charitable "food bank" upon which increasing numbers of unemployed and even employed people have come to depend for sustenance that is undoubtedly the key contemporary symbol of the immiseration of working-class people in Britain today.

Finally, considerable attention has been addressed to the consequences of immise-ration for working-class communities and psychologies. I consider these in turn. A common characteristic of many of Britain's post-industrial areas is their emergence as significant urban conurbations, usually no later than the Industrial Revolution and also usually around one dominant industry. In turn, they came to be inextricably identified with those specific industries ("Sheffield: steel city", etc.) to the point at which local explanations of both sociality and personhood are typically characterised by a kind of industrial determinism (Edwards 2012). Hence, for example, in Hart's (1987) ethnography of the potteries city of Stoke-on-Trent, her informants describe themselves as "people of the clay" (1987). More-over, as the informant self-referencing title of Dennis, Henriques, and Slaughter's (1956) celebrated study of a West Yorkshire mining town states, "Coal is Our Life". It follows

---

[2] A term that in the UK came to refer broadly to a neoliberal political movement whose inception lay in the Conservative government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

then, and as several recent ethnographies have articulated, that de-industrialisation is also commonly experienced as entailing the loss of community (Dawson 2010; Degnan 2012; Charles and Davies 2015; Pahl 2015).

Drawing particularly on recent work on post-Fordist affect (Muehlebach & Shoshan 2012), a more recent body of work has presented de-industrialisation as involving a kind of existential rupture. For example, in recent articles, we demonstrate how the social relations of production in mining and milling provide the foundations for life-worlds that frame aspects of social and cultural life that are apparently far removed from production itself, such as practices of care (Goodwin-Hawkins & Dawson 2018a) and attitudes to dying (Dawson & Goodwin-Hawkins 2018b). In times of de-industrialism, some of these practices persist as post-Fordist "afterlives". Conversely, sometimes they disappear, rendering people psychologically rudderless. Thus, typically, as informants in Catherine Thorleiffson's (2016) study of a former coal-mining town helplessly remarked, 'people don't realise that in our community, mining was *all* they [sic] ever known and done.'

Disenfranchisement and neo-nationalism

The combination of immigration with the precarity and immiseration brought by de-industrialisation, neoliberal restructuring and the post-GFC crisis has provided fertile ground for the emergence of working-class neo-nationalisms, not only in Britain (Holmes 2000) but also throughout Europe (Gullestad 2006) and, of course, in the US (Hochschild 2016). However, as several authors have pointed out, the emergence of such neo-nationalisms as an effective force is also contingent upon processes of political disenfranchisement (Kalb 2011; Evans 2012).

It is widely acknowledged that 1997 was a key moment in respect of the genesis of recent neo-nationalism amongst the white working-class in Britain. Following almost 19 years of government by a series of neoliberal "Thatcherite" administrations, the Labour Party came to power in an electoral landslide. Victory followed the party's rebranding as "New Labour". The newness was an ideological shift consisting of the adoption of neoliberal economic management in place of the erstwhile labourist Keynesian orthodoxy, and, in what turned out to be a successful strategy of capturing the electoral "centre-ground" abandonment of partisan class politics. This came to be known as the "Third Way", and its central injunction was prosperity through merit rather than (either middle or working-) class entitlement. Finally, and as we will come to see, another especially important component of New Labour's approach was its explicit embrace of multiculturalism in the context of the increasingly ethnically diverse society that Britain was seen to be becoming through immigration.

Referring to the British white working class, Edwards et al. (2012: 7) sum up the unintended and adverse effects of the Third Way, stating, 'it seemed, by the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, that the only way to be a viable person in Britain was to be middle class or "ethnic".' In this context, the Third Way was seen by many people to presage loss of privilege and the levelling down of the white working class to just one amongst other classes and, indeed, ethnic groups (Bottero 2009; Nayak 2009). It also si-

gnalled preferential treatment for these other groups (Rhodes 2010; Smith 2012). Moreover, finally, it signalled the white working-class' political disenfranchisement relative to these other groups (Lynch 2010: Edwards et al. 2012; Evans 2012).[3] The fact that these were outcomes of policy devised by the Labour Party, which had previously been regarded as the "natural" party of the working-class made the experience all the more troubling.

