

Who ate all the pride? Patriotic sentiment and English national football support

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ABSTRACT. The growing popularity of English national insignia in international football tournaments has been widely interpreted as evidence of the emergence of a renewed English national consciousness. However, little empirical research has considered how people in England actually understand football support in relation to national identity. Interview data collected around the time of the Euro 2000 and the 2002 World Cup tournaments fail to substantiate the presumption that support for the England football team maps onto claims to patriotic sentiment in any straightforward way. People with far-right political affiliations did generally use national football support to symbolise a general pride in English national identity. However, other people either claimed not to support the England national team precisely because of its associations with nationalism, or else bracketed the domain of football support from more general connotations of English patriotism.

Far more important than anything that happened on the field was the sudden liberation of an English national identity. It looks as if the English are finally allowed to start loving themselves. The sting has been drawn out of the flag of St George. All the old connotations – that a red cross on a white background meant a mindset that was white, racist, boozy, xenophobic, exclusive – has gone out of the window . . . The last few months have seen an extraordinary outpouring of national feeling, . . . That simple red and white flag stands for passion, dignity, humour, tolerance, stoicism, creativity, courage and more. We are told so often that this country is not what it was, that we should all just shut up and learn to be European. But over the past two weeks we have learned what it means to be English (*Daily Mirror*, 24 June 2002).

The relationship between football and nationhood has received considerable attention within the social sciences. While some theorists have focused on this relationship in terms of the historical origins of football (Armstrong and Giulianotti 1998; Giulianotti 1999; Pickup 1999), others have considered the

formation of national and international footballing authorities (Beck 2000; Dauncey 1999), or have considered the economic impact the sport has had upon nations (Bourdieu 1999; Eastham 1999). Of particular relevance to the present study is the strand of work emphasising the role of football in defining, promoting, challenging and resisting public expressions of national identity and pride (e.g. Boyle and Haynes 1996; Holmes 1994; Maguire *et al.* 1999), whether in terms of national politics (e.g. Stevenson and Alaug 2000), national character (e.g. O'Donnell 1994), or national style of play (Armstrong and Giulianotti 2001; Hare and Dauncey 1998). For example, Giulianotti (1999) claimed, 'At internationals, the team embodies the modern nation, often literally wrapping itself in the national flag' (p. 23), and Duke and Crolley (1996) emphasised how football 'captures the notion of an imagined community perfectly. It is much easier to imagine the nation and confirm national identity, when eleven players are representing the nation in a match against another nation' (p. 4). Bouchard and Constant (1998) went so far as to argue that football is one of the remaining spheres in which it is acceptable to openly display patriotic sentiment.

Contemporary accounts of the relationship between football support and popular nationalism need to be understood as the products of particular historical and cultural contexts. For example, Russell (1997) notes that until the 1930s football was virtually unrelated to expressions of English national identity. This was due to the irregularity of play and the inability of football to capture notions of Englishness to the same extent as cricket. The media's focus on the communal singing of hymns such as 'Abide with Me', thought to capture English virtues during the inter-war years, initiated a process of change. However, it was the rise of 'hooliganism' during the 1970s and 1980s that linked England football support to a different, more sinister, kind of nationalism (cf. Back *et al.* 1999).

The popularity of the 'hooligan' stereotype may in part be attributed to the fact that it fitted easily within a longer tradition of moral panic discourse relating to popular nationalism in England (cf. Colls and Dodd 1986; Condor 1996). More recently, concerns relating to the dangers of English national consciousness have focused on possible reactions to UK constitutional change. Commentators speculated that the establishment of a separate Scottish Parliament would awaken a hitherto dormant sense of English national identity, which might in turn lead to demands for a political voice, with problematic consequences for the social and political order (Condor and Abell 2006). Against these apocalyptic images, the possibility that a benign popular English patriotism might arise was also widely debated.

Recently, a trend has developed whereby elite commentators have looked to football support for indications of the development of an anticipated, benign sense of English national pride. This has been prompted in part by an increase in popular displays of English national insignia (especially the St George's flag) during the Euro 2000 tournament (Giulianotti and Gerrard

2001), and which gained momentum during and after the 2002 World Cup. Garland (2004), for example, pointed to a change in tabloid press reporting during the 2002 World Cup, away from the invocation of the 'hooligan' stereotype and towards the expression of 'a belief that English success on the football field has led to a growth, or even a rebirth, of the idea of Englishness and English patriotism' (p. 89).

It is widely assumed by cultural commentators that support for England in international football tournaments provides symbolic expression for a more fundamental and far-reaching sense of patriotic sentiment, but to date most of these accounts remain highly speculative. Although survey evidence suggests that people in England may have recently become more inclined to describe themselves as 'English', there is no evidence to suggest that these changing patterns in self-labelling practices necessarily map onto patriotic attitudes or political sensibilities (Condor *et al.* 2006). More specifically, there is no direct evidence to support the contention that national football support is popularly understood to symbolise a patriotic attachment to England as a place, or to the English as an imagined community.

