Pride and Prejudice: identity management in English people's talk about 'this country'

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ABSTRACT. This article discusses the ways in which a sample of English respondents oriented to the task of formulating an account of their country in an interview context. Attention to both the content and the organizational features of talk suggested that respondents were generally reluctant to be heard to speak about 'this country' in categorical terms, to adopt an explicitly national footing or to display a sense of patriotic national pride. They treated all of these as potentially hearable as symptomatic of 'typical' Anglo-British xenophobia. In contrast to many extant analyses, which suggest that national discourse may provide a legitimate vehicle for the expression of exclusionary or racist sentiments, it appeared that, for these English respondents in this context, talk about 'this country' was often treated as a delicate topic, functionally equivalent to, and subject to the same opprobrium as, talk about 'race'. At the same time, however, various features of the respondents' discourse pointed to the presence of banal (Billig, 1995) national referents. Possible interpretations of this are discussed.

KEY WORDS: *discourse, English, impression management, nationalism, prejudice*

Introduction

Impression management in local interaction is a phenomenon which has attracted a good deal of attention throughout the social sciences (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1959, 1963; Leary, 1995; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi, 1981; Ting-Toomey, 1994). Within this broad field, specific concern has focused on the ways in which people may, in the course of describing or accounting for the social world, attempt to avoid being imputed with the stigma of 'prejudice'. The notion of prejudice has a considerable history within liberal thought, and in

both academic and everyday discourse has come to express a cultural opprobrium against a constellation of behaviours including: irrational ('interested' or otherwise non-empirically grounded) accounting (cf. Edwards, 1997; Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996); categorical rather than particularized accounts of persons (which social psychologists term 'stereotyping') involving the dual processes of intragroup homogenization and intergroup differentiation (see Tajfel, 1978); the preferential treatment and perception of ingroups as opposed to outgroups; and an unwarranted dislike of others based on faulty knowledge or categorical representation (Allport, 1954; and see Billig, 1991; Billig et al., 1988 for general discussions).

Attempts to avoid the stigma of prejudice have often been viewed as particularly relevant to situations in which people are engaged in discourse concerning ethnicity and 'race'. Researchers have long been aware of the possibility that respondents' accounts of their own attitudes may be contaminated by social desirability response biases, reflecting the commonly held view that it is 'not nice' to display, or admit to, categorical thought in general or negative beliefs about other ethnic groups in particular. This concern led to the development of a variety of research strategies which encourage respondents to reveal their true beliefs (e.g. Sigall and Page, 1971), or which use covert indices of racial prejudice such as physiological responses (Rankin and Campbell, 1959; Vanman et al., 1997; Woodmansee, 1977), discriminatory behaviour (Crosby et al., 1980) and response latency (Dovidio and Fazio, 1992; Fazio et al., 1995; Wittenbrink et al., 1997).

Although impression management is often treated simply as an empirical inconvenience – a potential source of bias in questionnaire-based research on ethnic attitudes – some researchers, particularly those working with conversational data, have treated this as a topic for research in its own right (e.g. Billig, 1991; Billig et al., 1988; Cochrane and Billig, 1984; Verkuyten et al., 1994a; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). The discursive strategies that people may use to deflect potential charges of prejudice have been documented most thoroughly by Van Dijk (e.g. 1984, 1987, 1989, 1992) whose integrative accounts consider both the content and the organizational features of such talk. The strategies identified by Van Dijk include the use of overt disclaimers, apparent denials of prejudice, avoidance strategies, mitigation, understatement and euphemism. In addition, Van Dijk (e.g. 1987) has drawn attention to characteristic production features of prejudiced discourse, including hesitations, repairs, false starts and repetition. Van Dijk (1995) has also considered the possibility that such implicit or explicit denials of racism may serve a double function, presenting a positive image of both the individual speaker and also of the group of which he or she is a representative (cf. Tajfel, 1981).

Analyses of political rhetoric have also considered the strategies by which the expression of attitudes towards racial issues may be managed in formal public fora. For example, Reeves (1983) identified a variety of strategies characterizing British parliamentary discourse, including the attribution of racist remarks to

others and the use of equivocation and euphemism (cf. Van Dijk's accounts of transfer moves and vagueness in racist discourse). Several analyses of British political discourse have focused in particular on the ways in which racist arguments may be effectively disguised through talk which is not ostensibly about ethnicity or race (see Gilroy, 1993). In particular, authors have drawn attention to the ways in which arguments about race may be neutralized by being formulated within a culturally acceptable discourse of 'nation'. For example, Reeves (1983) considered how British political rhetoric could be 'discursive deracialized' by camouflaging accounts of race within discussions of 'immigration'. Similarly, Barker's (1981) account of 'the new racism' drew attention to the ways in which British Conservative politicians concealed theories about race within apparently neutral appeals to patriotism.

