



Temporality and collectivity: Diversity, history and the rhetorical construction of national entitativity

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Vernacular representations of nationhood collected in England differed from canonical accounts of social categorization in three respects. First, nations were not typically constructed as simple person categories, but rather as hybrid collectivities of human beings, objects and geographical locations. Second, national representation was not confined to the present tense, but was typically conveyed through temporal distinctions and narratives. Third, speakers displayed a reflexive concern over the rationality and morality of national categorization and stereotyping. Speakers could manage the tension between the need to recognize both national diversity and entitativity by forging a distinction between Englishness (identified with homogeneity, ethnic nationalism and the past) and Britishness (identified with pluralism, civic nationalism and historical progress). However, accounts had a dilemmatic quality. The strategies speakers used to promote images of contemporary national in-group diversity often implicitly presupposed a normal moral order of national cultural homogeneity. The association of pluralism with values of progressive social change meant that accounts of 'our' distinctive lack of national character could carry tacit implications of relative superiority. General implications for social identity approaches to social categorization are discussed.

Nations as social categories and identities

Tajfel famously argued that constructs such as class, race or nation should not be treated as analogous to groups of co-present individuals. He suggested that such spatially distributed entities should be understood in relation to the constructs of social categorization ('the ordering of the social environment in terms of . . . groupings of persons', 1974, p. 69), social stereotyping ('the attribution of general psychological characteristics to large human groups', 1969, pp. 81–2), and social identity ('that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group. . . together with the value and emotional significance of that membership', 1981 p. 255).

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In many respects Tajfel's general description of widescale social entities parallels Anderson's (1991) account of nations as 'imagined communities', and it is perhaps not surprising that social psychologists have often treated nations as exemplary instances of social categories and identities. Tajfel himself based his definition of social identity on Emerson's (1960) definition of nation, and Turner (1987) originally exemplified his self-categorization perspective with particular reference to nationhood. Subsequently, researchers have often used nationhood as a 'real-world' case with which to illustrate generic processes of social identification, social stereotyping and intergroup discrimination (e.g. Brown, Vivian, & Hewstone, 1999; Cinnirella, 1997, 1998; Haslam & Turner, 1992; Hopkins & Cable, 2001; Hopkins, & Murdoch, 1999; Lalonde, 2002; Rutland & Brown, 2001; Verkuyten & Hagendoorn, 1998). This sort of approach has been criticized by Billig (1996) who argued that it led social psychologists to overlook the differences between national categories and other kinds of social group (cf. Tajfel, 1960).

In this paper, I consider the question of national representation as an issue in its own right. Rather than focus on the cognitive aspects of national categorization and stereotyping, I shall consider the ways in which nations may be represented rhetorically, using data drawn from open ended interviews conducted in England. Unlike Billig (1996) I do not assume that national representation is necessarily unique, but rather use the topic to draw attention to three general issues that have become relatively neglected in contemporary social categorization approaches to intergroup processes. First is the issue of ordinary social actors' reflexive concerns over the rationality, morality and consequentiality of particular representational practices. Second is the question of whether societal entities are necessarily imagined as person categories. I suggest that the case of nationhood draws attention to the ways in which some objects of societal representation and identification may also be formulated as places, institutions or as hybrid assemblages of human and non-human elements. Third is the temporal aspect of societal representation. In particular, I focus on the ways in which historical imagery may be used to reconcile the presumption that nations constitute singular, distinctive and enduring entities with normative concerns relating to the fact and value of intranational diversity.

The essential contestability of social category constructions of nationhood

Social identity theorists generally understand group membership to represent a joint function of perceived similarity of members (or perceived similarity of members to a category prototype) and differentiation between in-group and out-group. However, the adequacy of this kind of model has been the subject of ongoing dispute (see Brown, 2000). Such concerns are not, of course, confined to the reified universe of social psychological science. On the contrary, matters relating to the rationality and morality of social categorical representation often constitute a subject of reflexive concern to ordinary social actors. In particular, categorical representation may conflict with liberal norms of universalism and injunctions against generalization (norms of individuality and diversity). The fact that ordinary social actors may orient their activity to such concerns is reflected in the commonly documented phenomenon of stereotype suppression (e.g. Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1996; Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998; Moskowitz, Salomon, & Taylor, 2000).

The specific topic of national representation clearly illustrates the potential importance of meta-representational concerns to intergroup contexts. Issues relating to the adequacy or morality of appeals to 'national culture' or 'national character' often

constitute the subject of explicit public argumentation (cf. Billig, 1985; Billig *et al.*, 1988). Commentators often adopt binary classifications of forms of national representation, for example contrasting hostile, xenophobic nationalism with a more benign patriotism (see Billig, 1995 for a critical review). Similarly, a distinction may be drawn between those forms of national representation that assume cultural homogeneity ('cultural' or 'ethnic' constructions) and those 'civic' constructions that are more able to accommodate images of intranational diversity.

Whether it is, in fact, possible to distinguish clearly between patriotic and nationalistic sentiment, or civic as opposed to cultural constructions of national belonging represents the bone of a good deal of current academic contention (e.g. Calhoun, 1999; Thomas, 2002). For present purposes, the significant thing to note is that these binary distinctions between hostile and benign, exclusive or inclusive understandings of nationhood may themselves be used as a form of currency for international comparison. National in-groups are typically associated with virtues of civic patriotism, whereas national others are attributed with the moral stigma of ethnic nationalism (Billig, 1995; Hopkins, 2001).

Nations as social categories and hybrid constructs

Although nations have often been treated as exemplary instances of social categories and identities, a consideration of the ways in which images of nationhood are usually formulated in real-world contexts might in fact lead us to question the axiomatic distinction between social and natural categories often adopted by social identity theorists (Tajfel & Forgas, 1981, cf. Latour, 1993; Michael, 2000).¹ 'Nation' is a polyvalent term: as Cubitt (1998 p. 1) noted, 'In common usage, the term "nation" serves sometimes as a virtual equivalent of "people", sometimes of "country", sometimes of "state"; it designates now a community, now an environment, now a component in a global political system'. However, it is not simply the case that understandings of nationhood may shift from the social to the natural to the political depending upon frame of reference. On the contrary, as Foucault (1994 p. 208-9) observed, nations and states may be formulated as hybrid collectivities of 'men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those things that are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, and so on; men in their relation to those either things that are customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking and so on'.

Existing social psychological research on the ways in which ordinary social actors orient to national entities and identities has often assumed *a priori* that nations simply constitute person-categories.² However, bearing in mind my observations concerning the potentially reflexive and normative aspects of national representation, it is instructive to note how any moral opprobrium associated with stereotypic representations of a national people may on occasions be strategically avoided precisely by representing nationhood in non-social terms, for example as a political institution (Habermas, 1990) or as a place (Abell, Condor, & Stevenson, 2006).

¹ The social/natural conceptual distinction was somewhat at odds with Tajfel's earlier work inspired by Brunerian 'new look' psychology (cf. Bruner, 1992), which emphasized precisely how inanimate objects may become imbued with social values.

² In contrast, the hybrid nature of the construct of nation is generally recognized in developmental psychology (e.g. Piaget & Weil, 1951) and in research which operationalizes national attachment as potentially embracing institutional, symbolic and geographical components (e.g. Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989; Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999).