Mobilisation and cultural nationalism – the white working class: 'like an eel....easy to catch, but hard to hold'

A key outcome of this process of disenfranchisement has been the concerted efforts on the part of several political organisations, each with historically nationalist leanings, to harness the support of the white working class. This is evident in the proliferation of new nomenclatures invented to describe the cohort, such as "Red Kippers": red, being the colour of Labour, and a reference to former Labour voters who voted for the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in the 2015 General Election. Each of these political organisations, which I describe below, made efforts to put working-class concerns about immiseration and immigration at the heart of their strategies.[4]

The late 2000s saw a resurgence of the neo-fascist British National Party (BNP), an organisation at whose core is the cessation of the immigration of specifically "non-whites" and, in turn, their repatriation. In its very short heyday in 2009, it had 50 local councillors and two members of the European Parliament. Furthermore, while its share of the national vote was tiny, at less than 1%, the BNP was a not insignificant force in pockets of Britain, especially a number of de-industrialised areas in east London and northern England. Its resurgence is usually put down to skilful campaigning focussed on highly localised concerns regarding welfare provisioning (Smith 2012) and ideas of "English indigeneity" (Evans 2012). Adam Kuper (2003) perceptively characterises the latter campaign focus involving playing and then turning on its head the game of post-colonial politics. In its most dramatic form, this involved appropriating emotive and liberal discourses representing immigration as a method of "ethnic cleansing" that presages the "genocide" of the English "race". Importantly, as several scholars have pointed out, the BNP's indigenous turn was an inevitable response to labourist multiculturalism (see, for example, Back et al. 2002).

In time, however, support for the BNP collapsed; currently, it has only one local councillor in the entire UK. Critical aspects of the BNP's agenda and strategy were effectively appropriated and made respectable by UKIP, whose marked difference was tying the kinds of concerns articulated by the BNP specifically to the processes of loss of national political independence, especially through EU membership. Thus, for example, in a strategy that appealed to former mining communities (Thorleifsson 2016), it disavowed the "climate change" agenda and Britain's binding to it by European and wider international

---

[3] The extent of such political disenfranchisement has, however, been called into question by some recent scholarship (see, for example, Koch 2016).
[4] I consider only "party" political organisations. A range of other neo-nationalist organisations, such as "The English Defence League" and "National Action" that lack electoral aspirations also exist.

legislation, such as the Kyoto Protocols. Likewise, it was able to win wider support for its anti-immigration agenda by casting it less in terms of the racist rhetoric of the BNP and more regarding concerns about the unrestrained free-movement of people wrought by an increasingly "borderless" Europe. Inevitably, the centrepiece of UKIP's agenda was the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. In that case, UKIP was extraordinarily successful, exploiting widespread "anti-Brussels" sentiment for a short period in the years prior to the UK's Referendum on EU membership in 2016. In 2014, it had 113 local councillors, 24 Members of the European Parliament, and two Members of Parliament. Then, in the 2015 General Election, it won 3.8 million votes, amounting to 12.6% of the total electorate. Importantly, this success lay significantly in UKIP capturing large numbers of the white working-class vote, especially in de-industrialised areas. Some of these were former BNP supporters, but a great many more were former Labour supporters.

Like the BNP before it, support for UKIP collapsed in time. At one level, this was a result of it having been perceived as a "one issue" party whose mission had successfully been fulfilled. In the 2016 Referendum, the UK voted narrowly for Brexit. However, more broadly, the collapse was a result of the ruling Conservative Party's core strategy of attempting to win over the white working-class from UKIP. Many of this group were, as I have observed, once Labour Party supporters. Hence, its members came to be referred to by nomenclatures such as "Working-Class" or "Red" "Tories".[5] In essence, the strategy consisted of a hardening neo-nationalist agenda whose centrepieces were "Hard Brexit"[6] and draconian immigration controls. These were allied to – it has to be said – largely vague promises to introduce measures designed to ameliorate austerity, such as greater infrastructural investment and improvements in public services.

In the 2017 General Election campaign, the Conservative Party's policies and rhetoric that were designed to appeal to the white working-class were also backed-up by symbolism. Notably, the campaign was launched further into the predominantly wor-king-class North than ever before – in Halifax, a former mill-town and long-time Labour Party stronghold. The symbolism was clear – "Labour Party – we are coming to get you". However, this turned out to be hubris. The Labour Party retained Halifax, and the Conservative Party's fate in the area was largely repeated across the UK's de-industrialised and predominantly working-class regions. Despite the Conservative Party capturing significant numbers of ex-Labour voters, especially those who had voted UKIP in 2015, the Labour Party also increased its vote and retained its political grip in most of these areas.

On the night of the General Election in 2017, I sat with campaigners in the Ashington branch office of the Conservative Party. The party had expected to increase its majority in Parliament significantly. In its most optimistic predictions, it expected to "wipe out the Labour Party". There were sound reasons for this beyond the pollsters' predictions. Above all, the Conservatives had embraced what appeared to be a central and, perhaps the central concern of the white working-class that it had expressed through previous votes for the

---

[5] A term commonly used to refer to members of the Conservative Party.
[6] A model of withdrawal of the UK from the EU in which the UK sacrifices full access to the EU's single market in order to enable full control over its borders.