Two lacunae may be identified in existing accounts of English national pride and identity, in relation to football support. First is the complete lack of attention to the vernacular reasoning of people who support, far less those who do not support, the England national team. Second, theoretical accounts have typically been formulated without reference to any benchmark data on the ways in which people normally present themselves in relation to nation. A recent body of research has drawn attention to the presence of a general moral opprobrium against overt displays of national identity and national pride in England (Condor 1996, 2000 and in press; Gibson and Abell 2004) that does not appear to have been greatly influenced by the advent of devolution (Abell *et al.* 2006; Condor and Abell 2006 and in press). The question therefore arises as to whether national football support may, as Bouchard and Constant (1998) suggested, represent one particular arena in which patriotic sentiments are currently able to find open expression. In this article we draw upon three separate corpuses of interview data, in order to explore the ways in which support for the England football team is represented in relation to constructs of national identity and national pride.

Method

Data were drawn from three sources.

1. Semi-structured interviews with 100 white people born and resident in England, conducted as part of a longitudinal panel study of reactions to UK constitutional change.¹ The interviews considered here were conducted during and shortly after the Euro 2000 tournament. The sample was recruited using a combination of random and purposeful sampling methods, combining techniques which Miles and Huberman (1994) call

maximum variation sampling (including factors such as region of residence, gender, age, socioeconomic status, political affiliation and religion), and politically relevant case sampling. For present purposes, it is significant to note that respondents selected through purposeful sampling included some people with connections to right-wing political groups, and some members of *englandfans*, the official England football supporters' club.

2. Semi-structured interviews with 36 young adults (aged 18–26) in Greater Manchester, conducted as part of a project on national and European citizenship.² These interviews took place between the 2002 World Cup and the 2004 European Championships. The sample was selected from respondents to an earlier random sample survey, and was balanced in terms of gender, socio-economic status and educational background; and included respondents who had, in response to the survey, scored either relatively high or relatively low on measures of national and European identity.
3. Interviews with an opportunity sample of 153 people approached informally on the street, in parks, bars or other public places on the days of the England–Denmark and England–Argentina matches in the 2002 World Cup tournament.

Interviews

The interview guides employed in the studies of reactions to constitutional change, and to national and European citizenship, included experiences of mobility, social networks, political attitudes and personal and social identity. Questions relating to national football support were included in both interview guides, but in practice the respondents tended to raise this topic spontaneously. The street interviews were introduced as a study of people's opinions about the World Cup tournament.

Analytic procedure

Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed for content, and basic delivery features noted using a simplified form of the standard Jefferson (2004) convention.³ All stretches of talk that included reference to national football were indexed and extracted for further analysis using ATLAS ti,⁴ a software package for the management of textual material. Inductive techniques based on Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1997) were used to identify the conditions under which a type of response occurred, and to map out variability of response across the data set, noting any deviant cases. Techniques derived from discursive psychology (Edwards and Potter 1992) were then applied to individual cases, to examine how accounts of football support were constructed in relation to matters of identity and nationhood, and how issues of accountability were attended to.

Analysis

Panel study (2000–01)

National football support as symbolic of patriotic identity

Only six of the 100 panel study respondents produced accounts in which they expressed both unqualified personal support for the England football team, and also cast this as an expression of patriotic attachment to England as a distinctive imagined cultural or political community. Analysis indicated a clear patterning to the accounts: all but one of these cases came from interviews with people with connections to extreme-right political groups.

Charles, whose account is reported in extract 1, was a member of the British National Party, and had convictions for hooliganism at local and national football games. The extract starts at the point where the interviewer (Jackie Abell) is asking about his opinions concerning a possible composite British football team:

Extract 1: Football support as symbolic of English patriotism

- 1 Jackie: Why would that be so bad?
2 Ch: Because I'm not. I'm English. It's in the blood, you can't help, it's in
3 the blood.
4 Jackie: And that gives you certain characteristics that make you
5 Ch: It does. It makes you shave your head, put a bit of weight on
6 (laughter) and watch football.
7 Jackie: Do you think you can choose to be English?
8 Ch: I think they had more of a sense of Englishness say earlier on, in the,
9 well from the day dot all the way up to say the 1970s. They had more
10 of a sense of being English than they have now because it's such a
11 multi-racial society, that people who are being brought into it don't
12 have as much value of where they come from than what they used to
13 have. And the way we see it, well I see it, a few of the lads and that,
14 on St George's day, we're just trying to keep alive, you know, the
15 theme if you like, of where we are.
16 Jackie: So if you're of a different race then you're not English?
17 Ch: (1) You mean like
18 Jackie: If you've got Pakistani parents but you were born here, are you
19 English?
20 Ch: No, you're Pakistani.
21 Jackie: Why aren't you English?
22 Ch: 'Cos your parents are Pakistanis.
23 Jackie: So if your parents had been Welsh and you'd have been born here
24 Ch: I'd have been Welsh.
25 Jackie: You'd be Welsh?
26 Ch: Yeah.
27 Jackie: So it's not on where you were born, but on where your parents were
28 born?
29 Ch: No. It's blood, it's blood in't it?
30 Jackie: Mm.
31 Ch: If you had to, if your Mum was a Pakistani and your Dad was a
32 Chinese man, yeah, you couldn't possibly be English could you? Just
33 because you were born in English [sic]? You could not be a mix of all

