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England/Britain's past**

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**Celebrating British multiculturalism, lamenting England/Britain's past**

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## **Celebrating British multiculturalism, lamenting England/Britain's past**

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### **Abstract**

Drawing upon Littler and Naidoo's (2004; 2005) 'white past, multicultural present' alignment, this article examines English newspaper coverage of two 'British' events held in 2012 (the Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympic Games). In light of recent work on English nationalism, national identity and multiculturalism, this article argues that representations of Britain oscillated between lamentations for an English/British past – marred by decline – and a present that, while being portrayed as both confident and progressive, was beset by latent anxieties. In doing so, 'past' reflections of England/Britain were presented as a 'safe' and legitimate source of belonging that had subsequently been lost and undermined amidst the diversity of the 'present'. As a result, feelings of discontent, anxiety and nostalgia were dialectically constructed alongside 'traditional' understandings of England/Britain. Indeed, this draws attention to the *ways* in which particular 'versions' of the past are engaged with and the impact that this can have on discussions related to multiculturalism and the multiethnic history of England/Britain.

### **Introduction**

In 2012 the United Kingdom (UK) hosted two major events of both national and international significance: the Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympic Games.<sup>1</sup> On each occasion attempts were made to represent 'Britain' via narratives that respectfully acknowledged its 'past' while also promoting a positive portrayal of Britain's 'present'. However, whereas both events prescribed the opportunity for various 'versions' of the nation to be displayed (Kenny, 2014: 166) and while appraisals of the London Olympic Games commended its multicultural inclusiveness (Mitra, 2014), such accounts stand in contrast to the animosity and anxiety that has pervaded 'English' press reports on immigration and multiculturalism (Drzewiecka et al., 2014; Hoops et al., 2015). Indeed, when previous work has identified a rebirth of English patriotism (Garland, 2004; Poulton, 2003; Kenny, 2014), then it is important that critical attention is awarded to examining the ways in which the English press served to frame 'Britain's potential power as a multicultural nation' (Mitra, 2014: 9) alongside more recent 'attempt[s] to recast England as a multicultural nation' (Kenny, 2014: 12).

Accordingly, this article will examine English newspaper coverage of the 2012 Diamond Jubilee and London Olympic Games. Specifically, it will use Littler and Naidoo's (2004; 2005) 'white past, multicultural present' alignment as an effective lens for examining how the English press presented particular 'versions' of an English/British 'past' while simultaneously appraising Britain's multicultural 'present'. In doing so, this article will shed light on the use of 'past' and 'present' narratives within newspaper discourses as well as the discursive effect of these narratives on issues pertaining to British multiculturalism and English nationalism/national identity.

### **Understanding National Anxieties: English Nationalism and National Identity via a 'White Past, Multicultural Present' Alignment**

Historically, English nationalism has been closely aligned with a British identification underpinned by its hegemonic position in matters related to the British constitution and economy (Kumar, 2003; Nairn, 1977). Just like the ‘Germans in the Habsburg Empire and Russians in the Russian Empire, the English identified themselves with larger entities and larger causes in which they found their role and purpose’ (Kumar, 2003: 36). However, instead of ‘Great Britain’, it is ‘Little England’ – an inward looking, Eurosceptic label – that has encapsulated England’s defunct global status and which has provided a ‘strong defensive reaction to globalization processes, European integration, the pluralization of national culture and the assertiveness of the “Celtic fringe”’ (Maguire, 1993: 314).

As a consequence, a ‘sense of loss ... linked to the actions or presence of “other” groups who [have] threatened established identities, traditions and ways of life’ (Skey, 2012: 13) has coalesced with ‘a revamped Englishness’ (Maguire, 1993: 314). This has resulted in an insular, parochial, and, at times, xenophobic, display of England. Often such displays are buttressed by nostalgic accounts of ‘England’s Green and Pleasant Land’, a global hegemony founded by the British Navy and a national pride forged in ‘*Two World Wars and one World Cup*’.<sup>2</sup> Here, examples of national hubris have, according to Gilroy (2004), resulted in a ‘post-imperial melancholia’ within England/Britain. Paralysed by colonial guilt, yet nostalgically invested in images drawn from its colonial history, Gilroy (2004) exposes how the post-imperial decline of Britain has underscored contemporary understandings of multiculturalism, immigration and national identity. In doing so, post-war representations of England have remained ambiguously tied to Britain’s imperial legacy and to wider insecurities regarding English national identity (Black, 2015; Gilroy, 2004; 2005; Kumar, 2003; Webster, 2005).