BNP, UKIP, and, overwhelmingly Brexit – immigration control. One campaigner assessed the basis of his party's misplaced optimism – 'The working-class. They're just like an eel… easy to catch, but hard to hold.' A central reason, I argue below, for the white working-class' "slipperiness" in this regard lies in misunderstanding its concerns about immigration, and its nationalistic sentiments more broadly, as expressions of xenophobia.

Xenophobia and its backlash

Fears about immigration in predominantly working-class communities leading to xenophobic sentiment and racial violence have been deep-seated in the UK, at least since Conservative politician Enoch Powell's infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968.[7] However, and perhaps even as a reaction to this, a common pattern seems to have emerged in British politics. Broadly, whenever, a political party appears to exploit and articulate xenophobic sentiments, this often heralds its demise. For example, as Smith describes, the collapse of the BNP coincided with the growing and commonplace recognition that its racist agenda trumped its localist agenda (2012).

Likewise, UKIP's demise in the 2017 General Election came when, in its search for political relevance without Brexit to fall back upon, it adopted racism. When this was met with hostility, the party tried to backtrack. Infamously, for example, it justified its plan to "ban the burqa" less as a means of preventing the erosion of English culture, but rather a means of helping Muslim women to overcome Vitamin D deficiency. Inevitably, UKIP became an object of ridicule.

Finally, in the more extreme fringes of the Conservative Party-supporting press and the party itself working-class support for immigration control was often understood and reflected-back to it as xenophobia. Notably, the folk devils (Cohen 1972) of the "Eastern European welfare scrounger", the "EU health tourist" and, especially in light of the terror attacks in Manchester and London that took place shortly before and during the 2017 General Election, respectively, the Islamic Jihadist, loomed large. The first clear sense during the election that such xenophobia would not be welcomed by sections of the white working-class became clear in the large-scale commemoration of the victims of the attacks that took place in the northern post-industrial city of Manchester. Local band Oasis's song *Don't Look Back in Anger* became the unofficial anthem of mourners. As I commented at the time, 'a sonically moving tune, its lyrical vacuity cried out to be filled with meaning. And, it came to say, "refrain from blame", and, implicitly, refrain from blaming immigrants' (Dawson 2017: 2).

The articulation of anti-xenophobic sentiment in cities such as Manchester is, perhaps, understandable. Manchester is a relatively deprived post-industrial city that is also massively multicultural. Thus, intuitively, it may have considerable potential for the racial tension that, pragmatically people may seek to avoid. However, what of Ashington, a conurbation with a relatively shallow multicultural history?

---

[7] A famous speech by Conservative politician Enoch Powell in the 1960s that warned against immigration and, specifically, its potential for bringing inter-racial and ethnic conflict.

Ashington and the heterogeneity of the white working class

Speaking of the "white working class" is inherently problematic. It has salience as a descriptive category within British society, especially in discourses of stigamatisation by the Right and of political mobilisation by the Left. However, it refers to a group of people that is, in fact, remarkably heterogeneous (Rhodes 2011; Rhodes 2012). Britain's working-class localities have experienced recent economic and social transformations unevenly. Thus, for example, in relation to the key issue of immigration, working-class communities span the spectrum from the largely "mono-cultural" (Dawson 2001) through to the "super diverse" (Hall 2015). Furthermore, and in ways not necessarily contiguous with such polarities, the ethnographic record illustrates a spectrum of locally dominant attitudes towards recent immigrants. These range from the hostile (see, for example Grill 2012) through to the accommodating (see, for example, Rhodes 2012; Watt 2006).

Located in far northeast England, Ashington comprises a town and surrounding villages with a population of approximately 22,000. Its inception as a settlement dates to the later stages of the Industrial Revolution, when it emerged as a centre for coalmining. However, mining went into steep decline from the mid-1960s. Ashington's last mine closed in 1994. Scarred by vast expanses of "brownfield", and facing no obvious alternative source of major employment, Ashington's decline was ameliorated only slightly by the development of small local light industrial, retail, service, and housing sectors.