Historical aspects of national representation: Temporality and entitativity

Theoretical accounts of nationhood have long emphasized how historical imagery may contribute to an understanding of nations as singular, coherent and distinctive entities (e.g. Bhabha, 1990; see Liu & Hilton, 2005). Anderson (1991) even attributed the historical emergence of the idea of nationhood to the development of a particular notion of time that afforded the conceptualization of a 'synchronic community' of spatially dispersed compatriots coexisting at a particular moment. He argued that this form of representation was necessary for any conception of a nation as a 'solid community moving steadily down (or up) history' (p. 26). However, empirical work on national representation and identity has rarely addressed issues relating to temporality directly.

In general, questions relating to the temporal and historical aspects of self and social perception have also tended to be neglected in social psychological theory and research (Condor, 1996a; cf. Levine, 2003). However, it is interesting to note that some of the conceptual approaches on which social identity and self-categorization theorists draw in fact originally granted a key role to temporal considerations.

For example, current interest in social category salience is often traced to Bruner's (e.g. 1957) work on perceptual readiness. However, in his more extended accounts, Bruner distinguished between two 'modes of thought'. The first mode of thought approximates to 'the ideal of a formal, mathematical system of description and explanation' (1986 p.12), and as such corresponds with the assumptions behind Turner's principle of meta-contrast and other work on category salience. In contrast, Bruner's second mode of thought pertains to the use of temporal narratives, and to forms of reasoning that correspond not to laws of logical induction, but to those of good 'story grammar' (1986 p. 14). Bruner himself was inclined to emphasize the importance of the narrative mode of thought, and in his later work focused specifically on the role of narrative in the construction of identity (e.g. 1998).

Similarly, contemporary work that emphasizes the importance of 'perceived similarity of elements' for social category construction often traces this idea to Campbell's (1958) Gestalt approach to social entitativity. However, according to Campbell's original formulation, perceived similarity of elements was in fact only one of four Gestalt principles of entitativity. The three other principles related to perceived spatial and temporal relations between elements: proximity, pregnance (elements forming part of a pattern may be perceived as a single figure), and common fate (elements that move together may be perceived as components of a single entity). In fact, far from prioritizing the principle of perceived similarity of elements, Campbell argued specifically that, 'common fate may be . . . more central to the diagnosis of entities than similarity' (p. 21).

For present purposes it is worth noting how these two perspectives incorporate different, although not incompatible, understandings of the way in which temporal considerations may be implicated in the perception of social entities. Bruner's emphasis on the narrative aspects of identity focuses on the importance of perceived continuity over time (cf. Condor, 1996). In contrast, Campbell's emphasis on common fate focuses on the importance of perceived simultaneity in time, in a manner analogous to Anderson's discussion of nations as 'synchronic communities'.

Temporal comparison and national representation

One body of work in the social identity tradition that has, exceptionally, addressed issues of temporality is that concerned with 'temporal comparison'. Temporal comparison refers to the process of judging the present status of an object, individual or group

against its own past. Originally developed in work on personal identity (Albert, 1977; Butler, 1998), the notion of temporal comparison has since entered the intergroup lexicon, and has been linked to Hinkle and Brown's (1990) distinction between relational and autonomous judgments in intergroup contexts. Applied specifically to the domain of national representation, it has been argued that the practice of evaluating a national in-group through temporal comparisons might substitute for processes of international comparison (Brown & Haeger, 1999; Mummendey, Klink, & Brown, 2001; Nigbur, 2003; Nigbur & Cinnirella, in press).

Although the study of temporal comparison processes in intergroup contexts is still in its infancy, a variety of methodological approaches have already been adopted. Mummendey *et al.* (2001), Nigbur (2003) and Nigbur and Cinnirella (in press) used experimental approaches, in which intergroup (specifically, international) and temporal comparisons were treated as independent variables. In contrast, Brown and Haeger (1999) adopted a content analytic approach, considering the extent to which respondents spontaneously used temporal comparisons in written responses to a question concerning 'what came to mind when thinking of their country' (p. 34). All of these studies raise interesting issues relating to the use of temporal imagery in societal representation in general and national representation in particular. However, as things stand, existing research begs three important questions.

First is the question of how temporal representations are associated with evaluative judgments. Existing research tends to assume that temporal comparisons are necessarily used to formulate positive intra-national judgments. However, in view of the fact that historical narratives may take both progressive and regressive forms (Condor, 1997) there is no reason why temporal comparisons could not in principle be used to formulate comparatively negative images of the national present (cf. Nigbur, 2003).

Second, research has not yet established empirically that temporal comparisons do, in fact, function as alternatives to inter-national comparisons (Condor, 2001). Rather, an *a priori* presupposition of functional incompatibility is usually built into the research procedures, with social and temporal comparisons being treated as separate experimental conditions, or as incompatible response alternatives.

Third, the specific empirical focus on temporal *comparison* may have led researchers to neglect other ways in which historical considerations may be used to formulate and to evaluate social categories and identities. In particular, in view of the importance granted to the process of narrative in theories of identity, and to notions of origins and lineage in the theoretical work on nationalism, it would appear important to consider temporal comparison as just one of a range of possible ways in which national representation may be articulated in relation to notions of time and history.

Exploring national representation in the vernacular

The present study represents part of a programme of work aiming to explore national representation by focusing on ordinary social actors' own vernacular accounting practices (see also Condor, 2000; Condor & Abell, 2006; Condor, Gibson, & Abell, 2006). In considering the normative and temporal aspects of national representation, my approach will differ from most existing social psychological perspectives insofar as I address these issues inductively, employing methods which do not impose *a priori* assumptions concerning the ways in which nations may be formulated as entities, nor of the types of relationship which may exist between different forms of representation.

Methods

Respondents

Data were drawn from a corpus of 210 semi-structured interviews with white people aged 15–92 born and resident in England.³ In line with standard recommendations for qualitative research, respondents were recruited with a view to ensuring maximum sample diversity (Mason, 1996). The sample therefore included people from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, occupations, political affiliations and locations of residence.

Interviews

The primary objective of the interviews was to examine how respondents alluded to, or responded to questions about, nationhood. However, rather than risk priming respondents, a non-reactive interview technique was developed. The interviews were introduced as part of a study of social attitudes, and respondents were encouraged to lead the discussion in response to general prompts, with the interviewer shaping the conversation by picking up on topics relating to nationhood as they arose in the course of conversation. In order to avoid imposing particular category labels (e.g. 'English' or 'British'), the interviewer would refer to nationhood using non-specific formulations, or else would echo a label previously used by the respondent. The primary concern of the present paper relating to the use of historical imagery had not been anticipated in advance, and the use of temporal references in the interview conversation reflects spontaneous talk on the part of both respondent and interviewer.

Analytic procedures

Interviews were transcribed for content, and transcripts were indexed using NUDIST. Nine hundred and thirty two separate exchanges which included explicit accounts of the respondents' own country were identified. Although an effort was made to preserve local contextual information at the point of indexing, transcript segmentation necessarily involves a loss of information concerning narrative sequencing. Consequently, analyses were always treated as provisional until interpretations were checked against a reading of the extract within the context of the interview as a whole.