- 34 three. It's in your blood isn't it?
35 Jackie: But I might never have been to China, I might never have been to
36 Pakistan.
37 Ch: So just 'cos you're born in England means you're English does it?
38 Jackie: I don't know.
39 Ch: You can't be. Serious.
40 Jackie: Do you ever get Asian people going to see England?
41 Ch: You never see it. Not, especially not at the away games. You do
42 actually, when you get in the interviews in the papers, there's always
43 an Abdul Sabada talking about England. I've noticed that.
44 Jackie: So would you then tolerate an Asian player playing for England?
45 Ch: An Asian player playing for England?
46 Jackie: Mm.
47 Ch: I don't know. I don't go watching England because of the fantastic
48 footballers, I go watching England because I'm English.

There are four especially noteworthy aspects to this stretch of talk. First, by way of proclaiming his English identity, Charles (albeit in an ironic manner) casts himself in terms of the conventional stereotype of a football hooligan, 'it makes you shave your head, put a bit of weight on and watch football' (lines 5–6). Second, Charles casts his support for the England football team as an expression of a generalised sense of national pride. Specifically, Charles equates his support for the England team with St George's day, and treats both as involving a symbolic remembering and celebration of national community. Third, Charles constructs Englishness in specific opposition to the other UK nations, such that a sense of English identity can sufficiently warrant resistance to the idea of a composite British team. Fourth, Charles treats Englishness as a matter of racial and ethnic lineage. After establishing Charles's position, whereby English nationality is fundamentally a matter of race, Jackie asks if Asian people support the England football team. Charles not only notes their absence from the game, but also infers their lack of commitment to the team on the grounds that their absence is particularly notable 'at the away games' (line 41). Their failure to attend games is contrasted with the public airing of their comments in the newspapers. The generic 'there's always an Abdul Sabada' (lines 42–3) exemplifies a belief in the media's habit of interviewing a token representative of an ethnic minority.

More generally we can see how Charles's account draws upon two bottom line assumptions. First is the assumption that support for the England team follows naturally from a sense of pride in a distinctive English national identity. Second is the assumption that English national identity is naturally and inevitably a function of personal and collective ancestry. Although Extract 1 provides an example of how these two assumptions could be combined to account for a speaker's own support of England football as a natural consequence of the possession of 'English blood', it is interesting to note that precisely the same assumptions could also be used by speakers to justify non-support for the England team. In the next extract we hear from

Max, a football team manager and, significantly, a past member of the England Selection Committee.

Like Charles in Extract 1, Max defines England primarily through contrast with the other British Isles nations, and assumes that national football support symbolises a generic sense of national loyalty, based on 'something in your genes' (line 9). However, in this case Max's nostalgic vision of a lost condition of English ethnic homogeneity is qualified by his orientation to a perceived normative opprobrium against the expression of racist sentiments. Unlike Charles, Max argues that the racial and ethnic diversity of contemporary England represents an insuperable barrier to national identity, and consequently precludes his supporting the national team. Interestingly, Max maintains an authorial stance *as* English, notwithstanding his denial of national sentiment by casting his own personal experience ('*I* haven't got the major national pride', line 5) as characteristic of the contemporary collective English national psyche ('*you* probably don't have that feeling', lines 20–1; '*we* don't have the passion', line 25).

Extract 2: 'I haven't got the major national pride'

- 1 Jackie: Do you think (.) part of our project is interested in people's sense of
2 national identity. Do you support the England football team?
3 Max: (.) I suppose I should say yes.
4 Jackie: [laughs] But you don't?
5 Max: But I haven't got the major national pride on that [sic]. Er, I suppose if
6 truth
7 were known, I'd prefer the Republic of Ireland to do as well as
8 anybody.
9 Jackie: Why the Republic of Ireland?
10 Max: I don't know. [laughter] I suppose it's something in your genes. My
11 grandparents were probably Irish [. . .] And I think you support the
12 Republic of Ireland because you believe your grandparents were Irish,
13 erm, and it's something which you can have an affinity to. Erm, I think
14 in England, and you have to be careful what you say, but I think we've
15 got ourselves into a major problem area with the numbers of people
16 who we've allowed into the country. Er, now I'm a very much live and
17 let live kind of person, and I'd never, ever want to do any harm to a
18 minority grouping of people and I'd be supportive of them. But I think
19 what we've done as a country is allowed an influx of people different
20 from ourselves and we've totally changed the perception of the
21 country. And I think in that scenario you probably don't have that
22 feeling, er, for the country that you've had possibly before. Erm, and
23 that's why you probably look with envy on somewhere like Ireland,
24 not because of the troubles in the north, but in the south where it seems
25 to be an idyllic kind of place and, you know, a place that I enjoy going
26 to. Erm, we don't have the passion of the Scots because we're always
27 looked on as oppressors rather than oppressed. The Scots, with their
28 history of being oppressed by the English, they all tend to stick
together.