Despite its post-industrial transformation, Ashington has retained its identity as a single-industry town. It is still celebrated in its local museum somewhat exaggeratedly as "the biggest mining village in the World". This belies the reality not just of the closure of the mines, but also a steady demographic transformation that has seen the area's erstwhile mining population recede relative to others. In the manner of many industrial towns in Britain whose inception lies in the Industrial Revolution, Ashington emerged as an intrinsically migrant town. It drew its labour to the mines from outlying rural areas and Ireland. Through the years that followed, it incorporated a range of immigrants, albeit in minimal numbers, most noticeably from Pakistan, Poland, and Italy. Excluded from the national dispersal policy, it remained largely unaffected by the arrival of forced migrants that many other post-industrial areas experienced in the 2000s. However, later, as significant numbers of the former mining working class out-migrated, other noticeable groups of migrants settled, albeit in small numbers. These include a few African and Asian people who are mostly employed in the health and care industries; Kurds from Turkey who have a very visible presence, especially as they own and run much of the local fast-food sector; and small numbers of immigrants from Central Europe. They are mostly employed in various forms of manual work, especially in the building trade. Finally, there has been a significant change in Ashington's British-born demographic, as the area has become a major provider of cheap private accommodation for working-class people priced out of other local housing markets.

Not surprisingly, given its history as an industrial conurbation with a predominantly working-class population Ashington has been represented in Parliament by the

Labour Party. At its high watermark in the 1997 General Election Labour received 65.5% of the vote in the Wansbeck constituency in which Ashington is part. 2015 saw a marked change, however. In the 2015 General Election the vote was as follows: Labour 50.0%; Conservative 21.7%; and UKIP 18.2%. In the 2016 referendum on membership of the EU the vote in the Northumberland constituency in which Ashington is a part was as follows: Leave 54.1% and Remain 45.9%. In the 2017 General Election, the vote in the Wansbeck constituency was as follows: Labour 57.3%; Conservative 32.7%; and UKIP 4.7%. In short, through the "Third Way" years Labour haemorrhaged votes to the Conservative Party, and then later lost votes to UKIP too. However, and like in many parts of de-industrialised Britain, on the event of UKIP's collapse a very significant portion of the vote returned to Labour rather than, as had been widely expected, the Conservatives.

Returning to the labourist fold

Commonplace explanations of what happened in the 2017 General Election tend to focus on the disastrous campaign of the Conservatives, the successful campaign of Labour, and its partial re-embracing of a socialist agenda. There is merit in these explanations. However, informants in Ashington highlight a range of other pertinent factors.

One sentiment commonly expressed by white working-class people in Ashington is that temporary abandonment of the Labour Party and voting for UKIP in 2015 was a protest against their ***Third Way disenfranchisement***. As one informant expressed: 'I had voted Labour all my life, but I voted for UKIP in 2015. I don't know if I even liked their policies. I mean, when it came to the referendum I wasn't sure if I was a stayer or a leaver. I just got fucked off with Labour. They stopped being our party. I got that out of my system though, and I was back to Labour again this year' (Mary, 48-year-old shop worker).

Allied to this, several informants explained their recent voting behaviour as motivated by what Smith describes as ***"anti-party party politics***" (2012), in which they registered a protest vote against dominant political parties, usually only to return to the mainstream at a later date. As another informant expressed: 'Yes. I voted UKIP in the last election. And I voted to leave Europe too. I had just had enough of politics as they used to be. I voted Labour this time around though.' (Roger – 48-year-old building labourer). This kind of voting behaviour is an increasingly ubiquitous feature of politics in Europe as several non-mainstream parties on both the right and left of the political spectrum, such as the Party of Freedom in the Netherlands and Podemos in Spain, have failed to capitalise on initial electoral successes.

In Ashington, there are several reasons for returning to the mainstream party political fold, especially what has been referred to as ***partisan tribalism*** (Dawson 2017). As one informant expressed: 'I voted UKIP in the last election. It was hard enough to live that down. But voting Tory….now that's another thing. Don't get me wrong. I've got nothing against Theresa May [leader of the Conservative Party]. She's no bad woman. Definitely strong and stable. You couldn't say the same for bloody Corbyn [leader of the Labour Party]. Whatever… I'll be voting Labour. Boring, eh?' (Susan, 51 years-old catering assistant). Put simply, even if they are so rationally inclined, many white working-class

people in Ashington find it emotionally challenging to transgress local and familial traditions of Labour Party voting.

In contrast to the above, a broad range of reasons given for returning to the Labour Party relate directly to concerns about xenophobia. Some anti-xenophobic sentiment is instrumental, a strategy of ***anti-stigmatisation***. For example, one informant reacted angrily to a newspaper photograph of a placard carried by an obviously middle-class protester at a 'Remain – keep Britain in Europe' rally. It stated, 'HELP! We're trapped on an island that's been taken by MAD PEOPLE!' My informant responded: 'Isn't it obvious who that's directed at? The pesky working-class again. Yes, we voted to get out of Europe. But, we didn't do it because we are mad. We didn't do it because we are racists, as these metropolitan types will have you believe. I feel uncomfortable about that. I won't be tarred with that brush. I'll be voting Labour this time. At least that's what I'm telling you…ha-ha (Janet, 50-year-old housewife).