Subsequently, whereas understandings of ‘England’ were once experienced through ‘the prism of British identity and imperial bonds’ (Jackson, 2015: 11) and as part of an imperial process that racialized national identity along racial hierarchies of national belonging (Cesarini, 1996), contemporary understandings of England are marked by anxieties enveloped in the European continent (Euroscepticism), England’s post-imperial role, and, more recently, its position within a devolved British state (Aughey, 2007; Colley, 2005; 2014; Colls, 2002; Featherstone, 2009; Gibbons, 2015; Gilroy, 2005; Leddy-Owen, 2014a; 2014b; Maguire, 1993; Malcolm, 2014; Skey, 2012; Wellings, 2010). This is echoed by Kingsnorth, who argues that:

The history of England, seen through the eyes of the ordinary English woman or man, is often a history of dispossession. ... If you want to hear that population speak, you only have to listen to an English folk song. Listen to enough of them, and you begin to realise how many are laments. (2015)

There are important conclusions to be drawn from such remarks, most notably, the extent to which a ‘history ... seen through the eyes of the *ordinary* English woman or man’ is used to project a particular ‘national story’ and the ways in which this history is negatively perceived as ‘a history of dispossession’ and ‘lament’ (Kingsnorth, 2015 [italics added]).

In his work on Englishness, Kenny (2014: 5 [italics added]) argues that ‘different *versions* of the past are in competition with each other, and these narratives are usually harnessed to different ideas about the character of, and prospects for, the nation in the present’. In fact, in their work on ‘race’, heritage and national identity, Littler and Naidoo (2004; 2005; Littler, 2005) draw attention to the propagation of a ‘white past, multicultural present’ alignment in accounts of Britain. They note that:

‘The white past, multicultural present’ formation occurs simultaneously as a lament and a celebration – a celebration of our nation being modern, young, hip and in tune with the globalised economy as well as harbouring a nostalgia and lament for a bygone contained, safe and monocultural world. (Littler and Naidoo, 2004: 338)

Here, communities ‘from somewhere else’ are simply added to national stories that fail to acknowledge the complex and entwined histories that have enveloped the British state and former empire (Littler, 2005). For example, with regards to television documentaries, Macdonald (2011: 425) highlights that ‘Muslim memories are rarely interwoven into general historical programmes about Britain, clustering instead in “special” programming’. This prescribes ‘an imaginary “them/us” polarity’ that continually views Muslim experiences within Britain as both separate from, and, different to, accounts of Britain’s past (Macdonald, 2011: 425).

Taking the above into consideration, it is apparent that the nation’s past forms an important part of contemporary discussions on multiculturalism and national identity (Black, 2015; Fortier, 2005; Gilroy, 2004; 2005; Kenny, 2014; Sumartojo, 2013). In the context of the Diamond Jubilee – a royal event marked by tradition and history – and the London Olympic Games – a global sporting event, awarded to London based upon its promoted multiculturalism – examinations of the relationship between ‘past’ and ‘present’ narratives in media discourses can provide a valuable insight into contemporary representations of Britain (Edy, 1999; Falcous and Silk, 2010; Silk, 2014; Wardle and West, 2004). In the case of England, this can take on particular relevance, especially when analyses of English nationalism/national identity have been marked by examples of dislocation, anxiety, (post-imperial) decline and a decrease in ‘British’ identifications (Abell et al., 2007; Aughey, 2007;

Cesarini, 1996; Colley, 2014; Featherstone, 2009; Gibbons, 2015; Gilroy, 1987; 2004; 2005; Kenny, 2014; Kumar, 2003; Leddy-Owen, 2014a; 2014b; Maguire and Poulton, 1999; Maguire et al., 1999; Reviron-Piégay, 2009; Skey, 2012; Wellings, 2010).

Therefore, with regards to examining how representations of Britain's multicultural 'present' were related to, framed by, and, worked alongside, established and stable versions of an English/British 'past' (Littler and Naidoo, 2004; 2005), this article explored English newspaper coverage of the 2012 Diamond Jubilee and London Olympic Games. In order to provide a representative sample of the English newspaper market, print editions of five English newspapers were selected: three broadsheet (*The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Daily Telegraph*) and two tabloid (*Daily Mail*, *Daily Mirror*).<sup>3</sup> Selected newspapers were chosen due to their readership demographic and national prominence. Once newspapers were collected, articles relating to the Diamond Jubilee and London Olympic Games were identified for analysis.<sup>4</sup> In total, 93 articles were selected. A qualitative thematic content analysis (Mayring, 2000) was employed and each article underwent a process of deductive inference (Callinicos, 1995; Oriard, 2006; Poulton and Maguire, 2012). Here, attention was given to examining the ways in which newspaper narratives served to draw upon 'past' and 'present' discourses in their framing of Britain. This was undertaken in relation to the literature on English nationalism/national identity and British multiculturalism. The following sections will elaborate upon these narratives.