Analysis involved an inductive investigation of forms and functions of national representation. Microanalysis of individual extracts was informed by frame analysis (Goffman, 1974), and techniques based on the grounded theory method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) were used to derive patterns of response types across the data set. Emergent hypotheses concerning patterning and typicality of response types were routinely checked using category counts and truth tables (Seale, 1999).⁴

Presentation of results

For purposes of presentation, generic claims (concerning typical or usual responses) will be restricted to situations in which at least 70% of observed instances are of the type described. The selection of particular extracts for illustrative purposes was based

³ These interviews were conducted between 1996 and 1998.

⁴ Owing to the adoption of inductive research methodology, the theoretical problematics addressed in the present article in fact represent considerations 'thrown up' in the course of the analytic process, rather than pre-existing conceptual considerations.

on two considerations. First, that any relevant features should be manifested in broadly similar ways in analogous cases. Second, preference was given to succinct exchanges that could be quoted without editing. In all cases, respondents are referred to by pseudonyms chosen by the respondents themselves.

Analyses

Forms of national representation: An overview

The relatively spontaneous accounts of nationhood collected in the present interview study differed from the kinds of accounts normally collected in more directive questionnaire research in a number of ways. In particular, it was notable that in only a quarter of cases did talk about nationhood refer explicitly to people rather than to places, activities, events or non-human objects. Even when human beings did figure in these accounts, it was usually as part of a hybrid construction.

In order to limit the scope of the present discussion, I will restrict my account to those stretches of talk about the respondents' own country that did include some reference to people. Extract 1 will be used to illustrate some common features of these accounts.⁵

Extract 1: 'British' pertaining to people in relation to places and things

- 1 Jill: Er you got the stereotype of a (1) British bloke wandering wandering
 2 down the city road in a bowler hat an' like a rolled up umbrella (.) I think
 3 every country produces chips now er (2.5) perhaps tea (.) I dunno you go
 4 abroad and they give you white tea [heh heh] So I'll say that [heh]
 5 Int: [Heh] So white tea is the only especially British thing you can think of?
 6 Jill: Well (3) cricket as well of course (1) nobody else plays cricket as badly as
 7 we do er (1.5) that's a fairly British institution and there's the monarchy
 8 Int: Hmm
 9 Jill: Very few countries these days have a king or queen I suppose (.) most
 10 have presidents so (1.5) perhaps that's seen as British as well

Accounting style

The first thing to note about extract 1 is the way in which Jill ironizes her account of British culture and character. Her reference to the '*bloke in a bowler hat*' (line 2) is presented as a report of a cultural '*stereotype*', and the image of the British as (white) tea drinkers is attributed to foreigners. When mentioning the monarchy, Jill initially adopts the role of principal (Goffman, 1981), speaking on her own behalf: '*very few countries. . . have a king or queen I suppose*' (line 9), but then shifts to present this as a report of a cultural stereotype: '*perhaps that's seen as British*' (line 10, cf. Devine & Elliot, 1995). The only time Jill presents an utterance as a bald statement of fact is when she says: '*nobody else plays cricket as badly as we do*' (line 6), and even this is effectively ironized by the use of an extreme case formulation ('*nobody else*', see Edwards, 2000). Finally, we may note how Jill signals a semi-detached footing in relation to the words she is uttering, marking her lack of total commitment to her response through 'flooding out' (Goffman, 1974) including periodic bursts of laughter, claims to

⁵ Transcription notation is adapted from Jefferson's system (Atkinson & Heritage, 1984).

ignorance ('*I dunno*'), self-mockery and meta-discursive orientations to the act of giving the account ('*I'll say that*' line 4). All of these features of accounting style were common in the data corpus.

Content of accounts

The specific content of Jill's account in extract 1 differs from kinds of representation normally collected in social psychological research on national categorization and stereotyping insofar as her description of Britishness does not in fact involve reference to the psychological characteristics held in common by a category of people. Jill treats Britishness as a hybrid collection of people, objects, activities and political institutions. Moreover, even when Jill is referring to people, she never directly attributes them with psychological characteristics (cf. Tajfel, 1969). Rather, she treats national culture as a possession or action (something that people have got or do) rather than an inherent quality (something that the people are). Finally, we may note that Jill at no stage in fact represents British people as a singular type. Her reference to the monarchy attributes British subjects with a collective positioning relayed through a metaphor of shared ownership. Her assertion, '*Nobody else plays cricket as badly as we do*' employs synecdoche to identify the nation with a sports team: it does not imply that each and every one of 'us' play cricket especially badly.

The use of temporal references

We noted in the introduction how existing social psychological work often emphasizes the role of temporal comparisons as a functional alternative to inter-national comparison. In extract 1, however, it is clear that references to time and to history are being used to perform a range of rhetorical business. For example, Jill attempts to establish national typicality through reference to origins and endurance: her suggestion that cricket might qualify as especially British is supported by an allusion to tradition ('*that's a fairly British institution*', line 7). When Jill does allude to change over time, this does not function as a substitute for international comparison. On the contrary, she refers to historical change in conjunction with a non-specific international comparative frame of reference (cf. Nigbur, 2003; Nigbur & Cinnirella, in press). Hence Jill suggests that the possession of a monarchical system of government has become increasingly distinctive over time (lines 9-10), and that chips have lost their erstwhile national distinctiveness (line 3).

In their analysis of written accounts of nationhood, Brown and Haeger (1999) found only 10% of respondents to use temporal comparisons, although they conceded that this low figure might reflect their rather stringent content analytic coding procedure. In contrast, every respondent in the present study at some stage attended explicitly to temporal considerations in the course of national accounting. It is not possible to consider all of the ways in which temporal matters could be invoked, and for present purposes I shall restrict my account to two, related, issues. The first concerns the ways in which notions of time could be associated with connotations of value. The second relates to the ways in which respondents could use temporal imagery to present accounts of their own country without appearing to endorse stereotypes of common or distinctive national culture or character.

Time and value

We have already noted how social psychologists often assume that temporal comparisons function as an alternative to inter-national comparisons for the purposes

of formulating positive in-group judgments. However, analysis of vernacular accounting practices suggests that the situation may in practice be rather more complex. In the first place, it was rare for respondents to articulate explicitly positive evaluations of their national in-group (cf. Condor, 2000). Of the 932 instances in which respondents referred to national in-group accounting, only 77 (8.25%) included an explicit display of in-group pride or favouritism. Secondly, as extract 1 illustrated, references to change over time could in practice co-occur with specific or non-specific *international* comparisons. Respondents could certainly employ temporal comparisons to formulate autonomous judgments whereby their country was judged against its own past. However, in most (72.5%) cases in which an international comparison was used, some reference was *also* made to history. Further analysis suggested that, far from being antithetical to international judgments, temporal considerations could in fact be used as a currency of international comparison. There were two different, and potentially competing, ways in which time and history could be imbued with connotations of value.