Although we have used quotations from these two interviews to exemplify how speakers understand support for the England football team

to reflect values of pride in England as an imagined cultural or political community, these kinds of accounts were, in practice, remarkably rare. The overwhelming majority of respondents either distinguished their support for the national football team from connotations of general patriotic sentiment, or else sought to distinguish their claims to national pride from connotations of English football support.

England football support vs. patriotic identity

Most respondents treated any direct association between English football support and the expression of a generalised sense of national pride as potentially problematic. Consequently, people who said that they supported England in international football tournaments typically treated this as an accountable matter, and attempted to bracket it off from any suggestion that they might be inclined to adopt a more general particularistic attachment to England as an imagined community. One common strategy involved 'explaining away' one's support for the England team by treating this as the consequence of an accident of birth (cf. Kiely *et al.* 2000). In Extract 3, for example, Dave downgrades the level of his support for the England team, claiming 'I'm not a great football fan' (line 3). When prompted, he agrees that he would support England, but when questioned further, he invokes birthplace as a form of minimal response, thereby avoiding any allusion to emotional investment. In addition, by casting England simply as a place, he divests the category of connotations relating to cultural or political community.

Extract 3: 'Because I was born in England'

- 1 Jackie: If England and Scotland and Ireland and Wales are playing football
- 2 who would you support?
- 3 Dave: Well it would be England, but then again I'm not a great football fan
- 4 either.
- 5 Jackie: Yeah, so you've not got much interest in football, if you had to
- 6 support someone it would be England?
- 7 Dave: Yeah
- 8 Jackie: Because?
- 9 Dave: I was born in England.

Another means by which respondents could distance themselves from potential charges of patriotic character was to justify their support for England as resulting from formative experiences as opposed to rational choice:

Extract 4: 'Perhaps it comes from childhood'

- 1 Jackie: . . . do you never kind of find yourself feeling some kind of loyalty or
- 2 supporting Britain, I suppose in athletics, or supporting England in
- 3 football or something like that?
- 4 Eliza: Oh yes, yes, I mean I'm not one of those people who gets terribly wild

5 and excited about these things but if I'm watching something I'll want
6 the British athlete to win. I mean, even if there was a Scottish or
7 Welsh or Irish or whatever, I'd rather they won than say a Frenchman
8 or a German or whatever. And football and things like that, yeah
9 England yes, yes sure that's very, I don't know, perhaps it comes from
10 childhood. It's very strong isn't it? But you always have that feeling
11 'oh I really want them to win'. Who else would you support? You
12 have to make that choice really in a way. Um, I mean I hate
13 football. . .so I actually hate football, I never would watch it on
14 television, I have no interest at all. But if there's a match and if I have
15 to want somebody to win it would be England.

Here, Eliza admits to an emotional reaction to England football, but downgrades this by invoking an extreme contrast: 'I'm not one of those people who gets terribly wild and excited about these things' (lines 4–5). She explains her support as a possible result of childhood socialisation, and as a matter of circumstance, rather than free personal choice ('if I *have* to want somebody to win', line 15). Note also how Eliza's account of her support for England in sporting contexts is coupled with a statement concerning her support for other British Isles teams. Although people with far-right political affiliations tended to define English identity in opposition to the other UK nations, most of the other interview respondents were concerned to distance their expressions of support for the England team from the identity of 'little Englander'. Consequently, accounts of England support were often rhetorically coupled with spontaneous displays of support for the other 'home' sides (cf. Condor and Abell 2006).

A third strategy that people could use to dissociate their support for England football from claims of general patriotic character, was by attributing their act of support purely to local circumstances:

Extract 5: 'It was only because it was coming to Old Trafford'

1 Jackie: Do you support the England football team?
2 Ell: Yeah, I went to Old Trafford the other week.
3 Jackie: What was it like? I only went to the bars afterwards and it was mad.
4 Ell: It is the first time I have ever been to an England international
5 Jackie: Oh right
6 Ell: and it was only because it was coming into [sic] Old Trafford, if it had been
7 in Bangor I would never have bothered getting tickets, and my uncle
8 got me tickets so he said come. It was absolutely fantastic, the match
9 was a bit tense and nervy and they were rubbish but when Beckham
10 put that kick in, I tell you, I have never been in sixty six thousand
11 people and it just made the hairs stand up on the back of your neck.
12 It was fantastic. Absolutely brilliant. Loved every minute of it.

In response to Jackie's question, Elliott reports having recently attended an England match. However, rather than treating this as indicative of any long-term commitment on his part, he presents this as essentially a one-off event.