Barker's work had an important influence on the way in which social scientists subsequently approached the analysis of racial discourse, although it has not been without its critics (see e.g. Miles, 1993). One particular limitation of Barker's account lies in its lack of specific concern over the way in which the construct of 'nation' itself is used and understood. Barker's argument rests upon the assumption that appeals to the (British) nation are necessarily perceived as neutral, and hence non-accountable: they are not, in themselves, potentially hearable as matters of 'prejudice'. Barker is not, of course, alone in this assumption. For example, Anderson's (1983, 1991) account of *Imagined Communities* famously distinguished between the construct of race (which he saw as a system of negatively-valued exclusion), and the construct of nation (which he regarded, in contrast, as a system of positively-valued inclusion). According to Anderson (1991: 3) 'nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time'. The assumption that the rhetorical deployment of national categories may (at least on occasions) be treated by speakers as unproblematic also receives some support from Billig's (1995) account of a phenomenon which he terms 'banal nationalism'. Specifically, Billig emphasizes how occasional, explicit appeals to national identity may be rendered possible by the existence of mundane habits of language, thought and symbolism which reproduce a taken-for-granted belief in the natural and unproblematic existence of national distinctions. Billig emphasizes how – in both lay and social scientific discourse – the construct of nation is often accepted and reproduced mindlessly and uncritically.[1]

To the extent that social scientists have considered the possibility that the discursive mobilization of national categories might, at least on occasions, be treated as normatively accountable, their analyses often rest upon a distinction between two forms of discourse, typically labelled 'patriotism' and 'nationalism'. A good example of this sort of account may be found in a recent text by Viroli (1995), in which the author distinguishes between a prejudiced 'language of nationalism' (an exclusionary, intolerant, xenophobic, jingoistic and self-aggrandizing discourse, which rests on assumptions of the uniqueness of a primordial folk) and a tolerant 'language of patriotism' (which rests upon a sense of civic duty and a

love of country 'understood not as attachment to the cultural, ethnic, and religious unity of a people, but as love of a common liberty and the institutions that sustain it' (p. 12)). Whereas nationalism, according to Viroli, is 'inseparable from the idea of power' and breeds expansionist and hostile rhetoric, patriotism is 'by nature defensive' (p. 3). Viroli accepts that the bonds of patriotic love are to some extent particularistic 'as it is love of the common liberty of a particular people, sustained by institutions that have a particular history which has for that people a particular meaning . . . that inspire and are in turn sustained by a particular way of life and culture' (p. 12). However, this 'charitable and generous love' involves an acceptance of diversity which can easily generalize across national boundaries, since the value of liberty upon which patriotic sentiment rests 'appeals to common universal principles and values' (p. 14).[2]

This sort of attempt to distinguish forms of national accounting which are basically virtuous (patriotic, tolerant) from those which are fundamentally malevolent (nationalistic, prejudiced) is currently common within the social sciences (see e.g. Connor, 1993; Janowitz, 1983; Snyder, 1976, and see Billig, 1995; Calhoun, 1997 for critiques). However, the utility of such a reified distinction may be questioned on two grounds.

First, it is not clear whether a distinction between patriotism and nationalism is always useful for understanding the ways in which discourses concerning national distinctions actually operate in practice. Indeed, analyses of political rhetoric have often demonstrated how notions of civic national unity, and the idea that a nation can be identified with the instantiation and defence of liberal values, can be mobilized in such a way as to gloss international hostility as a 'defence of democracy' (e.g. Chambers, 1989). It is usual practice for nations to term their own military capabilities 'defensive', and the extent to which any international activity is represented as hostile, expansionist or xenophobic is likely to depend more upon the point of view and interests of the speaker than the objective characteristics of the situation (Bronfenbrenner, 1961). Furthermore, evidence suggests that a variety of ethnocentric, chauvinistic and exclusionary practices within nation states can also be glossed as a 'defence of liberalism'. In particular, analyses of racist discourse have pointed to situations in which cultural values such as 'tolerance' or 'democracy' and the development of liberal political institutions are attributed to the primordial character or way of life of the majority population. In such cases, members of the 'tolerant' majority may fail to recognize the possibility of racist discrimination (Essed, 1991), and politicians may present immigration controls or limitations to the rights of minority groups as measures necessary to protect 'our democratic way of life' (e.g. Barker, 1981).

Second, it is not clear whether it is always possible for a speaker to refer to national categories without leaving themselves at least *potentially* open to charges of prejudice. Certainly, social psychologists would question whether it is possible to conceive of any social category without necessarily differentiating that category from others (Tajfel, 1978). If it is the case that any reference to national identity *necessarily* implies a system of 'simultaneous inclusion and exclusion'

(Miles, 1993: 56) and of intracategory homogenization and intercategory differentiation, it follows that any reference to a national category, however banal, may always be potentially open to the opprobrium associated with categorical thought in general (Billig et al., 1988).[3]