### **'A time when people were friendly rather than resentful': Nostalgia and lament in the English press**



It has been noted elsewhere that national ceremonies are often used to present a glorified portrayal of the nation's history by evoking memories embedded in the 'collective past' (Wynne-Jones, 2012 see also Dayan and Katz, 1994). Such events draw upon the nation's 'collective memory' (Moore, 2012a), providing a 'visceral connection' between the national population and their 'collective history' (Phillips, 2012). This was evident in English reports that sought to reflect upon Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, held in 1896. With regards to the British Naval Review at Spithead, Jack (2012) stated that 'Spithead ... showed what the nation was about', adding:

The convoy that followed the royal yacht around on its inspection duties included a large Atlantic liner, the *Campania*, filled with parliamentarians and newspaper reporters – witnesses and publicists to the naval supremacy that, in the words of the *Times*, was the 'true bond' of the British Empire. Since Nelson, Britain had thought of itself as a country of singular nautical genius. Certainly in no other country did seafarers enjoy so much respect and affection, or parents put so many of their children into sailor suits. (2012)

In addition, Tweedie and Harding (2012 [italics added]) highlighted that 'the assembly of this great fleet had required the recall of *not a single ship* from the Mediterranean or the farflung squadrons guarding the imperial sea lanes'.

Indeed, whereas the 1896 naval review was heralded as a powerful signifier of British culture and history, appraisals of the 2012 Jubilee were marked by reports that commented upon Britain's decline as a naval power (Davies and Walker, 2012; *The Guardian*, 2012). Tweedie and Harding (2012) noted:

One hundred and fifteen years later and Britain is celebrating only the second diamond jubilee in its history. The occasion calls for a naval review, a staple of coronations and other great moments in the life of the nation, but it is not to be. The Royal Navy, the country's saviour in two world wars, is a sorry shadow of its former self, so depleted by successive rounds of cuts that it can no longer muster a dozen ships for the occasion. So embarrassed are the ministers and civil servants at the Ministry of Defence who have overseen these disastrous reductions that they have quietly drawn a veil over the issue, hoping no one will notice the absence of a major role for the Senior Service in this week's celebrations. (2012)

Subsequently, despite suggestions that the 2012 flotilla reconnected Britain with its nautical heritage (Davies, 2012; Moore, 2012a; Phillips, 2012; Routledge, 2012; Wynne-Jones, 2012), Levine (2007: 60) notes that 'much of Britain's imperial strength [was] derived from [its] naval prowess'. Accordingly, 'lamentations' of the past were discursively present in the failure to include any naval accompaniment for the 2012 celebrations.<sup>5</sup> Instead, 2012's demilitarised spectacle served to underscore Britain's post-imperial decline (Gilroy, 2005; Kingsnorth, 2015; Littler, 2005; Littler and Naidoo, 2004), echoing Wellings's (2010: 490 [italics added]) suggestion that understandings of the past are, in England, often predicated on 'a vision of history where the notion of "*greatness*" has been *torpedoed* by perceptions of "decline" in the post-War era'. Evidently, the 'Britain' on display in 2012 was a 'sorry shadow of its former self' (Tweedie and Harding, 2012). Here, the disconcerting abandonment of a naval spectacle that had once formed an important part of preceding Jubilee celebrations, accentuated the decline in Britain's naval power and its sense of lost 'greatness'.<sup>6</sup>

Compounding these narratives of decline was Hitchens's (2012a) nostalgic promotion of the past as a period when 'we loved our country and respected its traditions, laws and institutions'. Critically considered, Hitchens's (2012a) remarks postulate a view of the past as 'appear[ing] to possess all those desirable qualities that are missed in the present' (Elias, 2008: 121). Elias (2008: 121) adds that such accounts reproduce a rather positive portrayal of the past whereby the 'discontent and suffering connected with increasing urbanisation and industrialisation' is used to underlie present concerns regarding changes in the development of societies, most notably, a lack of 'community'.