Elliott attributes his attendance to the fact that the match had been played locally (lines 6–7). His personal disinterest and lack of personal responsibility for his actions is further displayed by displacing the motivation to attend onto his uncle, who bought the tickets. His assessment of the experience as ‘absolutely brilliant’ (line 12) is cast as a function of the novelty of the event and the crowd (lines 10–11).

In the extracts considered so far in this section, the respondents would not have classified themselves as ‘England supporters’, but rather as people who might, on occasions, ‘find themselves’ supporting the England team. The question therefore arises about how people who do adopt the identity of ‘England supporter’ represent their activity. Analysis suggested that, apart from those individuals with connections to far-right political groups, people who proclaimed themselves ‘England supporters’ *also* rhetorically dissociated this support from claims to patriotic character. This is illustrated in Extract 6, in which Bob explicitly dissociates the condition of being ‘a big England fan’ from patriotism, a construct that he elides with exclusionary nationalist sentiment.

Extract 6: ‘I’m just an England football fan’

- 1 Wendy: Well, I was born in Bury, and I’m not as patriotic as Bob. Bob
- 2 is actually very patriotic.
- 3 Bob: No, I’m just an England football fan.
- 4 Wendy: No, you’re patriotic as well. I think you are.
- 5 Jackie: In what sense are you patriotic?
- 6 Bob: I wouldn’t say I am. I mean, I’m a big England fan as far as the
- 7 football goes, but only in so much as I’m a Liverpool fan as far as
- 8 the football goes, if you know what I mean. I’ll go and support
- 9 England as a football team. That doesn’t necessarily mean that after
- 10 the match I’m not going to go out and have a pint with someone who’s
- 11 not English.

Patriotic identity vs. England football support

In the last section we considered how people could rhetorically dissociate the act of supporting England in international football tournaments from connotations of generic national pride. It was interesting, therefore, to note that the relatively small number of respondents who *did* claim a general sense of English national pride ($N = 21$), were typically inclined to distinguish their own patriotic sentiments from the kinds of irrational, nationalistic excess which they associated with national football support. In Extract 7, for example, Billy treats the arena of international football as a factor that mitigates his sense of English national pride:

Extract 7: Football hooliganism as a ‘pitfall’ of English identity

- 1 Jackie: Do you feel, I was asking, you said, you, you think of yourself as
- 2 British and English and Mancunian, do you feel kind of proud to be
- 3 British or proud to be English or Mancunian?

- 4 Billy: (7) On the whole, yes.
5 Jackie: Thought that was gonna be no. [laughs] Yes.
6 Billy: On the whole, yes, but, there are a lot of shortfalls, or pitfalls that we
7 can do without and, (1) I don't know where it comes from. It's just
8 things happen and you wish, you weren't.
9 Jackie: What are the pitfalls?
10 Billy: The pitf- well you, you, a lot of it stems from football, I don't know
11 why it is, [laughter] but it's back down to football again, but you get,
12 you, this crowd violence. [laughter] And to be honest, we can really do
13 without it and, I don't know, really, why we've got it, but we have. I
14 mean, it started, oh, a few yea-, quite a few years back, in Ireland,
15 when England went over to Ireland, and it, I think, I can't remember
16 whether the game got abandoned or not, but basically we ran riot. And
17 to me, that's (.) we're not like that, really, but I don't know where it
18 came from, but it seems to have snowballed, and, it doesn't matter now
19 where we go, we are labelled as the bad guys.

Billy's difficulty in claiming a sense of national pride is indicated by the lengthy pauses (line 4), and his subsequent orientation to football and to hooliganism, which represent the 'pitfalls' (line 6) of English identity. Billy himself displays a bifurcated sense of national identity (see also Condor and Abell 2006 and in press). On the one hand, when describing England football hooliganism he uses an inclusive national 'we', thereby identifying all English people with the activities of the hooligans ('we ran riot', line 16), and casting them as subject to the same moral opprobrium ('we are labelled the bad guys', 19). On the other hand, Billy adopts a reflexive stance of critical national self-detachment, suggesting that the occurrence of football hooliganism makes 'you wish, you weren't' (line 8) English.

Young adults in Greater Manchester (2003–04)

Up to this point we have seen how interview accounts collected between 2000 and 2001 do not appear to substantiate claims that increased England football support involves symbolic expression of a more generic sense of benign national pride. There are, however, two reasons why we might be cautious about generalising from these findings. First, they were collected before the 2002 World Cup, which some commentators regard as the point at which a transformation in public opinion became really evident. Second, these interviews were conducted with respondents who varied greatly in age. In so far as any changes in English national consciousness may take the form of a generational shift (cf. McCrone and Kiely 2000), it is possible that the association between England football support and benign English patriotic sentiment might be more apparent among younger people. Bearing these considerations in mind, we searched for references to international football in our corpus of data collected from people aged 18–26, after the 2002 World Cup tournament.