Progress narratives

The first way in which notions of time could be associated with connotations of value was through metaphors of progressive historical development. The potential for images of historical progress to be used as a currency of international comparison has been documented by anthropologists, who have pointed to a phenomenon termed a 'denial of co-evalness', whereby social actors are disposed to represent other cultures as historically less advanced than their own (Fabian, 1983), and to a tendency for people to portray their own cultures as characterized by endogenous historical development, but to represent out-groups as frozen in time, a 'people without history' (Wolf, 1982).

In the present set of interview accounts, references to historical progress (or decline) could refer to matters which, following Tajfel (1978), we might term status and power: wealth, standard of living, prestige etc. These kinds of assessment could be made in conjunction with specific international comparisons ('*Japan has overtaken us in technology now*'), non-specific comparisons ('*we're not world leaders any more*') or autonomous comparisons ('*people here are better off now*'). Note that these accounts did not always cast the contemporary condition of the respondents' own country in positive terms.

More commonly, notions of national historical progress could be formulated in moral and aesthetic terms. These accounts tended to rest on a set of presumptions concerning the changing cultural composition of the respondents' own country. There were two versions of these accounts. The first, which tended to be associated with expressions of far right political attitudes, linked a historical move towards ethnic diversity and loss of national distinctiveness with a loss of 'identity', reputation moral fibre. The second, more common, version employed 'Whiggish' (Butterfield, 1931) images of liberal historical progress, and treated cultural diversification as testament to increasing equality, tolerance and liberty. This was associated with a more general tendency, widely shared among the respondents, to view concerns over national purity and distinctiveness as atavistic and retrogressive.⁶

⁶ In 72% of instances in which the interviewer (re)introduced an explicit national frame, the respondent's next turn included some allusion to social conflict, death or warfare.

History as national possession

The second way in which time could be associated with connotations of value involved treating history itself as a form of national possession or 'capital' (cf. Bourdieu, 1997). A country could be treated as possessing history in two ways. The first involved a repertoire of 'tradition' incorporating images of continuity of character or culture over time (an example can be seen in Jill's reference to cricket and the monarchy, in extract 1). The second involved a 'heritage' repertoire, involving references to the continued possession of material or symbolic traces of a now-transcended national past. Notions of national tradition were sometimes seen to be incompatible with values of progressive development. However, respondents were normally able to combine values of national heritage (understood as a literal or metaphorical possession) with images of their country as undergoing ongoing progressive change over time.

Again, we may note that historical accounting did not necessarily function as a substitute for international comparison. For example, accounts of national heritage could take the form of simple autonomous judgments ('*we have a lot of history*'), autonomous temporal comparisons ('*we are losing our history*'), specific international comparisons ('*we have more history than America*') or non-specific international comparisons ('*we've got a better history than most countries*'). Moreover, these were not mutually exclusive orientations, and respondents could often combine formulations, for example by attributing 'our' loss of history to the actions of national others. An example is provided in extract 2, in which Kate is explaining why she does not regard herself as European:

Extract 2: 'Now we are going to lose our identity'

- 1 Kate: Britain's an island and we have our own identity which is just
2 different from the Continent. We have a different history, our own culture
3 and it's just little quirky things but it is things that go back
4 like hundreds of years and I don't like that now we are
5 going to lose that identity just because some bureaucrat
6 in Brussels thinks we should all be the same.

Here we see Kate presenting national history and tradition as status characteristics. Again we can see how international judgment need not be confined to questions of national character. In this case, Kate is constructing Britishness as a hybrid assemblage of people ('*we*'), place ('*an island*', line 1) and non-specific activities and objects ('*things*'). The practice of leaving reference to contemporary national culture or character under-specified was common throughout the accounts.

Note how the evaluative dimension of this account rests on the attribution of value to history *per se*. Kate emphasizes that the specific British objects and events in question have little intrinsic worth ('*it's just little quirky things*', line 3). The importance of '*our own culture*' (line 2) and '*identity*' (line 1) is not calculated in terms of its current aesthetic, moral or use-value, but is rather measured against a metric of mere historical duration ('*things that go back hundreds of years*', lines 4-5).

Temporal imagery and the construction of national diversity

In extract 2, Kate is referring, albeit non-specifically, to a distinctive, and by implication singular, British culture and identity. This form of account was often used in talk about the EU or discussions of the globalising process of 'Americanization'. However, in contexts

when matters of identity threat (cf. Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999) were not at stake speakers were inclined to avoid, and often explicitly to disclaim, forms of accounting practice which represented their own country in terms of a common or distinctive national culture or character. Some common devices which respondents could use to avoid articulating stereotyped accounts of national character were noted above in relation to extract 1. For present purposes I shall focus in particular on the ways in which respondents could strategically deploy notions of time and history as a means by which rhetorically to suppress stereotypic representations of their national in-group.

National character as historical anachronism

We noted above how speakers could employ a range of rhetorical devices to ironize their account of national culture or character. One additional strategy involved casting homogenous and distinctive national character as thing of the past. Respondents often voiced accounts of national stereotypes that were recognizably anachronistic (e.g. bowler hats, stiff upper lip). In addition, respondents could explicitly present the idea that 'we' possessed a singular national character as an outdated cliché.

In extract 3 we hear again from Kate. In this case, Kate distinguishes between a past situation in which her country could be defined in terms of national culture or character, and a present condition under which this is no longer possible.

Extract 3: National character as purely historical

- 1 Int: You mentioned this country (.) so (.) how would you describe this
 2 country?
 3 Kate: Do mean (.) what (.) now?
 4 Int: Yea (.) now
 5 (5)
 6 Kate: Well (.) that's a hard one cos (2) like it's it's that I can say what it was
 7 like bu::t
 8 (1)
 9 Int: So what was it like?
 10 (2)
 11 Kate: Well it was sort of- y'know like 'men with bowler hats' and (.) I dunno
 12 (.) oh the Empire and y'know all that stuff
 13 Int: And now?
 14 Kate: Well I really can't tell you that (1) to be honest with you

A comparison of extracts 2 and 3 exemplifies the potential flexibility of individual speakers' accounts of nationhood. In extract 2, Kate presents a reified account of national culture. In extract 3, however, her representation of national stereotypes is doubly ironized, by projecting national character into a transcended past, and also presenting these historical images themselves as forms of popular cliché. This ironization of popular national-historical imagination is conveyed through the use of an inflection of quotation (Clark & Gerrig, 1990), and allusions to common knowledge ('y'know all that stuff', line 12).

Extract 3 also draws our attention to the potential significance of matters of periodisation in national historical accounting. Current approaches which treat temporal comparison as a generic process fail to consider the way in which various forms of national representation may be conveyed through the demarcation of specific historical periods. In the current data corpus, temporal comparisons were often used, as

in extract 3, to draw a rhetorical line under the history of Empire, thereby depicting a national historical rupture occurring around the time of the entry of New Commonwealth citizens to the UK.