In fact, such sentiments were echoed by Richards (2012), who commented upon the 'artificial unity' of the Jubilee, a 'unity' that 'tries to meet the burning appetite for community as there seems to be so few other options'. He added:

Not so long ago, the church, political parties, social clubs helped to bring people together. Workplaces were also communities, the mining villages, the shipyards and the rest. I am not romanticising the often horrendous working lives in these places. Often the horror formed part of the bond that gave these areas a vibrancy and sense of intense belonging. (Richards, 2012)

For Richards's (2012), a sense of community was construed as forming an important part of the 'vibrancy' of Britain, deeply rooted in its past, yet, undermined by the 'artificial unity' of the contemporary period. The notion of 'community' can help cement a positive 'we-image' (Mennell, 1994), which despite 'horrendous working lives', helps to form the 'bond' that underlies feelings of 'intense belonging' (Richards, 2012).

Indeed, this sense of 'belonging' was reinforced via traditional locations commonly associated with the archetypal English country village (Lowenthal, 1991). Here, one can

observe how (re)constructions of a safe and homogenous past ('white past') – based upon a respect for tradition and notable institutions, such as, the church and village hall – were perceived as important sites of community belonging (Dent, 2012). *The Daily Telegraph* (2012 [italics added]) noted that in 2012 for 'many ... communities, the obvious focus of the celebrations was also the most *traditional* – the church, the village hall, the high street'. Jones (2012) suggested that the Diamond Jubilee celebrations in her local town had 'given it a retro air – harking back to a time when people were friendly rather than resentful'. This was echoed in coverage of the Olympic Games, with Harris (2012) arguing that the Games helped turn 'the clock back to an era when Britain had a highly motivated workforce, proud of its country and eager to show a positive face to the world'. In both examples, the past was perceived as representing a positive Britain (Harris, 2012) with attempts to 'regain' a sense of lost community and the desire to 'turn the clock back' reinforcing feelings of decline within the English press.

Elsewhere, a sense of loss and a lack of national distinctiveness has been found to underscore accounts of English/British identity. Ware (2009) argues that:

We are repeatedly told that young white Britons – particularly in England – are at a loss to explain what is distinctive about their national culture, or more worrying, that they hold negative perceptions of what it means to be white, English or British – a condition sometimes referred to as 'identity fragility' (2009: 8)

In Ware's (2009) remarks it is the 'young white Britons' who feel something has been lost. This corresponds with Skey (2012) who highlights how the white ethnic majority in England frequently feel that it is *their* past which is undermined. This was echoed by Hitchens (2012a) who, in reference to the Queen's coronation in 1953, noted how 'The ceremony itself ...

[was] so Christian (and Protestant at that) and so British, that if it happened these days it would immediately be subject to 10,000 complaints to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission'. Here, Hitchens's (2012a) remarks reflect an often-cited animosity amongst the ethnic majority in England regarding the effects of 'political correctness' and its discouragement of 'traditional' values and beliefs (Skey, 2012; *The Daily Telegraph*, 2012).

The above examples have endeavoured to reveal how lamentations for a 'white past' were discursively constructed in English newspaper discourses. That is, while certain reports sought to highlight the decline in Britain's naval power (Davies and Walker, 2012; Jack, 2012; *The Guardian*, 2012; Tweedie and Harding, 2012), other reports provided 'nostalgic visions' of Britain, based upon tradition and a particular sense of Englishness, grounded in respect, rather than resentment, and embodied in the church and village hall (Dent, 2012; Jones, 2012; Phillips, 2012; *The Daily Telegraph*, 2012). In doing so, it is evident that English newspaper discourses reinforced narratives commonly associated with English nationalism (Gilroy, 2004; 2005; Kenny, 2014; Kumar, 2003; Wellings, 2010). This is significant, particularly because it contrasts with how newspaper discourses sought to frame Britain during the 2012 London Olympic Games.

With regards to the Opening Ceremony, references to Britain's imperial history were noticeably absent during the ceremony, with only a brief inclusion of a model *Empire Windrush*.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the absence of empire was condemned by De Chickera (2012) as revealing 'a very convenient – selective – history. All good. All celebration. No bad. No reflection'. In fact, despite the 'selective' portrayal of British history, it was not until the final performance of the Opening Ceremony, during a particular 'multicultural' section, that ethnic diversity was regarded as a normative part of British society.<sup>8</sup> This denoted a disparity within the English press between *who* the British once were and *who* they now believed themselves to be (Black, 2015). In such instances, references to British multiculturalism were used to

construct a decisively ‘new’ Britain, one that had overcome, and, was different to, its former imperial self (Black, 2015).