In general, these respondents' orientations to matters relating to national identity were remarkably similar to those displayed by the older respondents in 2000–01, and by people in England prior to devolution (Condor, 1996, 2000

and in press). For example, these young people often spontaneously oriented to concerns over the ultimate rationality or morality of nationalism in general, and of English national attachment in particular. In Extract 8, for example, Katie casts English patriotism as essentially anachronistic:

Extract 8: Patriotism as anachronism

- 1 Katie: But I think older generations are, probably more er
- 2 patriotic really [. . .] Towards, it just being er, English or whatever [. . .]
- 3 probably because like, with England particularly like [sic], the royal family
- 4 meant a lot more I think years ago than what it does now, it seems to
- 5 be, fading out quite a lot.

Similarly, when these respondents talked about national identity in relation to football (or vice versa) their accounts did not differ in any notable respect from those collected in the panel study. Even after the 2002 World Cup, the young people we spoke to still spontaneously invoked negative stereotypes of England 'fandom' to explain their personal resistance to national identity. Jack's account (in his interview with Stephen Gibson) has much in common with Billy's account in Extract 7 above:

Extract 9: 'Bad connotations'

- 1 Stephen: Yeah. Would you say you have a particularly strong sense of national
- 2 identity?
- 3 Jack: No I wouldn't. Me personally I'd say I have a very – have very little
- 4 sense of national identity. In fact I like to be discouraged from it.
- 5 Stephen: Yeah? Why is that?
- 6 Jack: Well, sport, well, the connotations with sport especially. And that –
- 7 English supporters of any – especially if it's any national team, are hated by the
- 8 media, other countries, pretty much their own government.
- 9 It's just that really and, it's like, England itself appears to h- in the
- 10 media does have quite, some fairly bad connotations.

The prevalence of 'yob' imagery in these accounts suggests that reports of the death of the England hooligan stereotype may have been greatly exaggerated. Even when respondents did not treat England football support as essentially malevolent, the rhetorical linking of English national identity with football meant that imagery concerning the irrationality and parochialism of national chauvinism could be coupled with stereotypes of masculine mob behaviour and immaturity associated with football fandom:

Extract 10: 'Gung-ho attitude'

- 1 Trevor: Er, maybe a bit more – males are probably a bit more attached
- 2 to their local area. That's probably through something like, the team
- 3 they support and stuff like that. Whereas like women probably are a bit more
- 4 relaxed about it. You get the male attitude like, gung-ho, yobs,
- 5 'we are, we are Manchester, we are English'. Whereas women are a
- 6 bit more sensible.

World Cup street interviews (2002)

In the formal interview studies, many respondents reported that their support for the England team was likely to be situation-specific. It is plausible then that our failure to find a clear relationship between generic patriotic sentiment and England football support may simply reflect the fact that national football lacked any immediate salience in the context in which the interview conversations took place. In contrast, the interviews considered in this section were conducted in public places before the matches, during the half-time intervals, and during the post-match celebrations, on the days of the 2002 World Cup England–Denmark and England–Argentina games. Other than interviewing people while the matches were actually in progress, matters of England football support could hardly have been more salient or invested with more emotional expression. The places where the interviews were conducted were festooned with the England flag, and many of the people we spoke to wore England shirts, were draped in the St George’s flag or had their faces painted red and white. The heady sense of camaraderie evident in the streets would appear, superficially at least, to exemplify precisely the ‘outpouring of national feeling’ and benign English national self-love noted in the *Daily Mirror* article quoted at the start of this article. However, in so far as the people we spoke to did claim to support the England team at all (and many did not), they formulated these statements in precisely the same way as was evident in the more formal interview accounts.

About half of the people who claimed to be supporting England mitigated this statement with reference to their lack of personal agency or choice:

Extract 11: ‘England obviously’

- 1 June: [. . .] The World Cup I’m following now, I’m watching the World Cup.
- 2 I think everybody is now though aren’t they?
- 3 Joan: I’m not
- 4 June: Are you not?
- 5 Joan: No, I got two days off work and that’s it.
- 6 June: Well, I got a football fanatic son, so.
- 7 Joan: He just tells me what he says when he comes home and that’s it. Well,
- 8 to be honest with you, I’ve had enough of football.
- 9 June: I know, I’ve no option. I’ve got to watch it.
- 10 Cliff: So who – who would you like to win the World Cup?
- 11 June: England.
- 12 Joan: England, obviously [laughter]
- 13 June: Definitely.

The start of this extract is characterised by a series of turns in which June mitigates her support for the England team. June initially presents her support as normative (‘everybody’, line 2), and in response to Joan’s claim not to be following the tournament (lines 4, 6, 8–9) she warrants her

support in terms of having a ‘football fanatic son’ (line 7). Note also that June presents her son’s support not as a reflection of national pride, but of his interest in the sport.

In addition, supporting the England team could be cast as a reflection of local rather than specifically national attachment (cf. Brick 2001; King 2000). The collective ‘vested interest’ (line 7) that John refers to in Extract 12 is not formulated as a vested English national interest, but rather as an interest in supporting players from a local club side. John treats this tendency as characteristic not of a generically ‘English’ cultural habit, but rather of a specifically ‘northern’ mind-set.