Up to this point the discussion has been based largely on social scientific analyses of political speeches or cultural texts. There is currently very little information concerning the ways in which ordinary speakers may mobilize national categories and identities in talk.[4] In addition, extant accounts of national discourse have been largely confined to analyses of the content, rather than the reception, of appeals to nation. A focus on the ways in which national discourse is formulated in conversational encounters might enable us to expand upon these accounts in order to consider the ways in which participants themselves orient to national referents in the course of interaction (cf. Antaki, 1994; Edwards, 1997). For example, an analysis of the ways in which political speeches which deploy notions of national homogeneity, immigration or the national interest may function to effectively neutralize claims concerning racial difference and exclusion (cf. Barker, 1981) might be broadened to consider the ways in which these discourses are actually received, and responded to, by audiences. Similarly, the extent to which any particular national reference can be treated as virtuously patriotic, or as an instance of a normatively accountable nationalist prejudice (cf. Viroli, 1995), might be considered from the point of view of the interactants themselves rather than warranted simply by a reading imposed by the analyst. Finally, an analysis of banal national referents (cf. Billig, 1995) need not depend on the identification of forms of mundane national deixis in talk ('we', 'here', etc). Rather, we might consider the ways in which such references are treated in the course of ongoing interaction. In some cases, it may indeed be the case that interactants treat terms like 'we' and 'here' as functionally banal, letting them pass without qualification or explanation. In other cases, however, interlocutors may treat such references as problematic or accountable. Again, the banality (or otherwise) of any national reference might be treated not so much as a prior fact as a local interactional accomplishment. This sort of perspective need not be regarded as a simple substitute for an objectivist analysis of the possible social functions of a form of talk (cf. Wetherell and Potter, 1992). On the contrary, if taken to its logical conclusions it would include a reflexive consideration of academic analyses themselves as forms of social (inter)action – interpretations of, and responses to, instances of national discourse. But this form of analysis would also enable us to question how ordinary speakers themselves deploy and interpret national references in the course of interaction.

Although most existing analyses focus on the ways in which constructs of nation are strategically mobilized within talk about racial categories, a few studies have focused on everyday accounts of national distinctions per se (e.g. Windisch, 1990). Of particular relevance to the present article are a series of studies by Bozatzis (1997, 1999) who analysed discussions between Greek students resident in the UK and interviews with Greek EU employees in Brussels.

Paying attention to both the content and the organizational features of talk, Bozatzis pointed to the existence of a pervasive interactional dilemma for his respondents. On the one hand, speakers were concerned to avoid the charge of xenophobia, using various strategies to disclaim the identity of the nationally-prejudiced. On the other hand, they attempted to deflect possible charges of xeno-mania: they were concerned not to be heard to be denigrating Greece in comparison to Britain or other European countries.

Whilst these studies have provided some interesting insights into the possible ways in which people may orient towards national categories in talk, Bozatzis was keen to interpret the behaviour of his respondents as reflecting a very specific historical and cultural legacy, through which the Greek nation has come to be constructed on the one hand as quintessentially Occidental, and on the other hand as fundamentally Oriental. Given the very different circumstances behind the establishment of different nation states, and the very different ideological frames in which different national communities are presently realized (Van Dijk, 1995, 1998), it may be unwise to attempt to speak of national discourse as a general, international, phenomenon. At the very least, any parallels and common features between the ways in which people orient to national categories in talk should be the subject of empirical study.

The present paper reports a preliminary study into the way in which a sample of English people oriented to questions about 'their country' in an interview context. A good deal has been written about English national identity, but almost all current accounts of commonsense national representations rely on analyses of cultural texts (tourist brochures, national newspapers, political speeches, etc.) rather than on the discourse of ordinary citizens (see Condor, 1996, 1997a). This study was conducted in order to begin to redress this empirical lacuna.

Data and analysis

The data were drawn from a corpus collected from a series of interviews with English people carried out over a 2-year period. The respondents came from a variety of backgrounds. Some were university students, while others were recruited from (non-academic) evening classes in two local colleges in the north west of England. One of these was a general community college in an urban area (where the respondents were taking courses in massage, car maintenance, etc.) and the other was an agricultural college in a rural area (where the respondents were taking classes in chain-saw maintenance, dog-handling, etc.). Other groups of respondents were recruited from community centres in three villages on the south coast of England and from personal contacts in West London. Further interviewees were recruited via snowball sampling from the friends and relatives of the initial respondents. In total, 170 interviews were conducted, with respondents from a variety of social class backgrounds, whose ages ranged from 17 to 84.

The interviews were advertised as part of a project on 'current social attitudes'.

Each interview began by asking the respondent for basic information on themselves and their lives, and the ensuing conversation often moved in a seemingly natural fashion, to discussions of foreign holidays and attitudes towards Europe and other countries. The interviews proper were generally semi-structured in format. The interviewer had a list of topics to be covered which could (if necessary) be formulated into questions. An attempt was made to formulate any direct questions in a non-leading manner, although (as we shall see later) this was not always the way in which they were received by the respondents. In particular, when attempting to elicit talk about the respondents' own nation the interviewer did not use the category labels 'Britain' or 'England', but referred instead to 'this country'.[5]

All of the interviews were transcribed for basic content. However, in order to reduce these data to manageable proportions for the purpose of more detailed analysis, a disproportionate stratified sub-sample of 48 interviews was randomly selected from the original corpus. In order to ensure some measure of generalizability, these were selected in equal numbers from interviews with respondents from the north and south of the country, and from urban and rural areas. Within each regional sub-sample, equal numbers of male and female respondents were selected, and the sample was also balanced by social class (grossly classified as middle class or working class) and age. All of these selected respondents were white, had been born in, and were currently domiciled in, England. The relevant sections of interviews were transcribed in detail (see Appendix for an explanation of the transcription notation).