**‘The moment when history turned a page’: Celebrating Britain’s ‘multicultural present’**

Whereas the previous section revealed how wider anxieties regarding England/Britain’s post-imperial role and declining power were enveloped in nostalgic reflections, other reports sought to highlight ‘Britain’s’ modern, multicultural society. In particular, newspaper reports represented a changed Britain, one that was both ‘modern’ (White, 2012) and ‘self-confident’ (Lott, 2012). Alibhai-Brown (2012) observed:

these two weeks have been a watershed of true significance. There has been a visceral reaction among black and Asian Britons to what we have seen. For some, it has been perhaps the first time they have really felt a part of this country. For others, the promise of tolerance and integration has come true. Seeing the mixed-race and black competitors fighting fiercely for their personal bests and for their country has been the moment when history turned a page. (2012)

Alibhai-Brown’s (2012) reference to ‘black and Asian Britons’ and the effects of ‘seeing mixed-race and black competitors’ compete ‘for their country’ was evocative of ‘the promise of tolerance and integration’ that has underscored multicultural discourses aiming to encourage a respect for diversity, or, at least, a hybrid understanding of national identification (Modood, 2006). In fact, Alibhai-Brown’s (2012) comments were echoed across reports that suggested that foreign immigration had resulted in a multicultural British society, based not

on homogeneity, but, on diversity. As a result, the English press represented Britain as a multicultural nation par excellence. However, under closer examination, English newspaper portrayals of Britain's multicultural society revealed a complex interplay between Britain's past and present.

For example, in comments pertaining to the 2003 Golden Jubilee, Littler and Naidoo (2004: 337) note how organised events 'formed part of a wider set of Jubilee celebrations in which the "tradition" of the white past, symbolised by monarchy through the ages, was linked ideologically as being in tune with a "young" Britain, which it more often than not signified as multicultural'.<sup>9</sup> Similar dynamics could also be identified in coverage of the 2012 celebrations, whereby the 'tradition' of monarchy was reflected in reports that emphasised the Queen's 'steadfast Christian belief, duty and self-discipline' and in her representation as 'a country woman, rooted in the unchanging landscape of Britain and its natural rhythms' (Phillips, 2012). Juxtaposed with depictions of English 'tradition' (Church, village hall, Queen Elizabeth's religion/character) however, were reports that suggested Britain had 'finally stopped being a nation harking back to the days of the British Empire' and was 'finally worthy of the title Cool Britannia' (Izzard, 2012). This was reflected in descriptions of the crowds that attended the Diamond Jubilee flotilla. White (2012 [*italics added*]) noted that overseas visitors to Britain would have met 'US tourists mingling with a cross-section of *modern* Britain, young, old, black and white, hustlers ("Free flag with every Sun") and hijabs'. Accordingly, Lott (2012) was clear to point out that during the Olympic Games 'our multicultural character felt very natural and unforced now, deeply and uncontroversially part of who we are'.

What is apparent in the above examples, however, is the assumption that Britain's multicultural society had *finally* been achieved, a portrayal that served to cement British multiculturalism as an ahistorical and 'modern' phenomena (Collins, 2012). Indeed, for

Collins (2012 [italics added]), ‘no longer prisoners of our stultified, stiff-lipped past, we have made a real effort to *become* the kind of people we always hoped we might be’. This was echoed by Freedland (2012 [italics added]) who noted that ‘the opening ceremony set the tone, suggesting that we should love the country *we have become* – informal, mixed, quirky – rather than the one we used to be’. The effects of such rhetoric are echoed by Silk (2014) who, in comments related to the Olympic Opening Ceremony, argued that:

Multi-ethnic Britain was given no past: differential legitimating discourses, histories, belongings and identities were simply absent or silenced. The legitimated past – the supposed ‘common’ values of the ‘Green and Pleasant Land’ and ‘Pandemonium’ – provided the foundation for Boyle’s multi-ethnic present. In this sense, contemporary multicultural Britain was seamlessly moored within a portrayal of a simple, safe, stable and pure Anglicized national narrative. For multi-ethnic Britons, the histories presented were not common; there was no opportunity to travel through history together. (2014: 76)

Therefore, in accordance with Silk’s (2014) analysis, the undermining of Britain’s ‘multiethnic’ history presented a narrative whereby members of its diverse population were simply ‘added on’ to the story of Britain. Echoing De Chickera (2012), this failed to portray England/Britain’s ‘multiethnic’ heritage, and, arguably, served to bolster Britain’s ‘multiculturalism’ as a present-centred achievement, ‘moored within a portrayal of a simple, safe, stable and pure Anglicized national narrative’ (Silk, 2014: 76). By delineating between a ‘past’, based upon tradition (Phillips, 2012), and a ‘present’, that was decidedly modern, ‘quirky’ and cool (Freedland, 2012; Izzard, 2012; White, 2012), a clear disparity in the English press’ framing of Britain’s ‘past’ and ‘present’ could be found (Littler and Naidoo,



2004; 2005). The following section will examine how these discourses were simultaneously brought together in narratives that revealed anxiety and tension (Littler and Naidoo, 2005; Littler, 2005; 2006).