Extract 12: ‘We all have a vested interest’

- 1 Cliff: The atmosphere around town is just
- 2 John: Yeah.
- 3 Cliff: Something else.
- 4 John: It, it’s electric, yeah. It’s electric. But then again you know, it, it’s
- 5 like in the north, it’s predominantly it’s all about football and you
- 6 know, a lot of [. . .] Liverpool supporters and a lot of
- 7 Manchester United supporters. So we all have a vested interest in the
- 8 game, if nothing else, because they’re the players that play for their
- 9 team. You know, so. It’ll be a good night. A good result. Looking
- 10 forward to the Nigeria game; that will be good.

In this context where symbols of England football support saturated the visual field, and the fate of the England team dominated the media and everyday conversation, approximately one-third of the people we spoke to chose to display a sense of personal idiosyncrasy – and often a rational independence of mind – by proclaiming their support for a country other than England. In the following extract, Clifford Stevenson is speaking to two teenagers. One of the respondents displays no interest in the World Cup, and another justifies her support of Italy with reference to considerations unrelated to matters of national self-identity:

Extract 13: ‘I support Italy’

- 1 Cliff: Sorry to bother you. I’m from the university; we’re doing a survey on
- 2 people following the World Cup or not?
- 3 Kevin: No.
- 4 Cliff: No?
- 5 Clare: Yeah. Following the World what?
- 6 Cliff: The World Cup.
- 7 Clare: Oh yeah. I do, I support Italy.
- 8 Cliff: Really?
- 9 Clare: Yeah. Why?
- 10 Cliff: Why is that?
- 11 Clare: Because they’re ace [laughs]
- 12 Kevin: No–
- 13 Clare: Italian lads [laughs] No, we’re just about to go home and watch it
- 14 aren’t we?

Even in cases where respondents did claim to be ‘seriously’ supporting England, they often portrayed this as a form of playful diversion from everyday life, rather than an expression of an enduring and wide-reaching sense of national attachment. For example, it was common for respondents who were wearing England regalia to respond to a question concerning who they would ‘ideally’ like to win the tournament by momentarily breaking frame and adopting, for the purposes of answering the question, a normative discourse of ‘football supporter’. As a consequence, people with their faces painted with the England flag could, when asked, say without any sense of irony, that they ‘ideally’ would like some other national side to win, and justify their choice with reference to the presence of players in the team from their local club side, or with reference to factors such as quality of play, or underdog status.

Our final extract is taken from a discussion between two interviewers (Clifford Stevenson and Susan Condor) and three respondents, conducted a couple of hours after England’s World Cup victory over Argentina. The interviewers joined the respondents, who were all sporting England football shirts, celebrating outside a pub. The stretch of talk reported below occurred after a general discussion in which the respondents had variously identified themselves as England-born Chinese (Lee), as American with an English fiancé (AJ), and simply as English (Peter). At the start of the extract, Susan introduces the issue of national pride:

Extract 14: English but. . .

- 1 Susan: Are you two [Lee and Peter] proud to be English then?
- 2 Lee: Well yes, because obviously I’m like, I look Chinese and that but if I
- 3 grew up here, I was born here. Grew up in, I grew up in like
- 4 predominantly white area, I didn’t know what Chinese means. So
- 5 basically like everything, I am Chinese but the way I was brought up is
- 6 like English and all my mates are like proper English fans so yeah.
- 7 Susan: Are you [Peter] proud to be English?
- 8 Peter: Yeah. Definitely, like I’ve enjoyed supporting them at football but
- 9 most of my family’s Irish so I’m more interested in how well they get
- 10 on.
- 11 Susan: Ah! So if England played Ireland, who would you support?
- 12 Peter: I’d go with Ireland, definitely.
- 13 AJ: See, it’s the same for me too because both my, both, grandparents, my
- 14 grandparents are from Ireland so
- 15 Susan: Oh, well, this could get difficult couldn’t it?
- 16 AJ: Yeah. It’s complicated for me. I’m just kind of a [inaudible]
- 17 really.
- 18 Peter: I’m just as bad. My other grandparents are German and Scottish, so.
- 19 Cliff: All right.
- 20 Susan: So who do you actually want to win?
- 21 Peter: Want to win? Or I think will?
- 22 Susan: Want to.
- 23 Peter: Ireland. It’s the
- 24 Lee: Yeah. It’s so unrealistic that I can’t say that, but out of the teams with a

- 25 chance -
26 Susan: Ideally
27 Lee: Out of the teams with a chance I'd actually really like to see Spain do
28 it.
29 Susan: Why?
32 Lee: Just because I think they've got a good side. They've under-achieved a
33 lot, I really rate a few of the players. And I just like to see someone
34 other than the major big names do well.