The narrative of national diversification

The construct of temporal comparison as currently used in social psychology tends to assume that people employ categorical distinctions between past and present. In practice, however, respondents often treated historical change as a gradual, and possibly ongoing and essentially meaningful process, rather than a single cataclysmic event. Consequently, when respondents distinguished the national present from the (imperial) national past, this often took a form that I shall be describing as the 'narrative of national diversification'. This involved reference to an ongoing historical process by virtue of which the country had transformed from an original condition of ethnic nationhood, to a more inclusive, civic, form of national community. An illustrative example is presented in extract 4:

Extract 4: 'We're becoming a pretty diverse mixture now'

- 1 Ruth: I mean there's a I mean there's a lot of people in this country in the way
2 that (.) they are British (.) but they're from different cultures and different
3 (1) types of people so I don't really think we have any more I mean we
4 used to have stuff like the er (.) national image was kind of like (.) what
5 was it up -upper (.) not upper was it stiff upper lip?
6 Int: Yes
7 Ruth: It was different wasn't it? I mean that used to be us and um still when you
8 think uh the worst thing is when you see in cinemas and stuff (.) it's like
9 did you er ever go and see did you see Independence Day?
10 Int: Hmm (.) yes YES
11 Ruth: You know the bit where you have the BRITISH bit in it
12 Int: Yea
13 Ruth: and it was just like irritating beyond belief because you're thinking this is a
14 film that's being like going around loads and loads of the world and that is
15 the image that people are going to have of us and it's a totally wrong
16 image of us (2)
17 Int: So what are [we like if
18 Ruth: [I don't know what we're like but [heh heh heh] we're NOT
19 like that (.) I think people still think we're quite a posh country but we're
20 not (.) we're (4) I don't know what we are but we're not posh I think we're
21 becoming (2) a pretty diverse mixture now

In extract 4, Ruth's objective, as signalled by her abstract (lines 1–3) and her gist statement (lines 20–21), is to present an account of national community-without-commonality. She contrasts this form of representation to an unstated assumption ('*but*', line 2) that the British do, in fact, constitute a singular type. Ruth uses four strategies to prioritize her account of contemporary British diversity over the normative grain of the trope of national folkhood.

First Ruth establishes the nominal equivalence of '*people in this country*' by simply asserting '*they are British*'. Second, she shifts her use of the term '*country*' between social and non-social referents. Her initial use of '*country*' to denote a geographical construct enables her to portray the people-as-population as a singular entity simply by virtue of common place of residence. Having established the diversity

of the people-as-population, Ruth subsequently uses the term 'country' to refer to a social category without attending further to questions of family resemblance.

Third, Ruth explicitly ironizes 'images' (line 15) of singular national character. Like Jill in extract 1, Ruth casts stereotypes of British homogeneity as an outsiders' (foreigners') view, citing evidence of how the (US) fictional media disseminate a 'totally wrong' (line 15) picture of her country. However, Ruth does not present these stereotypes as merely factually incorrect, but rather as anachronistic reflections of the British as they did exist at some time in the past. Ruth's fourth rhetorical move, then, involves forging a distinction between the present continuous (in which 'we' British are coming to exhibit such diversity as to elude simple categorical representation), and a transcended past in which British people were, indeed, of a singular type.⁷

Stereotype suppression through reference to historical origins and lineage

I noted in the introduction how social psychological concern over the specific process of temporal comparison had led to a relative neglect of the ways in which national entities and identities might be articulated in relation to notions of origins or lineage. Theoretical accounts of nationalism have conventionally assumed that appeals to historical origin or lineage are necessarily associated with discourses of homogenous and primordial national character (Balibar, 1991; Samuel, 1998; Chambers, 1989). Consequently, it was interesting to note that, in the interview data considered here, respondents often used references to origins or lineage as part of a line of argument celebrating diversity and explicitly *challenging* stereotypic accounts of homogenous, distinctive national character (63% of explicit uses of lineage accounts were employed in this way).

In extract 5, we see Lee using lineage as a criterion of British identity precisely in an effort to counter the assumption that British people have 'any one thing in common now':

Extract 5: 'British people can be lots of things'

- 1 Lee: [. . .] it's difficult really to say that that (.) we we Br- British people are
2 like this or like that because British people can be lots of things
3 really they can be anything and you can't say that they have any
4 one thing in common now (.) I suppose you could say they are- all live
5 here but even that's not true now because people can live anywhere and
6 there there are lots of Brit- people who are BRITISH who have never lived
7 here like in the Falklands and it's it's just that their ancestors p'haps came
8 from here but: they are still British if you know what I mean

This use of images of nationalized lineage to suppress discourses of common national character is reminiscent of Morris's (1996) account of 'cultures of descent' having the potential to be inherently pluralistic insofar as membership does not depend on the acceptance of a common set of practices but is vouchsafed by ancestry alone. It is also worth noting that this kind of formulation is possible by virtue of the fact that Lee is treating nationality as a matter of the relationship between people and place rather than of perceived similarity of an individual to a category prototype.

⁷ This use of a temporal comparison to project intra-national homogeneity into a transcended national past has parallels with the ingroup heterogeneity effect in social comparisons (e.g. Devos, Comby, & Deschamps, 1996; Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992).

A converse rhetorical formulation, which could paradoxically serve similar rhetorical ends, involved using origins as a criterion of nationality, but employing this idea within a line of argument designed to ironize the very concept of 'our' (still) having a 'real' national culture or identity. A common trope used to ironize stereotypes of national character or culture involved reference to 'foreign influence', the rationale being that if the origins of an activity, person or object could be traced outside the nation, then it did not qualify as 'really' national. In the conversation leading up to extract 6, Simon had been explaining his lack of interest in international sport, claiming: *'I just don't feel that there's anything much to be proud of'*.

Extract 6: 'They're not really British'

- 1 I: Isn't there anything that you're proud of?
2 Simon: Well, it's difficult, really, isn't it? We-we've got a such a bastardized
3 culture everything really comes from somewhere else or is a mixture (I)
4 even bowler hats they actually come from Portugal or somewhere and the
5 so-called English language in reality it's a mixture of all sorts and
6 people they're a mixture of races and nationalities (.) probably even
7 Shakespeare wasn't really English if you traced his family back far enough
8 (I) even the Royal family which is like THE most typically British thing
9 we've got even they're not really British they're from France and Germany
10 and where else? Holland too William of Orange (I) so even they're not
11 REALLY British when you come to think about it huh no, there's nothing,
12 is there?

In extract 6, Simon casts stereotypes of common, indigenous, British or English national culture as a matter of false historical consciousness. However, analysis indicated that when references to foreign origins were used to ironize nationality attributions, in 75% of cases this pertained specifically to the category English. In extract 7 this is expressed through the cliched formulation, 'mongrel race':

Extract 7: The English as a 'mongrel race'

- 1 Frank [. . .] when you go back in history you realize that the whole idea of
2 an English race or English way of life is just nonsense (.) we're a
3 mongrel race, people have settled here from all over the world.

The reasons why the category English could be especially vulnerable to ironization by the foreign influence repertoire will be explored in the next section.