Other anti-xenophobic sentiments are, however more deep-seated. At one level, and especially amongst older people labourist traditions are suffused with a form of ***socialist internationalism***. As one informant expressed it: 'Labour stopped being socialist when Blair [former leader of the Labour Party and Prime Minister between 1997 and 2007] took over. I've been with Farage [former leader of UKIP] ever since. At least he wants to get us out of Europe. That way we could open the mines again. But I don't like the way UKIP's talking these days….all this anti-Muslim stuff. That's not what we're about here. It doesn't matter what colour your skin is or where you're from. Call us old-fashioned around here, but we believe in the old saying, 'workers of the world unite.' That's the way forward' (George, 76-year-old retired miner). In short, much local anti-xenophobic sentiment is rooted in a socialist internationalism that sees class, as much as localism or ethnicity, as a significant form of identification.

Importantly though, the local anti-anti-immigrant sentiment is not always merely a reflection of political ideology. It is also an outcome of experience. In a manner reflecting Clifford's (1992) famed conceptualisation of places as sites less of "dwelling" than of "travelling", many local working-class people conceptualise Ashington as an ***essentially migrant*** context, and even proper belonging to it as the preserve of the migrant (Dawson 1998). This has a historical dimension. Especially through the burgeoning amateur local history and "my ancestry" industries, (see also, Edwards 2012), people are acutely aware of the conurbation's immigrant beginnings and their own immigrant "routes" (Clifford 1997). Indeed, local cultural distinctiveness is often thought of in these terms. For example, reflecting its multiple migrant linguistic inputs, the local language and the accent is often referred to as the "polyglotal buzz" (Dawson 1998). Furthermore, the sentiment is also an outcome of lived experience, especially that of having been forced through de-industrialisation to out-migrate temporarily in order to seek work elsewhere. In sum, as one informant articulated,: 'Why on earth would we have a problem with immigrants. Scratch the surface, and you'll see that we are all immigrants here. That's what makes this place what it is' (Joe, 57-year-old unemployed former miner).

The conceptualisation of Ashington and its people as "essentially migrant" problematises a fairly pervasive finding in many studies of the British white working-class

(and other classes): that local perceptions of belonging are intimately tied to longevity of residence. The resulting "born and bred" discourse (Strathern 1981; Edwards 2000) often results in what Evans appropriately describes as "place-ism" (Evans 2006), whereby new-comers of any ethnic variety are marginalised. Assumptions of an intimate link between belonging and longevity of residence are, I argue, called into question even more by another factor integral to places like Ashington, places whose inceptions and *raison d'êtres* lay in industry. In such contexts, valorised forms of sociality and personhood are, as I have already intimated often seen as industrially determined and, thereby fundamentally grounded in the experience of industrial work. For example, as we have demonstrated elsewhere (Dawson & Goodwin-Hawkins 2018b), ideals of "autonomy" in Lyng Valley (near Halifax) and "solidarism" in Ashington are intimately linked to the contrasting isolated and collective forms of the social organisation of production that characterised the milling and mining industries that once dominated in these areas, respectively.

Importantly, de-industrialisation and subsequent unemployment, precarious employment and service employment, that is often locally conceptualised as being less than "real", i.e., industrial work, is then often characterised as involving the loss of such valorised forms of sociality and personhood. Invariably, young people – those who ought to be most economically active, but who through de-industrialisation have been denied more than others the potential to be so – are seen widely to embody this loss the most (Dawson 2018). In this respect, local people frequently adopt and internally deploy the stereotypes implicit within discourses of povertyism, albeit projecting them inter-genera-tionally. Central among these stereotypes is that of the "Chav": an image of indolent youth characterised by specific styles of dress and behaviour that include welfare dependency and lawlessness. Hence, one of the assumed etymologies of the term Chav is an acronym for "Council Housed and Violent". Another assumed etymology reflects the ethnicisation of class; Chav derives from "Charvor" (Nayak 2009), the Gypsy word for child. Thereby, resonances are drawn between local working class-youth, processes of infantilisation, and Britain's most marginal and stigmatised indigenous ethnic group (Okely 1983).