In the interests of brevity I shall be bracketing the (admittedly interesting) questions of variability within and between responses in order to focus on one particular commonplace feature of these accounts. The general phenomenon to which I wish to draw attention is somewhat counter-intuitive in terms of current academic commonsense (and, also as we shall see, popular commonsense) concerning the characteristic ways in which people in general, and English people in particular, construct their nation and orient to their identity as nationals. Specifically, I shall be drawing attention to the fact that, in this specific interview context, English respondents tended routinely to treat talk about 'this country' as a normatively accountable matter-of-prejudice. This was apparent from the ways in which they oriented to the interviewer's questions, and also from the content and the organizational features of their accounts more generally. The following discussion will consider a number of rather different ways in which this general phenomenon was manifested.

DEMONSTRATING RATIONALITY: NATIONAL CATEGORIZATION AS PREJUDICE

The refusal of national categorization In Extract 1 we can see a fairly typical example of a situation in which a speaker treats 'this country' as a delicate topic. The talk leading up to this extract involved a fairly lengthy turn in which the respondent described her impressions of Canada (which she had visited for a

period of six months). Her final words had been 'because it is so different from what you find in this country', and the interviewer's question was formulated as if it had been occasioned by this previous utterance.

Extract 1

Int: So (.) what (.) is different (.) about this country?
(8)

Resp: Hm (.) I don't (.) y'know (.) I don't really think about (.) in terms of countries (.) or different nations or (.) whatever because (1) I'd like to believe that ar- we are all one big country (.) other than (.) segregated into (1) categories (.) with nothing to (2) I dunno (.) with nothing to (.) um (3) fit into a role that's pushed into those certain categories like y'know (.) the typical (.) Briton (.) um (2) I don't know (.) other people personally I think that (.) I would care enough about any person no matter (.) where they were from (.) I'm not a big thing for y'know oh 'Britain's y'know the best' or (.) y'know look after yourself before looking after other people (.) cos like I said before I think we are so (.) well off compared to (.) other countries and I think that they need far more help (.) than we do here (.) right now so (.)

One notable feature of this extract is the presence of the sorts of production and expression features that Van Dijk (1984, 1989) describes as typical of talk about delicate topics: pauses, hesitations, false starts and self-corrections. Of course, one should be wary of using features such as these as discourse markers which will necessarily alert the analyst to the presence of a sensitive topic (see Van Dijk, 1984). However, it was notable that many respondents whose accounts were otherwise quite fluent would demonstrate this kind of hesitancy when answering questions (or engaging in spontaneous talk) about 'this country'.

A second feature we may note is how the speaker interprets the question 'what is different about this country?' as an invitation to voice necessarily *prejudiced* opinions. First, she takes up the issue of intercategory differentiation implied in the request to speak about what is 'different' about 'this country'. She questions the legitimacy of thinking 'in terms of [different] countries', and (notwithstanding her previous account) denies doing this herself: 'I'd like to believe that we are all one big country . . .'. She then questions assumptions of intracategory homogenization ('the typical Briton') which she regards as tacitly implied by the terms of the question. The respondent then distances herself from the discriminatory implications of the question (as she interprets it). She rejects an unstated implication (cf. Maleville, 1995) that the population of different countries should be evaluated or treated differently: 'I would care enough about any person no matter where they were from.' This leads to a denial of chauvinism, with an allusion to a tacit expectation that she might voice the view that 'Britain's the best' or 'look after yourself before looking after other people'. Finally, she contrasts the discriminatory implications of the question (as she has interpreted it) and the possible available chauvinistic responses (which she treats as having been normatively expected of her) with her own view that (for the British) national self-interest is unwarranted in the light of the greater needs of 'other countries'.

Extract 1 exemplifies a phenomenon which was apparent throughout the data set. This speaker does not seem at any stage to be orienting to a normative requirement to display a patriotic identity (cf. Bozatzis, 1999). On the contrary, her concern appears to be focused on the possibility that to be heard to speak about what is 'different about this country' might automatically stigmatize her as prejudiced. This respondent's hesitancy, and her reluctance to take up the invitation to talk about 'this country', might, of course, be attributed to the fact that, by the very act of posing a direct question, the interviewer had rendered her views on this topic accountable. On the other hand, it did seem that these features were more often and more clearly evident in the replies of many of the respondents to questions about 'this country' than for any other topic. For the speaker in Extract 1, for instance, the rejection of talk-about-countries was quite specifically occasioned by the invitation to speak about '*this* country': she did not, for example, use these sorts of topic-avoidance strategies when (earlier in the conversation) the interviewer asked her 'What is Canada like?'. More generally, it was notable that, whereas the speakers on occasion qualified, warranted or distanced themselves from national-generalization throughout their talk, this treatment of talk-about-countries as potentially hearable as prejudice was particularly marked when taking up the topic specifically formulated as '*this* country' (or 'Britain' or 'England').[6]

Banal national reference as topic-avoidance A further notable feature of Extract 1 is the process by which a *potentially* banal national reference may be reformulated as an explicit, contentious topic in the course of a sequence of interaction. First, the interviewer does not allow the respondent's (potentially banal) reference to the 'differentness' of 'this country' to pass without comment. Instead, her question ('what is different about this country?') formulates this as an accountable topic requiring further elaboration. The interviewee, in turn, responds by rejecting the formulation of the question, problematizing what is now the interviewer's reference to 'this country'. However, notwithstanding her explicit problematization of the interviewer's use of the national referent, many aspects of her own account are still formulated in ways which might be taken to signal a banal acceptance of national categories apparent through linguistic deixis ('we', 'they', 'here', 'other' people) and by ellipeted elements in the talk (where the respondent does not, for example, ask the interviewer what she means by a 'country'). In this respect, the extract parallels other instances of dilemmatic talk in which categorical referents are treated as an indication of prejudiced (irrational and morally reprehensible) thought, whilst, at the same time, the existence of category distinctions is taken for granted (see Billig et al., 1988).