Autonomous temporal comparisons and the English/British distinction

In the extracts considered so far, most respondents alluded to their country as 'Britain'. Social psychological research conducted in England rarely accords the question of national category labelling much consideration and normally simply presents respondents with the label 'British' (e.g. Brown *et al.*, 2001; Cinnirella, 1997). Although it has been suggested that in England the terms English and British may be treated as synonymous (McCrone & Kiely, 2000), our analysis suggested that the extent to which respondents were concerned to distinguish between the categories could vary according to topic of talk. People were particularly inclined to conflate the two

categories in the context of talk about Europe, but were less inclined to do so when discussing UK domestic issues. The term 'English' tended to be used spontaneously in a rather restricted range of contexts. In 72% of cases, the category English was used in the context of accounts of sport and leisure, of place and landscape, and in relation to culture and heritage. Discussion of politics or foreign policy typically employed the categories British or UK.⁸

In practice, far from routinely conflating the categories, respondents often formulated Britain/ish and England/ish as mutual comparison terms, warranting the distinction with reference to moral or pragmatic considerations as much as to matters of simple fact or rationality.⁹ In particular, respondents were inclined to use the English-British distinction as a vehicle through which to express the distinction between the past (ethnic) and the present (civic) state of their country, as illustrated in extract 8.

Extract 8: 'There's no such thing as Englishness any more. . .'

- 1 Molly: I'd always say I was British because it just seems like more of a
2 current concept if you like because there's no such thing really as
3 English any more, is there? you can't point to things and say,
4 'that's English' or only those sad things which have been made
5 up like Morris dancing. Even before the Romans there was like
6 waves of um immigration and now with more people coming from
7 different cultures bringing their own things it's inevitable that
8 we would end up losing whatever identity there was um (1) It's a shame
9 I suppose in a way though having said that it would probably
10 be a bit odd if we we were all still dancing round the maypole and
11 (.) whatever (1) drowning witches or whatever it is we used to do
12 [laughter] I hope we've progressed a bit beyond that [laughter]

In extract 8, Molly casts the category 'English' as a hybrid entity, comprised of people in relation to places, activities and things. She used historical origins as a criterion of English cultural identity: according to her account, in order to qualify as authentically English, characteristics and activities require a historical pedigree and, ideally, need to be indigenous. However, no such criterion is applied to Britishness. On the contrary, as far as Molly is concerned, the construct of Britishness is authenticated by its very modernity ('*more of a current concept*', lines 1–2).

At the start of extract 9, Bob is talking about his holiday in the USA. Like Ruth in extract 4, Bob treats stereotypes of 'our' cultural homogeneity as fictional throwbacks to a now transcended past, held by foreigners and promoted through the medium of cinema. In this case, however, Bob treats this past condition of cultural homogeneity as being linguistically marked by the category 'English'. Like Molly in extract 8, Bob elides the English/British distinction with an ethnic/civic distinction, and articulates this in conjunction with a temporal comparison: English being associated with a transcended past, and British with the present continuous.

⁸ Consequently, although the respondents did not themselves use this language, their orientations to the two categories were often consistent with the distinction between England as nation as Britain as state (cf. Connor, 1978).

⁹ In more than half of the instances (58%) in which respondents specified a rhetorical 'other' for the category 'British', the term 'British' was defined in explicit contrast to the category 'English'. The most commonly used non-UK outgroup was the USA (22%).

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Extract 9: 'British is everyone'

- 1 Bob: [. . .] And also like it was 'English this' and 'English that' and I'm
2 like all the time trying to catch up, it's like, so what's with this 'English',
3 you know [laugh] Like, is it some idea like that we're so quaint all sort of
4 living like in Ealing comedies or what? And I'd sometimes try to correct
5 them, and say, you know, 'it's not English it's British'
6 I: Would you never say English?
7 Bob: Well I'd try not to [huh] I find myself slipping up sometimes but
8 I'd try not to
9 I: Why not?
10 Bob: Well cos y'know British is everyone. Whether you are Moslem or
11 Jewish or from Pakistan or Welsh or English or Scottish whatever
12 it's the whole lot together so it's no longer like we can think just in
13 terms of 'we're English'. And it's like erm you know us and them like
14 with Northern Ireland and it's it's a a a bit like erm Lancashire and
15 Yorkshire used to be isn't it? You know, why go making trouble and
16 making something about differences rather than rather than finding
17 common ground.

In extracts 6 and 8, Simon's and Molly's arguments drew upon concerns over the anachronistic, and hence fictive, notion of English national purity and homogeneity. Read in context, however, it was clear that both respondents were also concerned about the moral and pragmatic aspects of representing their compatriots as a singular, indigenous folk. In extract 9 Bob makes it clear that his preference for the term 'British' does not rest merely on questions of rationality but also on matters of morality and civic responsibility. He adopts a lay version of the common in-group model (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasion, Bachman, & Rust, 1993), and casts the use of the category English as promoting particularistic group self-interest ('*us and them*', line 13), and a potential threat to public order ('*making trouble*', line 15). In contrast, the use of the category British allows for the establishment of '*common ground*' (lines 12, 17) promoting future social harmony.

Extracts 8 and 9 also illustrate a common feature of the accounts of nationhood produced in the interview context insofar as Bob and Molly are concerned, at least in part, with meta-representational and meta-discursive matters. That is to say, their concern is not simply focused on questions relating to how they view their country, but also relates to issues concerning language use and communication: what is the 'best' or most appropriate thing to 'say' in relation to national representation. Again, their accounts of appropriate language use are not confined to matters of representational accuracy *per se*, but also relate to matters of probity and morality. Bob, in particular, displays a concern with matters over 'verbal hygiene' (cf. Cameron, 1995), of the ways in which particular representational practices may have particular discursive effects, and of his own use of language use as a matter of ethical self-management in the interests of civility and responsible citizenship ('*I'd try not to . . . I find myself slipping up sometimes*' (line 7)).

Dilemmatic aspects of national representation

Up to this point we have considered how an analysis of vernacular accounting practices reveals the process of national representation to be more complex, and reflexive, than is often suggested in accounts which focus on its perceptual rather

than rhetorical aspects. Attention both to the content and to the form of talk indicates that respondents routinely combined a banal (Billig, 1995) acceptance of nationhood as an uncontroversial fact of life with a normative concern to resist simple categorical representation. In this final section, I turn to consider how the kinds of accounting strategies that respondents used to resist social categorical accounts of their compatriots could possess paradoxical properties.

Social cognition research has drawn attention to the potentially ironic or 'rebound' effects of stereotype suppression (e.g. Liberman & Forster, 2000; Macrae, Bodenhausen, Milne, & Jetten, 1994; Monteith, Spicer, & Tooman, 1998). Analogously, Billig *et al.* (1988) noted how arguments may possess implicitly dilemmatic properties which 'can go beyond the . . . intentions of the communicator', and may include contradictions 'contained within the semantic structure of the discourse itself' (p. 22). In this final section of the article I shall consider three dilemmatic aspects of the kinds of representational devices that respondents in the present study used to rhetorically repress accounts of singular and distinctive national in-group culture or character.

When are 'we?': Temporal comparison and historical elision

Self-categorization theorists often emphasize how the contextual flexibility of social representation may be contingent upon the particular out-groups used for comparison purposes. Analogously, we may note how national representation may vary as a function of the deployment of particular temporal frames of reference. Microanalysis of accounts suggested that the variability, and potential ambiguity, of temporal frames could render accounts of nationhood radically unstable and, on occasions, even inherently contradictory.