In contrast to this, the predilection for work amongst the overwhelmingly economic migrants that have settled in the area is widely assumed and, indeed celebrated. So too is their apparent preparedness to do both the kinds of work that more historically rooted locals are not willing to (see also, Tyler 2012), and the kinds of work that many of these long-term locals are not capable of doing (see also, Howard 2012), largely because of perceived state underinvestment in training and retraining. Recent work in the Anthropology of Britain describes the inclusion of immigrants by the post-industrial white working-class on the basis of immigrants' actively forging social relationships (Edwards 2000) and, more per-tinently on their being able to exhibit locally valorised behavioural ideals (Rhodes 2012). In Ashington, as in other de-industrialised contexts where manual work is so central to notions of local sociality and personhood, immigrants are seen to cultivate these ideals in spades, precisely because they are part of a population that is there to work.

Conclusion: a warning for the Left

A number of Labour politicians and leftist political activists have been both concerned and impressed by increasing support at various times in recent years amongst the British post-industrial white working-class for political organisations that articulate explicitly neo-nationalist political agendas. This has led to calls for, as Leddy-Owen puts it, greater recognition of how 'reinvigorated English national identities could be an important resource for constructing a progressive sense of social solidarity and community in England' (Leddy 2014: 109). In some instances, this has been accompanied by calls from the Left for the Labour Party to embrace the core neo-nationalist policy of stringent control of immigration. In this article I have demonstrated that sections of the post-industrial white working-class have turned away from neo-nationalist political organisations whilst simultaneously holding firm in demands for immigration control. I have demonstrated the logic of this. In many instances, members of the post-industrial white working-class "hate" immigration. In particular, it is seen as enabling access to an international labour force that obviates the need for the development of local human capital. Contrastingly, many of the same people express feelings of "love" for immigrants. This is an outcome of widespread perceptions of immigrants embodying locally valorised forms of sociality and personhood that are intimately linked to experiences of work and industrial work in particular. The turn away from the neo-nationalist right is, in part an outcome of its failure to appreciate this distinction and, in turn, an anti-xenophobic backlash by sections of the post-industrial white working class. The Left would be wise to pay heed to these subtle distinctions in attitudes towards the matter of immigration amongst the post-industrial white working-class if it too is not to jeopardise its recently hard-fought political gains.

References

Back, Les, Michael Keith, Azra Kahn, Shukra Kalbir & John Solomos. 2002. The Return of Assimilationism: Race, Multiculturalism and New Labour. *Sociological Review Online*. 7(2).

Bottero, Wendy. 2009. Class in the 21st Century. In: Kjartan P. Sveinson (ed.), *Who Cares About the White Working Class?* London: Runnymeade, pp. 7–14.

Caplan, Pat. 2016. Big Society or Broken Society?: Food Banks in the UK, *Anthropology Today* 32(1): 5–9.

Charles, Nickie & Charlotte A. Davies. 2005. Studying the Particular, Illuminating the General: Community Studies and Community in Wales. *Sociological Review* 53(4): 672–90.

Clifford, James. 1992. Travelling Cultures. In: Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson & Paula A. Treichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 323–35.

Clifford, James. 1997. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

Cohen, Anthony P. 1982. *Belonging: Identity and Social Organization in British*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Cohen, Stanley. 1972. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: the Creation of Mods and Rockers*. London: MacGibbon & Kee.

Craig, Gary, Andrew Dawson, Sandra Hutton, Nerys Roberts & Mick Wilkinson. 2004. *Local Impacts of International: The Information Base*. Hull: CASS.

Dawson, Andrew. 1998. The Dislocation of Identity: Contestations of 'Home Community' in Northern England. In: Rapport, N.J. & Andrew Dawson (eds.), *Migrants of Identity: Perceptions of Home in a World of Movement*. Oxford and New York: Berg, pp. 207–24.

Dawson, Andrew. 2000. The Poetics of Self-Depreciation: Images of Womanhood Amongst Elderly Women in an English Former Coal Mining Town, *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures* 9(1): 37–52.

Dawson, Andrew. 2001. *Mono-Cultural Communities and Their Effect on Asylum/Immigration Seekers in Humberside*. London: Save the Children.

Dawson, Andrew. 2002. The Problem with Asylum-Seeker Dispersal, *Benefits* 10(1): 9–14.

Dawson, Andrew. 2010. *Ageing and Change in Pit Villages of North East England*. Melbourne: University of Melbourne Custom Books.

Dawson, Andrew. 2017. Why British Labour Voters Stayed True to Their Roots, *Pursuit* https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/why-british-labour-voters-stayed-true-to-their-roots. Accessed on10 August 2017.

Dawson, Andrew. 2018. Youthquake: Neoliberalism and the Ethnicization of Generation, *Advances in Anthropology* 8(1): 10–17.