### **Lament and celebration: A contested portrayal of British multiculturalism**

For the *Daily Mail* (2012), it was ‘those out there’ who had come to Britain in ‘unprecedented waves of mass immigration’ and who had subsequently ‘challenge[d] our identity as a people’. Indeed, work by Poulton and Maguire (2012) and Meer et al. (2010) has highlighted how the right-wing English press tend to frame stories that argue for tougher immigration policies. Meer et al. (2010: 105) note that for ‘the Daily Telegraph and the Daily Mail, Britishness is not multicultural’. This was reflected in both the Diamond Jubilee and Olympic press coverage, whereby a clear sense of paranoia could be identified in the right-wing English press.

John (2012) reported that ‘[Immigration] authorities fear that up to two per cent of all visiting Olympic athletes, officials and supporters will try to stay on in Britain once the Games are over’, adding, ‘we’re going to need the Olympic village to accommodate all the “overstayers”’. It looks like the “legacy” of the Games is going to be another milestone in Britain’s world-class record for accepting asylum seekers, no questions asked’. In fact, after the games had finished, reports remained cynical towards the continuing effects of immigration. Hitchens (2012c) argued that ‘When all this is over, we will still be broke, disorderly, badly educated and gravely troubled by the greatest wave of mass immigration in our history. I cannot see why I should smile about that’.

As a result, concerns regarding immigration were vividly outlined by Riddell (2012), who noted that:

With beacons of welcome ablaze around the Commonwealth, we forget at our peril that economic interest decrees a sensible immigration policy, while our shared humanity demands that Britain, a nation of migrants spearheaded by a monarch of German ancestry, offers safety to the tortured. (2012)

Despite Riddell's (2012) reference to the British monarchy's 'German' ancestry, it was evident that Britain's 'openheartedness' was a cause of concern, particularly, in relation to it undermining a coherent sense of 'British' culture and identity. Here, Riddell (2012) added that, 'in a Jubilee of fantasy and imagination, listen out amid the celebration of this country's openheartedness for a rustle from the chancel of Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. That would be Shakespeare turning in his grave'. Indeed, the image of England's most famous playwright 'turning in his grave' served to manifest around English fears concerning Britain's cultural erosion in the face of continued immigration. This was matched by Hitchens's (2012b) comments on the Opening Ceremony, which resulted in a particularly English sense of frustration:

As for Shakespeare, I suppose it would now actually be subversive for such an occasion to include the thrilling words of John of Gaunt's dying speech: 'This blessed plot, this Earth, this realm, this England', for 'England' and 'English' are words that social workers don't like to hear. (2012b)

In addition, to the fact that the words of John of Gaunt would sit awkwardly within a ceremony that was meant to celebrate the history, culture and people of 'Britain', Hitchens's (2012b) comments reflected a frustration that was matched by Taylor's (2012) reference to

‘the creeping cultural fragmentation that anyone over the age of 50 becomes darkly aware of the moment he or she opens a newspaper’. Similarly, Moore (2012b) added that:

Behind these irritations lies an uneasy feeling that London is ceasing to be umbilically British. If this is a place where a third of the births are to parents not born in this country, if this is Londonistan, or Londongrad, does it have any unity? How would it survive the strain of economic disaster, let alone of physical attack? (2012b)

Certainly, the sense that Britain’s increasing diversity had changed Britain, was highlighted in accounts that sought to measure Britain’s transformation during Queen Elizabeth’s 70-year reign. *The Sunday Telegraph* (2012) noted that:

The Queen’s capacity to unite her subjects in admiration and respect for her and for the achievements of her reign is remarkable. *Britain is a far more diverse country than it was in 1952, when [Queen Elizabeth] came to the throne. The fissures between us are more obvious, and in some ways deeper and sharper, than they were 60 years ago. Britons no longer share a single common culture.* In 1952, the nation was still emerging from the shadow of the Second World War. Some goods were still rationed. Most of us wore the same clothes, ate the same food, and shared the same religion and amusements. *In the years since then, parts of our cities have been transformed in ways which, in 1952, would not have been recognised as ‘British’ at all.* While we all enjoy a much higher standard of living, the gap between rich and poor is larger than it was in 1952. And resentments over immigration have increased, largely because in 1952, there had been very little immigration. (2012 [italics added])