By way of example, let us reconsider Ruth's account of national community reported in extract 4. The first thing we may note is the way in which the constitution of Britain as imagined community varies within this account as a consequence of the ambiguity of the deictic referent 'now'. For example, when Ruth says, '*I mean, there's a lot of people in this country. . .*' (line 1) this may be understood as a reference to an immediate experiential present, analogous perhaps to Anderson's (1983) account of nations as 'synchronic communities'. However, the period of time encompassed within the implied or explicit deictic now may also be conceived in calendrical terms (a day, week or year), or even as a historical period. So, when Ruth asserts, '*we're becoming a pretty diverse mixture now*' (lines 20–21), the people encompassed within her '*we. . .now*' bracket need not be understood to be literally co-extant, and may even include national compatriots who are no longer alive, or have yet to be born (Anderson, 1991).

This temporal flexibility in turn affords a degree of ambiguity and even dilemmatic paradox to Ruth's account of national diversity. As we have seen, Ruth establishes the status of the British '*now*' as a '*diverse mixture*' (line 21) precisely through contrast with an imagined past condition of cultural and class-based homogeneity. At the same time, however, she uses an historically expanded British '*we*', in formulations such as, '*I mean we used to have [. . .] I mean that used to be us*' (lines 3–7). The historically expanded national '*we*' assumes an essential *identity* between the category of us-now and the image of the (ethnically homogenous, stiff-lipped) British of the past.

A similar form of temporal slippage may be identified in Molly's account in extract 8, in which a purely contemporary English national '*we*' ('*I hope we've progressed a bit beyond that*', line 12) is used alongside an historically expanded national '*we*' ('*we would end up losing*', line 8) and a purely historical national '*we*' ('*whatever it is that*

we used to do', line 11). Hence, at precisely the same time as Ruth and Molly challenge images of national historical continuity and endurance in principle, this very assumption is implicitly imported into their accounts through the medium of diectic reference.

Another consequence of this kind of 'forked tongue' phenomenon, whereby a speaker's in principle claims are undermined by their use of particular forms of diectical reference, can be found in situations in which respondents disclaim using particular terms of national self-reference. For example, in extracts 8 and 9 Molly and Bob are reporting that they do not call themselves English. However, it would be a mistake to interpret these reports of self-labelling practices as a form of self-disclosure concerning the respondents' sense of national identity *per se*. Although both Molly and Bob resist explicitly self-labelling as English, they nevertheless adopt a speaker-inclusive English 'we': 'I hope we've progressed a bit beyond that' (extract 8, line 12); 'some idea like we're so quaint' (extract 9, line 4).

'Our' contemporary cultural diversity and the presumption of the national indigenous

In some of the accounts we have considered, respondents suggest that the idea of a singular or indigenous national culture or character represents a form of historical myth. In such cases, respondents often represented their own accounts, which ironized the idea of a 'really' British Royal family (extract 6), an English race or way of life (extract 7) or an English culture or identity (extract 8), as the outcome of rational contemplation: 'when you come to think about it' (Extract 6 line 11); 'you realize' (Extract 7, line 1). However, there were distinct limits to what respondents suggested might be achieved by rational contemplation over matters of history. Although they could invoke historical considerations to question the legitimacy of *specific* national categories (particularly 'English'), or to challenge attributions of nationality to particular people, artifacts or practices, they did not question the existence of nations, nor of national character, in principle. On the contrary, arguments employing the narrative of national diversification relied on a tacit presumption that at some stage in the past the country had indeed been populated by an homogenous and distinctive folk. The procedure of contrasting a present state of national heterogeneity with an imagined past condition of homogeneity presumes the existence of nationalized culture and character as part of the original global order. Similarly, the notion of 'our' indigenous, national culture or character becoming corrupted or diluted over time by the importation of 'foreign' peoples and ways of life, attributes an original and essential national status to those people, objects and activities which are understood to have mixed with, 'bastardized' (extract 6, line 2) or swamped 'our' own.

National identity and (Anglo) British cosmopolitan virtue

Throughout this article I have emphasized how historical accounting need not necessarily preclude the use of an international frame of reference. In this respect, we may note how the 'national diversification' and 'foreign influence' repertoires both tended to be treated as nationally specific historical processes. That is, 'we' have lost our (by implication, original) state of national homogeneity whereas other nations, in contrast, have not. The idea that 'our' distinctive level of cultural diversity makes 'us' more 'interesting' and attests to 'our' greater progress, tolerance and cosmopolitan virtue than the peoples of 'other' nations represents an enduring trope of Anglo-British political rhetoric (Young, 1995). Analysis of contemporary political rhetoric indicates

how notions of 'our' distinctive level of cultural heterogeneity, derived from a long history of 'foreign' migration and influence, may be presented as enhancing 'our' economic competitiveness and labour market potential (Condor, 2006).

It is interesting to note how the same association of cultural diversity with progress may also lend a dilemmatic quality to the English/British distinction. By way of illustration, let us return to Molly's account reported in extract 8. In the stretch of talk reported earlier, Molly had suggested that she called herself British rather than English in view of the historical loss of authentic English culture. Molly continues her account with a display of liberal recognition towards the identity claims of the minority British nations:

Extract 8 (continued): 'Scotland and Wales are different of course'

- 8 we would end up losing whatever identity there was um (I) It's a shame
 9 I suppose in a way though having said that it would probably
 10 be a bit odd if we were all still dancing round the maypole and
 11 (.) whatever (I) drowning witches or whatever it is we used to do
 12 [*laughter*] I hope we've progressed a bit beyond that [*laughter*]
 13 Scotland and Wales are different cos until recently they were more sort of
 14 isolated and very much kept their own cultures so it is easier to sort
 15 of say what is Scottish and what is Welsh because there is more of
 16 an identity there
 17 I: Like what?
 18 Molly: Well in in Scotland they have kilts (.) obviously (.) and when you think
 19 about it that must be one of the few places in the world now where
 20 people still actually wear traditional national dress so that's one thing
 21 and and in the case of Wales they have kept their own language which is
 22 I think the oldest language in Europe, so so you can- it's easy
 23 to to appreciate why it is important to them now to keep their own
 24 identity and not to just get absorbed into one big thing. And it's- huh
 25 that's well it's something that makes Britain really an interesting place
 26 I think because although we are in one way just a tiny little island we
 27 have all these very different cultures.

On the face of it, Molly's account represents a model of national self-effacement and negative social comparison. She combines a negation of in-group (English) identity with a simultaneous valorization of the identity of national out-groups. Scotland and Wales have '*more of an identity*' (lines 15–16) owing to the fact that, unlike England, they have '*kept their own cultures*' (line 14). The value of these minority national cultures and identities is worked up through positive international comparison in conjunction with the metric of history-as-value: the population of Wales have '*the oldest language in Europe*' (line 22); Scotland is '*one of the few places in the world now where people still actually wear traditional national dress*' (lines 19–20).

There are, however, three paradoxical elements to Molly's account. First, is an implicit contradiction between her explicit and implicit formulations of the British/English distinction. On the one hand, Molly argues that the category 'English' should be subsumed under the superordinate 'British' on grounds of rationality and probity. On the other hand, Wales and Scotland are exempted from inclusion in the category 'British' on empirical bases ('*Scotland and Wales are different*', line 13) and as a matter of respect ('*it is important to them . . . not to just get absorbed into one big thing*', lines 23–24). Consequently, the superordinate category 'British' comes, by default, to refer (implicitly) solely to England.