Dawson, Andrew & Bryony Goodwin-Hawkins. 2018. Post-Fordist Death: A Comparative Ethnographic Analysis of Milling and Mining in Northern England. *Death Studies* 41(10): 282–9

Degnan, Catherine 2012. *Ageing Selves and Every Day Life in the North of England: Years in the Making*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Dennis, Norman, Fernando Henriques & Clifford Slaughter. 1956. *Coal is Our Life: Analysis of a Yorkshire Mining Community*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode.

Edwards, Jeanette. 2000. *Born and Bred: Idioms of Kinship and New Reproductive Technologies in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Edwards, Jeanette. 2012. Ancestors, Class, and Contingency, *Focaal – Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 62(1): 70–80.

Edwards, Jeanette, Gillian Evans & Katherine Smith. 2012. Introduction: The Middle-Classification of Britain, *Focaal – Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 62(1): 3–16.

Eurostat 2011 Statistics in Focus. 21 July 2011. Retrieved 6 July 2017.

Evans, Gillian. 2006. Learning, Violence and the Social Structure of Value, *Social Anthropology* 14(2): 247–59.

Evans, Gillian. 2012. "The Aboriginal People of England": The Culture of Class Politics in Contemporary Britain, *Focaal – Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 62(1): 17–29.

Fortier, Anne-Marie. 2007. Too Close for Comfort: Loving Thy Neighbour and the Management of Multicultural Intimacies, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25: 104–19.

Grill, Jan. 2012. "It's Building up to Something and it Won't be Nice when it Erupts": The Making of Roma/Gypsy Migrants in Post-Industrial Scotland, *Focaal – Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 62(1): 42–54.

Goodwin-Hawkins, Bryony & Andrew Dawson. 2018a. Care and the Afterlives of Post-Industrial Northern England, *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 29(2): 222–36.

Goodwin-Hawkins, Bryony & Andrew Dawson. 2018b. Life's End: Ethnographic Perspectives. *Death Studies* 41(10): 269–74.

Gullestad, Marianne. 2006. Imagined Kinship: The role of Descent in the Rearticulation of Norwegian Ethno-Nationalism. In: Andre Gingrich and Marcus Banks (eds.), *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology*. New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 69–91.

Hall, Steven, Simon Winlow & Craig Ancrum. 2008. *Criminal Identities and Consumer Culture: Crime, Exclusion and the New Culture of Narcissism*. Devon: Willan.

Hall, Suzanne M. 2015. Super-Diverse Street: A 'Trans-Ethnography' Across Migrant Localities, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 38(1): 22–37.

Hart, Elizabeth. 1987. *Paintresses and Potters: Work, Skill and Social Relations in a Pottery Factory in Stoke-on-Trent*, 1981-1984. PhD diss., University of London.

Haylett, Chris. 2001. Illegitimate Subjects? Abject Whites, Neoliberal Modernisation, and Middle Class Multiculturalism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19: 351–70.

Holmes, Douglas. 2010. *Integral Europe: Fast Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hochschild 2016. *Strangers in Their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right*. New York: New Press.

Kalb, Don. 2011. Introduction. In: Don Kalb & Gabor Halmai (eds.), *Headlines of Nations, Subtexts of Class: Working-Class Populism and the Return of the Repressed in Neoliberal Europe*. New York: Berghahn, pp. 1–36.

Koch, Insa. 2016. Bread-and-Butter Politics: Democratic Disenchantment and Everyday Politics on an English Council Estate, *American Ethnologist* 43(2): 282–94.

Kuper, Adam. 2003. The Return of the Native, *Current Anthropology* 44(3): 389–402.

Laville, Jean-Louise. 2010. The Solidarity Economy: An International Movement. *RCCS Annual Review* 2(2): 1–10.

Lawler, Step. 2012. White Like Them: Whiteness and Anachronistic Space in Representations of the English White Working Class, *Ethnicities* 12(4): 409–26.

Leddy-Owen, Charles. 2014. Reimagining Englishness: 'Race', Class, Progressive English Identities and Disrupted English Communities, The *Sociological Review* 53(4): 109–28.

Lewis, Oscar. 1962. *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty*. New York: Wiley.

McCall Howard, Penny. 2012. Workplace Cosmopolitanism and "the Power and Pain of Class Relations" at Sea, *Focaal – Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 62(1): 55–69.

McKenzie, Lisa. 2013. Narratives from a Nottingham Council Estate: A Story of White Working-Class Mothers with Mixed-Race Children, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36(8): 1342–58.

Mollona, Massimilano. 2010. *Made in Sheffield: An Ethnography of Industrial Work and Politics*. London: Berghahn Books.