In response to Susan's question concerning English pride, Lee answers in the affirmative, while also orienting to the possibility that his claim to English identity might be treated as problematic. He consequently supports his claim by invoking upbringing and his support of the England team as 'markers' (cf. Kiely *et al.*, 2000). By contrast, Peter uses a 'yes, but ...' formulation. His initial assessment that he is 'definitely' proud to be English is supported by the assertion; 'I've enjoyed supporting them at football' (line 8). However, he immediately goes on to qualify this statement with a reference to his Irish ancestry, and proceeds to downgrade his commitment to England by claiming to be 'more interested' in how well Ireland 'get on'. When Susan asks, 'who do you actually want to win?', Lee also drops the national identity frame, and justifies his talent preference in terms of a rationally disinterested assessment of talent ('they've got a good side', line 32) combined with a moral preference for the underdog ('I just like to see someone other than the major big names do well', lines 33–4).

Conclusions

In this paper we have explored an arena in which overt expressions of English national pride are currently thought to be most prevalent. Our findings, however, suggest the relationship between England football support and expressions of a more generalised sense of national pride may be rather more complex than contemporary media or academic stereotypes suggest. Certainly, people associated with far-right political groups did treat national football as a vehicle through which to express a chronic personal identification with, and sentimental attachment to, England as an imagined national community. However, in these cases, the constructions of Englishness that the speakers invoked were rather different from the benign form commonly supposed to have supplanted exclusionary, xenophobic formulations. Otherwise, people were inclined to distinguish their support for the England team from matters of national pride, to distinguish their expressions of national pride from national football support, or to explain their resistance to English national sentiment in terms of its symbolic association with irrational excesses of football support.

In view of the historical coincidence between increased England football support and the advent of devolved governance in the UK, it is significant that

vernacular accounts of support for the England team were generally dissociated from the domain of the political. Instead they were typically articulated in conjunction with displays of positive attachment to the other British Isles nations. Consequently, it appears that the 'fusing' of international football with political discourses identified, for example, in media reportage (e.g. Delgado 2003) does not currently have any clear parallel in the everyday practices and explanations of members of the English general public.

The fact that the same kinds of orientation were found across three rather different corpuses of data – in which the interviews were framed in different ways, took place in different places, and were conducted by different interviewers – suggests that the tendency to rhetorically dissociate claims of England football support from those of generic national pride constitutes a relatively robust phenomenon. In addition, we should note that similar kinds of orientation were apparent irrespective of the gender, age, political orientation, or region of residence, of the respondents.

Since all of these accounts were obtained in some form of interview setting, it could of course be argued that they were influenced by similar normative pressures associated with this kind of discursive context. However, in so far as we might expect respondents to be especially attentive to self-presentational concerns in interview encounters, this would suggest that interview talk would be especially likely to reflect the kinds of cultural values to which members of a particular speech community orient when discussing matters of national identity (Condor 2000). In the present case, our interpretation of the interview talk did not rely on presumptions concerning the ultimate veracity of individual speakers' accounts. Rather, it drew attention to the ways in which respondents oriented towards normative concerns over the legitimacy and morality of English nationalism (and hence attempted to distinguish their football support from a general sense of patriotic sentiment), or to the possibility of violent, xenophobic nationalist excess (hence distinguishing their expression of patriotism from the stereotype of the England football hooligan).

In addition to contributing to our understanding of the specific ways in which English national identity may be articulated in relation to football support, the data presented here might prompt us to think more broadly about the complex, laminated ways in which national identities are claimed, displayed and performed in everyday life. Clearly, English national identity is not an all or nothing affair. People can display immense emotional involvement in the fate of the England football team, without expressing any such concerns over the nation as an imagined community. Similarly, at any particular moment in time, an individual can display a sense of self which is saturated by national self-identity on one (e.g. visual) channel, while simultaneously orienting towards a shared moral universe on another (e.g. verbal) channel, in which overt displays of emotionally based English national partiality are understood to be normatively proscribed.

The domain of England national football support also draws attention to the potential role of irony and playfulness in national identity display (Condor 1996). Consequently, while football support may indeed represent an arena within which repressed nationalist sentiment may be granted licence for open expression, our findings equally suggest that the overt, bodily displays of national self-celebration paraded publicly in relation to football may be intended as a form of carnivalesque performance. This may be understood by the social actors concerned as representing a temporary breaching, rather than an exemplification, of the normal social order.

Notes

1 'Migrants and Nationals', funded within the Leverhulme Trust Constitutional Change and Identity programme (Grant number: 35113) conducted jointly with David McCrone, Frank Bechhofer and Richard Kiely, Edinburgh University.

2 'Orientations of Young Men and Women to Citizenship and European Identity' (EC: project no. SERD-2000-00) coordinated by Lynn Jamieson, Edinburgh University.

3 This included information concerning timing of pauses (measured in seconds, and indicated in brackets) and points of emphasis. In line with conversation analysis approaches, analysis of the patterning and occasioning of pauses was used to identify interactional 'trouble'.

4 Atlas.ti Version 4.2 London: Scolari, Sage Publications Software, 2000.

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