Second, we can see how Molly's act of discursive recognition of the UK minority nations doubles as an act of reification. In the very process of attributing them with a distinctive identity Molly casts the population of Wales and Scotland as a people without history, characterized by an homogenous, primordial folkhood. In contrast, by virtue of their default status as the sole occupants of the category British, the (now rhetorically unmarked) English are attributed with a distinctive cultural diversity, and distinctive claims to modernity. In this way, the attribution of the minority UK nationalities with tradition and identity implicitly functions as a rhetorical sop (Van Knippenberg, 1984), which implicitly favours Molly's national in-group (Jost, 2001; Kay, Jost, & Young, 2005). The Scots and the Welsh may have '*more of an identity*' (lines 15–16). But 'we' – the Anglo British – have '*progressed a bit beyond that*' (line 12).

Finally, we may note how Molly's elision of the social with the topographical ('*we are. . . just a tiny little island*', line 26) affords an image of cultures as a property of place, which allows her to lay proxy claim to the national cultures of Wales and Scotland through the trope of common location and collective ownership: '*we have all these very different cultures*' (lines 26–27). In this case, we may note how Molly attributes the mere fact of cultural diversity with aesthetic and intellectual value '*it's something that makes Britain really an interesting place*' (line 25). Molly's account thereby casts 'their' (Welsh and Scottish) distinctive cultures in two qualitatively different ways. On the one hand, for the populations of Wales and Scotland, these cultures represent the living *traditions* of an essentially homogenous people without history. On the other hand, for the population of England, who have themselves progressed beyond national tradition and identity, these same cultures may be claimed as a collective British *heritage*, the possession of which is consistent with a contemporary state of cultural diversity and progressive cosmopolitan virtue.

General discussion

The particular case of nationhood has often been taken as a *prima facie* example of a social category and a social identity. However, a consideration of vernacular accounting practices suggests that the situation may be rather more complex than generally assumed, and far from exemplifying the ideal-typical case with which social identity and self-categorization theory deals, a consideration of national representation may, in fact, challenge a number of established conceptual presumptions.

First, in the interview accounts considered in this paper, nationhood was not typically represented as a simple person-category. Rather, it tended to be formulated either as an entirely de-populated construct (e.g. a place or set of institutions) or (in the accounts focused on in this article) as a hybrid collectivity of social and natural elements, of people, places and things. There is no reason to imagine that national representation is necessarily unique in this regard. Rather, insofar as the objects of societal regulation and identification are formulated as institutions, they may be variously cast as social or physical entities, or as hybrid collectivities, according in part to the demands of the local context (cf. Barsalou, 1991). This does not deny the possibility that societal entities such as nations may sometimes be represented in social categorical form. However, it does suggest that the question of when and with what consequences social categorical representations are used, and the process by which particular societal formations are treated as if they were instantiated in human categories and identities, might be better

conceived as an empirical question, rather than the 'given' point of departure for social psychological analysis.

Second, unlike data normally collected in survey or laboratory contexts, the verbal accounts considered here rarely involved straightforward present-tense descriptions. Once again, this phenomenon is unlikely to be confined to the particular case of national representation. In fact, a general analytic consideration of the temporal aspects of self- and societal representation would appear necessary if research practice is to reflect Tajfel's (1966 p.79) concern for those 'abstract and symbolic' aspects of human imagination that enable individuals to become 'capable of transcending the concrete perceptual context of the moment'. The results of the present study suggest, however, that this is unlikely to be achieved simply by inserting temporality as a 'variable' into extant conceptual schemata or research practices. It is not the case that people either 'do' or 'do not' include temporal considerations in their accounts of social structures, events and processes. On the contrary, these accounts are necessarily chronically tensed. In addition, it makes little sense to conceive of temporal considerations as essentially independent from matters of category homogeneity or inter-category distinctiveness. We have seen how, in the interview accounts, people, objects and events could be attributed with national status not only on the basis of family resemblance, but also on the grounds of temporal-spatial co-presence, common origin, lineage, and common fate. Similarly, matters of time and history did not simply function as an alternative to an international frame of reference, but could on occasions constitute the vehicle through which notions of fact and legitimacy in intergroup contexts were established, and the medium through which comparative value and status were assessed.

Third, a focus on the ways in which nationhood is formulated in narrative context draws our attention to the ways in which social actors may display reflexive concern over the appropriateness, and potential wider social consequentiality, of their own representational practices. Attention to the complex and often dilemmatic aspects of respondents' accounts however points to the limits of current approaches to 'strategic' rhetoric in intergroup contexts insofar as these imply that representational forms and functions may be entirely under the voluntary control of individual social actors (cf. Condor, 1990; Condor, 1996a, 1996b, 2006). Attention to the details of the respondents' accounts provided a clear illustration of what, following Billig *et al.* (1988), we might term implicit ideological dilemmas. Just as cognitive attempts at stereotype suppression may have ironic consequences, so too may rhetorical attempts to control national representation contain inherent paradoxes, with the consequence that attempts to convey a rationally disinterested image of nation as a civic community may end up reinforcing precisely the kinds of self-celebratory ethnic nationalist formulations that they were designed to repress.

Although the kinds of normative concerns relating to social categorical accounting considered here are consistent with work which points to a more general disinclination towards stereotyped representation, the precise nature of these meta-representational concerns, and the rhetorical resources used to manage them, will be at least in part historically, culturally and ideologically specific. In view of the wide variety of ways in which nationhood may be construed (Condor, 2001, see Beiner, 2003; Brubaker, 1992; Favell, 1998), we would not necessarily expect to find the same specific concerns about national representation displayed by people in different national contexts, or even by people from different national or cultural backgrounds within the UK. Moreover, although we might expect that national categories will

always have the potential to be represented as hybrid entities, that temporal concerns will saturate national accounting, and that social actors will orient their accounts of nation at least in part to normative concerns, would we would not necessarily expect these general processes to be manifested in the same way across changing historical circumstances.

Since the data reported here were originally collected, political changes in the UK, in particular the establishment of a Scottish Parliament, have prompted predictions on the part of social scientists, politicians and survey researchers that understandings of nationhood in England were about to undergo dramatic change (Bryant, 2003; Curtice & Heath, 2000). It is notable that many of these arguments were based on an *a priori* assumption that national representation in England had hitherto been characterized by a complacent thoughtlessness, a lack of awareness of post-Imperial historical change, and a lack of concern over the difference between Britain and England. These sorts of assumptions are difficult either to sustain or to refute with even the most sophisticated opinion poll data. However, the findings of the present study of vernacular accounting procedures suggest that even prior to these political changes, established forms of national representation in England were already characterized by a complex, nuanced and flexible system of beliefs and values in which images of historical change figured prominently. Although these forms of national representation could, on occasions, be mindlessly assumed, they could also be treated as potentially contentious subjects of debate, as people displayed reflexive concern over the appropriateness, and potential social consequentiality, of their own representational practices.

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