This example echoes Ward's (2002) reference to the 'what went wrong' category in discussions on the legacy of the British Empire. Here, 1948 and the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* is viewed as the beginning of Britain's problems with immigration, reflected in concerns regarding Britain's ability to manage the number of migrants entering the UK. In accordance with *The Sunday Telegraph* (2012), it is apparent that such accounts prescribe a depiction of Britain's 'multicultural' present as incongruent with its former self. In doing so, multicultural subjects are only 'now' included within the national community (Littler and Naidoo, 2004; 2005; Silk, 2014) while at the same time discursively perceived as part of the 'fissures' within contemporary Britain (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 2012).

To this extent, *The Guardian's* Jonathan Freedland (2012) was able to point out that the success of the Olympics would fail to change public opinion on immigration:

False dawns are frequent, in sport especially. ... As today's Guardian/ICM poll shows, most Britons are not going to let the Olympics shift their views on immigration: those Somali-born asylum seekers unblessed by Mo Farah's gifts will not be applauded as they walk into the pub. Our problems haven't gone away just because the news bulletins have barely mentioned them for two weeks. (2012)

Consequently, despite the games success, Freedland's (2012) remarks were underscored by a sense of trepidation towards the 'new' Britain that had been reported elsewhere (Izzard, 2012). Indeed, while Phillips (2012) noted that 'From the opening anthems to the blistering party night Boyle asserted our tolerance and diversity as the quintessential British quality', it was a tolerance that Britain was 'now *encouraged* to celebrate' (Sandbrook, 2012 [italics added]). Accordingly, amidst criticism that both the Olympic Opening Ceremony and the games had been good 'for multicultural lefties' (Williams, 2012), Clark and Gibson (2012)

pointed out that ‘after being reminded of the success of minority ethnic Britons voters remain inclined to doubt that most newcomers do anything positive for Britain’.

Taking the above into consideration, it is clear that concerns regarding immigration, formed an important part of the English press’ coverage. Notably, it was England’s ‘Shakespeare’ who was viewed as being besmirched by Britain’s ‘openhearted’ attitude to immigration and cultural diversity (Riddell, 2012). This was compounded by Hitchens’s (2012c) comments on the efforts of the former Labour government to host the games and their attempts ‘to undo the magic of the 1953 Coronation Ceremony, with modernist incantations and a censored, reordered version of our national history’. For the ‘Blairites’, the twenty-first century was an attempt ‘to proclaim Year One of their nasty, tatty, multicultural, antiChristian New Britain’ (Hitchens, 2012). In short, Hitchens’s (2012c) remarks reflect Gilroy’s (2005: 89) assertion of the ‘desire’ to return to a ‘comprehensible and habitable’ sense of national understanding, based upon ‘tradition’ (Dent, 2012; Jones, 2012; Phillips, 2012; *The Daily Telegraph*, 2012) and un-besmirched by a ‘reordered’ version of the past (Hitchens, 2012c).

## **Conclusion**

In contrast to work that has highlighted how the media tend to frame English sporting endeavours, specifically, the English national football team, this article has taken a different path (Garland, 2004; Maguire and Poulton, 1999; Maguire et al. 1999; Poulton, 2003; Vincent et al. 2010; Vincent and Harris, 2014). Instead, this article has examined how a ‘white past, multicultural present’ alignment, within English newspaper discourses, served to configure contemporary anxieties enveloped in British multiculturalism, immigration and national identity.

Accordingly, although national celebrations and sporting occasions can provide a site for progressive displays of multiculturalism (Baker and Rowe, 2014), this article argues that representations of Britain, oscillated between nostalgia for an English/British past – marred by decline – and a present that, while being represented as both confident and progressive, was beset by latent anxieties (*Daily Mail*, 2012; Hitchens, 2012b; 2012c; Moore, 2012b; Taylor, 2012; Riddell, 2012). In doing so, English press reports served to reflect Littler and Naidoo's (2004; 2005) 'white past, multicultural present' alignment by both celebrating Britain's multicultural society while at the same time lamenting England/Britain's past. In short, this presented a conflicted understanding of the present that temporally resulted in both celebration and anxiety within the English press.