However, it may be worth exploring in a little more detail some of the functions that may be served by banal national referents in this sort of context. In general, it appeared that vague and potentially ambiguous terms such as 'we' or 'here' could be used by speakers as a means of avoiding (potentially 'prejudiced') explicit

references to their own nation. This is illustrated in Extract 2, in which we can see the interviewer's attempt to shift from an implicit to a more explicit national reference rejected by the interviewee:

Extract 2

I: So in your view (1) what would you say are (.) are the most important changes that have taken place (1) over the last few years?
(2)

R: I would say that there is more discontent than there was (.) so (1) and grumbling and to a certain extent y'know (.) I can see what they mean but (.) like we have just got so much compared to places like India (.) and Africa >y'know we worry about the national health service< (.) and people worry when buses don't turn up on >time an' like all these people< y'know they don't (.) one bus for thousands of people an (.) y'know they don't have national health service an'=

I: hmm

R: =it upsets me sometimes (2) to think that people here jus' (.) y'know are just totally (.) ignorant (.) erm (1) to what like (.) can really be like really struggling rather than what they perceive as being (1) hard life here=

I: =Hmm (.) so:: (.) what do you think life is like (.) in this country?
(2)

R: well (1) that's (.) a difficult one to answer to be honest with you (1) °yes° (2) I'm not sure (.) I'm not sure that (.) I don't know what in general (1) it's it's that (.) well I suppose (.) I suppose I really don't want to say that 'oh in Britain we do this' (.) be::cause that's not really the way I think (.) in general (1) I dunno (.) it's just that (.) thinking (.) well (1) well I think that's part of the problem

In the talk prior to this exchange, no mention had been made of national distinctions and the interviewer's question need not have been interpreted in national-exclusive terms. However, various features of the respondent's reply would seem to indicate the adoption of a national-specific frame of reference. Although the 'we' who have 'got so much compared to places like India and Africa' might be interpreted as a supranational referent (possibly pertaining to people in the developed world), the references to 'worries' about public transport and, in particular, the 'national' health service, do point to an implicit use of a national frame. However, when the interviewer explicitly asks for the respondent's views about life 'in *this country*', he demonstrates some difficulty formulating an answer. After a certain amount of hesitancy and a number of false starts, he finally refuses to engage in national categorical accounting ('I really don't want to say that "oh in Britain we do this" ').

The fact that many speakers apparently preferred to refer to 'this country' using euphemistic, or potentially ambiguous references has interesting parallels with Van Dijk's account (e.g. 1984, 1987) of the practice of avoiding explicit mention of particular social categories as a strategy of self-presentation in the expression of delicate opinions. However, in this context it is important to note exactly *what* it is that the speakers are treating as a 'delicate opinion'. Speakers in this study did not only use vague reference terms when formulating opinions about 'foreigners' or 'ethnic minorities' (cf. Van Dijk, 1984). On the contrary,

they seemed *particularly* inclined to use this form of discourse when engaged in discussion about their own country and compatriots.

The externalization of national categorical accounting: footing shifts in talk about 'this country' In both of the extracts so far considered, the speakers at some stage explicitly refused to speak in national categorical terms. As we have seen, it is also possible that the common preference for implicit national referents might, in some cases, function as a strategy of topic-avoidance. In addition, it was possible to identify other ways in which speakers avoided being heard to engage in talk about their country. For example, it was notable that, on those occasions when respondents did talk about 'this country' in categorical terms, they often temporarily adopted the footing of relayer (Goffman, 1981), reporting the ways in which (by implication) *other* people might formulate accounts:

Extract 3

I: So what d'you think about <u>this</u> country?
(2)
R: What do you mean?
(1)
I: Well um just say something about (.) what you think this is like (1) as a country
(1)
R: What <u>I</u> think?
I: Yes (2) Just tell me something in your own words (1) what you think
(2)
R: You mean anything that typically (.) typically [British
I: [Yea
R: The food [heh heh heh]
I: Yea
R: And there's (1) we::ll (.) there's this stereotype of (1) of how it's (.) like (.) like we've got a long history and (.) and <u>tradition</u> and all that (.) people still 'drink <u>tea</u> in the afternoons' and 'policemen ride bicycles' and we're all (.) old <u>fash</u>ioned (.) and then there's things like of course we always lose at sport and (.) and I suppose that one's <u>true</u> (.) [heh heh]

This particular example was selected for reasons of economy of exposition, since it includes instances of several rather different ways in which speakers could effectively externalize stereotypes of their country or compatriots, casting themselves in the role of relayer rather than principal (Goffman, 1981) of the words they utter. This is particularly notable in this instance since the reported extract starts – ironically – with an explicit negotiation about the footing which the respondent should adopt when formulating her response to the question, 'What do you think about this country?'. Having established that a felicitous response would involve the speaker saying what she thinks 'in her own words', she adopts the role of *relayer*, establishing a distance between the account that she is producing and 'her own words'. This she does in a number of ways: by formulating her account as a report of a commonly-known 'stereotype', by the use of an inflection of quotation, and finally by selective endorsement: distinguishing

between the bulk of the representation and the one aspect of the account that she is prepared to personally support – 'I suppose that one's true'.