Muehlebach, Andrea & Nitzan Shoshan. 2012. Post-Fordist Affect: Introduction, *Anthropological Quarterly* 85(2): 317–43.

Nayak, Anoop. 2009. Beyond the Pale: Chavs, Youth and Social Class. In: Kjartan P. Sveinson (ed.), *Who Cares About the White Working Class?* London: Runnymeade, pp. 28–35.

Okely, Judith. 1983. *The Traveller Gypsies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pahl, Ray. 2005. Are All Communities in the Mind? *Sociological Review* 53(4): 587–602.

Rapport, Nigel J. (ed.) 2002. *British Subjects: An Anthropology of Britain*. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Rhodes, James. 2011. 'It's Not Just Them, It's Whites as Well': Whiteness, Class and BNP Support, *Sociology* 45(1): 102–17.

Rhodes, James. 2012. The 'Trouble' with the 'White Working Class': Whiteness, Class and 'Groupism', *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 19(4): 485–92.

Robbins, Joel. 2013. Beyond the Suffering Subject: Toward an Anthropology of the Good, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19(3): 447–62.

Shildrick, Tracy, Robert MacDonald, Colin Webster & Kayleigh Garthwaite. 2012. *Poverty and Insecurity: Life in Low-Pay, No-Pay Britain*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Smith, Katherine. 2012. Anxieties of Englishness and Participation in Democracy, *Focaal – Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 62(1): 30–41.

Strathern, Maralyn. 1981. *Kinship at the Core: An Anthropology of a Village in North West Essex in the 1960s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thorleifsson, Catherine. 2016. From Coal to Ukip" The Struggle Over Identity in Post-Industrial Doncaster, *History and Anthropology* 27(5): 555–68.

Tily, Geoff. 2017. UK 103rd out of 112 in Global Ranking for Real Wage Growth Since the Crisis, *Economics*. http://touchstoneblog.org.uk/2017/02/uk-103rd-112-global-ranking-real-wage-growth-since-crisis/. Accessed on 8 August 2017.

Tyler, Katharine. 2015. Attachments and Connections: a 'White Working-Class' English Family's Relationships with Their BrAsian 'Pakistani' Neighbours, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38(7): 1169–84.

UK Border Agency 2008

Ware, Vron. 2008. Towards a Sociology of Resentment: A Debate on Class and Whiteness, *Sociological Research Online* 13(5): 9.

Watt, Paul. 2006. Respectability, Roughness and 'Race': Neighbourhood, Place Images and the Making of Working-Class Social Distinctions in London, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 30(4): 776–97.

Werbner, Pnina. 2006. Vernacular Cosmopolitanisms, *Theory, Culture and Society* 23(2/3): 479–98.

Willis, Paul 1977. *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Wise, Amanda & Selvaraj, Velayutham (eds.) 2009. *Everyday Multiculturalism*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Palgrave.

Povzetek

V zadnjih letih smo med postindustrijskim belim delavskim razredom v Veliki Britaniji priča pojavu neonacionalističnih občutkov, povezanih zlasti z nadzorom priseljevanja. Ta trend pa se je vidno zmanjšal leta 2017, saj je nepričakovano veliko število postindustrijskega belega delavskega razreda glasovalo proti političnim strankam z implicitno neonacionalističnimi agendami. Na podlagi etnografskih raziskav, izvedenih v postindustrijski severovzhodni Angliji, pojasnjujem ta nepričakovan zasuk dogodkov, ki je deloma posledica reakcije proti implicitni ksenofobiji v agendah neonacionalističnih političnih organizacij. Utemeljujem, da je ta zasuk povezan s splošno razširjenimi zaznavami priseljencev, ki vključujejo lokalno valorizirane oblike družbenosti in osebnosti, tesno povezane delom in še posebej industrijskim delom. Hkrati pa zagovarjam idejo, da se isti člani postindustrijskega belega delavskega razreda pogosto upirajo priseljevanju, ker ta omogoča dostop do mednarodne delovne sile, ki odpravlja potrebo po razvoju lokalnega človeškega kapitala in s tem možnost dostopa mnogih "lastnih" ljudi do sredstev, s katerimi lahko razvijejo te iste valorizirane vrste družbenosti in osebnosti. Na ta način postindustrijski beli delavski razred pogosto nasprotuje priseljevanju, medtem ko je naklonjen priseljencem.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: beli delavski razred, postindustrijsko, volitve, nacionalizem, priseljevanje, antropologija v Britaniji

CORRESPONDENCE: ANDREW DAWSON, School of Social & Political Sciences, University of Melbourne, Parkville 3010, Victoria, Australia. E-mail: dawsona@unimelb.edu.au.