That is, whereas British multiculturalism was commended (Alibhai-Brown, 2012; Collins, 2012; Freedland, 2012; Izzard, 2012; Lott, 2012; White, 2012), such narratives were separated from, and, challenged by, 'past' reflections of 'traditional' England/Britain as a 'safe' and legitimate source of belonging that had subsequently been lost and undermined amidst the diversity of the 'present' (Davies and Walker, 2012; Harris, 2012; Hitchens, 2012a; Jack, 2012; Richards, 2012; *The Daily Telegraph*, 2012; *The Guardian*, 2012; Tweedie and Harding, 2012). This was compounded by reports that emphasised the transitory effect that Britain's inclusive multiculturalism would have on public opinion after the games, particularly with regards to immigration (Clark and Gibson, 2012; Freedland, 2012). As a consequence, the discursive framing of Britain revealed discourses of discontent, anxiety and nostalgia that, when confronted with the diversity of the present, resulted in a contested and exclusive portrayal. This can serve to support assimilative practices whereby new arrivals are continually required to justify their presence in accordance with 'traditional' ideas and values (Black, in print; Fortier, 2005; Littler, 2005; Silk, 2014). Indeed, this has been observed in attempts by the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) to appeal to English

'disenchantment' via narratives that bestow a particularly 'English' perception of British history (Seth-Smith, 2013).

Finally, it has not been the intention of this article to degrade interpretations of the past nor has it aimed to present a picture of English nationalism/national identity as inherently racist or xenophobic. Rather, in the context of the English press, this article has explored Fortier's (2005: 564) assertion that 'One of the challenges in facing up to the past lies in the tension between acknowledgement/interpretations of the past, ... and accountability/self-examination for social relations in the present'. Evidently if attempts to promote a progressive Englishness are to be achieved (Bragg, 2006) then closer attention will need to be paid to the relationship that England intends to have with its complicated, 'multiethnic' past. Indeed, a past that is not dissimilar to its complicated, 'multicultural' present.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> With regards to sporting events, analyses of English national identity have focused on sporting occasions where the 'English' national team perform (Abell, Condor, Lowe, Gibson and Stevenson, 2007; Garland, 2004; Maguire and Poulton, 1999; Vincent, Kian, Pedersen, Kuntz and Hill, 2010; Vincent and Harris, 2014). Rarely is the representation of English national identity considered during British events where the UK's 'home nations' collaboratively compete as a single team, 'Team GB'.

<sup>2</sup> 'Two World Wars and One World Cup' is an England football chant referring to *Britain's* victories in both the First and Second World Wars and England's victory against West Germany in the 1966 Football World Cup Final.

<sup>3</sup> Newspaper articles used in this study formed part of a larger data corpus that examined British domestic and Commonwealth press coverage of the 2012 Diamond Jubilee and London Olympic Games.

<sup>4</sup> This sample included Sunday editions. Furthermore, whereas each newspaper is sold in Scotland, they are all based in London. Despite retaining relatively high sales in Scotland (Greenslade, 2014), their highest sales are in England. As a consequence, the selected sample can be referred to as 'English newspapers'.

<sup>5</sup> In lieu of any naval review, the focus of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations centred on the extended bank holiday weekend. Official events included The River Thames Diamond



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Jubilee Pageant, held on 3 June 2012, a Diamond Jubilee Concert, held on 4 June 2012, and a national service of thanksgiving held at St. Paul's Cathedral on 5 June 2012.

<sup>6</sup> British naval reviews have been conducted since the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A Royal Naval Review was performed for Queen Elizabeth's Silver Jubilee in 1977. In 2005 the Queen's Golden Jubilee Naval Review was annexed with the International Fleet Review held to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. This was the last time that a naval review was conducted in the United Kingdom. Queen Elizabeth's coronation in 1953 also included a naval review.

<sup>7</sup> *HMT Empire Windrush* was the name of the ship that brought West-Indian immigrants to the UK from Jamaica in 1948.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the juxtaposition between a traditional past and a modern/'cool' present was provided dramatic semblance during the final segments of the Opening Ceremony which used digital media to create a 'modern-day' love story involving a young, mixed heritage couple. The 'Frankie and June Say Thanks Tim' section (a 'boy meets girl' encounter was used as a thank you to the English computer Scientist, Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web) followed a particularly English performance that centred around a 'Green and Pleasant Land' depiction, complete with milking maids, Morris dancers and a game of cricket. Used at the start of the ceremony this segment provided some form of historical backdrop to the ceremony's narrative (see also Silk, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Littler and Naidoo (2004) refer to the London 'String of Pearls' Golden Jubilee Festival. They note that 'This was a major cultural and heritage venture organised for the Queen's Jubilee year which foregrounded a series of Community Focus Events intended to bridge the gap between local communities and major organisations and institutions in the nation's capital' (Littler and Naidoo, 2004: 337).