It was very common for respondents to use, or make reference to, highly clichéd national images (most commonly, tea-drinking, bowler-hat wearing, monarchy-loving). Many commentators have shown how clichés may be mobilized to enhance the factual (or commonsense) status of the speaker's words, thereby avoiding problems of accountability (e.g. Van Dijk, 1984; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). However, in the case of the present data, it appeared that speakers such as the woman quoted earlier were more often using clichéd representations of national character or ways of life in such a manner as to effectively ironize their utterance, marking these accounts as knowingly humorous, exaggerated, or as reports of commonsense beliefs which the speaker did not necessarily endorse (cf. Devine, 1989). The issue of cliché use will be returned to later. For the time being it is worth noting that, although all of these strategies for effectively externalizing categorical accounts were a common feature of representations of 'this country', they were much less in evidence when speakers were engaged upon describing *other* countries.

The disavowal of national identity In addition to their apparent reluctance to be heard to speak about 'this country' in categorical terms in their own voice, respondents often appeared reluctant to self-categorize (cf. Turner, 1987) in explicitly national terms. The following extract presents an example of a case in which the speaker's attempt to avoid answering a question about 'this country' involves, in part, an explicit rejection of the national altercating (Weinstein and Deutschberger, 1963), which he treats as having been implied by the terms of the question:

Extract 4

R: I suppose (.) I suppose that it's really just (.) not what you get here (.) is it?
(2)
I: How (.) how (.) would you say you view this country then?
(2)
R: What d'you mean now or =
I: =Yea (.) now
(1)
R: erm I don't know (.) I don't know many typically British people (1) not really (2) I don't know I don't associate myself with belonging to a nation state in that sense °right° (.) I'm not a nationalist (.) I'm sort of just me °right° (.) I do what I want so (1) don't really think about anything else ((laughter))

In this case, the respondent had previously been discussing the underdevelopment of Greece and the former Yugoslavia, and the ways in which 'Greek people' are content with the simple things in life, a situation which he explicitly compared with the situation 'here'. However, (as in Extract 2 earlier) once the interviewer reformulates his 'here' as a reference to 'this country', the respondent starts to treat this as a delicate topic. Again, the speaker interprets the interviewer's question ('How would you say you view this country?') as an invitation

to generalize about 'typically British' people, which he refuses, this time on the grounds that he lacks first-hand experience: 'I don't know many' (cf. Potter, 1996; Tsui, 1991; Van Dijk, 1984). In this case the respondent also orients to the way in which the question implicitly invites him to speak as a national, a footing which he rejects in favour of an independent voice ('I'm just sort of me . . . I do what I want').

Attempts to avoid being imputed with a sense of national identity were particularly marked in response to direct questions on this topic (cf. Condor, 1996), for example:

Extract 5

I: How (.) would you describe your national identity?
R: Huh huh I've no idea ((laughter))
I: Is it something you are aware of thinking about very much?
R: No (2) °not at all° (3) I don't like it (.) the idea of being British huh I don't think about that fact at all (...)

Once again, it is important to note that despite their occasional explicit rejection of a nationalist footing and denials of a sense of national identity, these speakers nevertheless commonly adopted a banal national footing as indicated by the use of the pronoun 'we' (see Billig, 1995). Again, it would appear that these sorts of ambiguous (see Achard, 1993; De Fina, 1995; Windisch, 1990) self-referents to some extent functioned to avoid the normative opprobrium associated with explicit self-categorization in national terms.

DEMONSTRATING TOLERANCE: NATIONAL PRIDE AS CHAUVINISTIC PREJUDICE

Pride as prejudice As already noted, respondents might (not surprisingly) interpret the request to talk about 'this country' as positioning them on a national footing. Their unease in taking up this topic might, then, reflect a general concern to avoid the potential imputation of stake – that is, of a potentially prejudicial 'interested' perspective (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Potter, 1996). We have already noted how the speaker in Extract 1, for example, oriented to the potential for the question, 'what is different about this country?' to be answered in terms of national self-interest. Adopting temporarily the role of relayer, she refers to clichéd expressions of nationalist sentiment, the existence of which she treats as common knowledge shared with the interviewer: 'Britain's y'know the best', 'y'know look after yourself before looking after other people'. Her personal disavowal of such sentiments is marked by her explicit disclaimer ('I'm not a big thing for y'know . . .') and by the ironic tone of her delivery.

At this stage it is worth noting the various (potentially contradictory) ways in which 'prejudice' may be understood. In the previous section I focused on the ways in which speakers treated references to their country as instances of categorical thought which breached liberal values of rationality and of the appreciation of human individuality and common human nature (cf. Billig et al., 1988). However, within the tradition of Enlightenment thought, the term 'prejudice' is

also used as a synonym for intolerance. The notion of tolerance involves a tacit *acceptance* of the existence of group differences, but is opposed to anti-egalitarian or chauvinistic beliefs in the superiority of one's own group, beliefs or way of life (Gay, 1973; cf. Billig, 1985). Attempts to avoid being attributed with 'prejudice' may, therefore, involve attempts not only to disclaim national-categorical thought, but also, attempts to disclaim national chauvinism whilst accepting the existence of national distinctions.

In the corpus of data considered here, there was certainly evidence that respondents were orienting to a normative ethos against voicing a belief in the superiority of 'this country'. I have already alluded to the common tendency for respondents to distance themselves from clichéd expressions of overt nationalist sentiment: speakers commonly mentioned refrains such as 'Britain's the Best', 'Rule Britannia', 'Land of Hope and Glory' and made ironic reference to the label *Great* Britain ('I don't think Britain's so great'). More generally, it seemed that speakers were concerned to disavow the identity of the nationally 'proud':

Extract 6

I: That all sounds pre- pretty negative. S::o are there any good things (.) about about this country (2) do you think?
(4)

R: It < I find the history (.) interesting > bu::t what I'm saying is I just don't identify with the national (.) pride identity er the monarch er (.) and I mean >°that's that's another thing that makes us different from from other countries° having a monarch< but having said that I- I don't (1) affiliate with (.) monarchy >with er monarchy and er and all that pomp (.) I don't really consider it as my you know heritage when you ask me to identify the good- < but to me it's just somewhere (2) a bit different from other places (. . .)

The question at the start of this extract was occasioned by a previous turn in which the respondent had been talking of industrial decline and the legacy of Thatcherism in promoting a 'greedy' and 'selfish' attitude on the part of the folk. The interviewer's question starts with a gist formulation, which casts the essence of the respondent's foregoing account as 'pretty negative', and then goes on to invite her to balance this with an account of 'any good things'. The respondent appears somewhat reluctant to take up this conversational offering: she pauses before replying, and her response 'I find the history interesting' is delivered extremely slowly. Immediately after uttering this phrase (and without a hearable pause) she then attempts to protect herself against the possibility that the interviewer might interpret these words as those of the nationally-proud. She then mentions the monarchy as something distinctive about 'us' (cf. Billig, 1992), but again immediately qualifies this statement. It seems that the speaker's concern here is not so much to avoid being heard to articulate categorical accounts of 'this country', but rather to stress that her recognition of national 'differences' should be understood as a rational (intellectual) 'interest' rather than as an indication of a (by implication, reprehensible) sense of national pride.

Even when not mentioned explicitly, it appeared that respondents were routinely orienting to the possibility that they be attributed with a normatively

accountable national pride. Speakers (like the woman quoted in Extract 6) seemed overwhelmingly inclined to voice critical accounts of their country and – in particular – of their compatriots, and were typically reluctant to be drawn into discussion concerning the 'good things about this country'. The concern on the part of the interviewees to avoid being seen to 'do' national pride was also indicated by footing shifts in their accounts. Speakers usually adopted the role of principal of their critical accounts of 'this country' and its folk. Conversely, it was common that when speakers did articulate positive accounts of 'this country', they did so in the role of relayer. In addition, it was quite common for positive accounts of 'this country' to be prefaced with disclaimers, or to be expressed as if apologetically. In the following extract, for example, the speaker seeks permission to voice an account in which 'this country' is favourably compared to others:

Extract 7

R: Well (.) I don't know if I'm allowed to say this (.) [but
I: [It's OK you can say anything you want (.) I don't mind=
R: =OK then (.) speaking in general terms now of course (.) I know that's a stereotype but I do think that it's it's true on the whole y'know the j- the justice system and all that [heh heh] and I I like that our police don't have guns (1) not like in America where they shoot people at the drop of a hat [heh heh heh] °this is what I think° and=
I: =Yea (.) °that's [fine°
R: = [well (.) what else (.) oh y'know (.) politeness and saying please and queues and and not all that shouting and pushing you get on the Continent (.) places an (.) I (.) I suppose that you could say that I'm a closet nationalist [heh heh heh] >°if you'll forgive me for saying that°< ((laughter))

In this case we may note how the speaker attends to potential charges of prejudiced irrationality: he prefaces his positive account of the British judicial system and policing methods with a knowledge credential (Hewitt and Stokes, 1975): 'speaking in general terms now', 'I know that's a stereotype'. However, it is also clear that the respondent is orienting to the possibility that his positive account of 'this country' be treated as normatively accountable more generally. Not only is his response prefaced by a statement in which he signals that he might not be 'allowed to say this', but the force of his utterance is mitigated by periodic bursts of laughter. His gist formulation, 'I suppose that you could say that I'm a *closet nationalist*' clearly points to a recognition of a cultural opprobrium against nationalist sentiment, which is underscored by his final, jocular, request for 'forgiveness'.

Although this is a rather extreme example, it is generally illustrative of the way in which a majority of speakers apparently found it interactionally difficult to formulate positive representations of 'this country' in the interview context. Even amongst those respondents who generally evidenced patriotic sentiments, there was a distinct tendency to orient to the possibility that their words might be interpreted as non-innocuous.

Extract 8

I'm not 'there'll always be an England' or that junk °that rubbish° not at all that way if you understand me (2) bu::t (1) <to my mind> (2) to my mind (1) this is the (.) <best place in the world to live> (1) not not that I know (.) it's and I I suppose a- um French or °what have you (.) whatever° would say the same (.) it's what you know really (1) at the end of the day (.) it's (.) what you know (1) and well (1) I have had a-seen a lot of the world >one way and another< in the Navy and such (.) and (.) I've been to all sorts and it just left me thinking well (1) that's all very well (.) but England's (.) well (1) let's say the place to be (1) the place I want to be anyway (1) for me there's nowhere to touch it but that(.) that's just my view really

This speaker (a retired farmer from the south of England) articulated the clearest and most consistently nationalist sentiments of all of the sampled respondents. Later in the interview he expressed anti-immigration views, hostile attitudes to 'so-called refugees', and told a story about friends of his son being attacked by 'armed gangs of Asians'. These parts of his account were characterized by the kinds of rhetorical features which have often been documented in analyses of racist discourse. What is interesting to note, however, is that these same sorts of features (such as disclaimers, hesitations, assertions of category entitlement and so forth) were also present when he was talking simply of his liking for England, a quarter of an hour before the conversation turned (via a discussion of farming practices, London, holidays and the government) to issues pertaining to race and ethnicity.

'This country' as the instantiation of intolerance Up to this point I have attempted to illustrate some of the ways in which respondents routinely oriented to accounts of 'this country' in general (and evaluatively positive accounts in particular) as normatively accountable. This raises two questions. The first concerns the observation that attempts to disclaim national categorical accounting seemed to be occasioned largely by talk about the respondent's own country. One might expect that any cultural opprobrium against categorical accounting would apply equally to situations in which 'other' countries were the topic of conversation. Second is the question of why respondents' attention to issues of stake was manifested almost exclusively in attempts to disclaim or warrant expressions of national 'pride'. In the context of discourse concerning collective identities, issues of stake may be seen to be potentially two-sided. A representation of stake as (irrational) interest (Edwards and Potter, 1992) may be pitted against a notion of stake as normatively-acceptable ingroup 'loyalty' (cf. Tajfel, 1978). It is not clear, then, why the respondents in this study seemed to be attending only to a normative requirement opposing displays of national chauvinism, and not to a perceived requirement to demonstrate a sense of patriotic loyalty.

Part of the answer to these questions may be found by attending to the respondents' shared understandings of what 'this country' is and, by extension, what it means to be an Anglo-British national. It is clear that, for many of the respondents, 'this country' was regarded as a privileged, powerful actor on the international stage. In such cases, expressions of national chauvinism (or even the discursive mobilization of national accounting) might be seen as an exercise in 'lording it'

over other less 'fortunate' nations (see, for example, Extracts 1 and 2). The manner in which popular clichés of nationalist sentiment were presented also suggested that respondents often interpreted these as a defence of political or economic superiority (or a belief in the justification of that superiority) over other countries.

More generally, there was a tendency to represent 'this country' as (often distinctively) characterized by hostile expansionism, ethnocentrism and xenophobia. There were two ways in which this representation was commonly formulated. The first involved a notion of 'this country' as a distinctively racist *state*. For many of the respondents, the era of nineteenth-century imperialism and colonial expansionism was treated as the defining moment of Anglo-British national history. More generally, respondents often referred to ways in which 'this country' might be formulated politically in terms of racist notions of ethnic superiority and militaristic expansionist policies. In this sort of context, patriotic national 'pride' could be interpreted as a defence of imperialism and racism:

Extract 9

I: So can you say a bit more about how you (.) see this country?
(2)
R: Erm (2) I don't know (1) I'm I s'pose a bit ashamed to be English
I: You're ashamed to be English?
R: Well (.) England's er got a lot wrong with it (.) a lot to answer for really >the English aristocracy did a lot of harm to other nations °which I'm not very pleased about°< (. . .)
I: Can you say a bit more about that?
R: Erm (.) it's colonization really (1) erm (3) and slavery (3) erm going into lands and saying they weren't people when they were totally ignoring other people's cultures (3) racism (.) and (2) So I don't like to be kind of connected to that view

A second type of formulation drew attention to nationalism and xenophobia as primordial characteristics of the Anglo-British *folk*. I have already noted the tendency for speakers to posit their own (comparatively 'reasonable') accounts in distinction to the sorts of jingoistic clichés which they presented as typical of their compatriots. More generally, speakers were concerned to distance themselves from the chronic insularity, ethnocentrism and concern for national distinctions which they regarded as 'typically British':

Extract 10

[. . .] I mean like my dad is very British (.) an' he::'s (2) very that way he's for the monarchy (.) he's (.) he hates foreigners he'll only eat British food and things like this (.) but uh (.) I'll try anything I'll (2) I like travelling (.) an' I don't feel really British

Extract 11

Well (.) OK (.) I'm not myself the sort of person who really thinks y'know oh I'm British (.) who thinks about it that much y'know but (.) I don't think I'm necessarily typically British in that respect (.) but (.) but I think that in general (1) in general (.) well this is a country that is (.) y'know perhaps not what it was in terms of industry and that it's sort of reached its sell-by date [heh heh]

It is interesting to note that these sorts of representations were commonly used in conjunction with a construction of the nation as relatively economically and politically weak. In view of the 'fact' that 'this country . . . is not what it was', contemporary expressions of national pride take on the complexion of irrational bigotry.

These observations are consistent with some recent survey data which points to the existence of a popular belief that the agents of the British state and members of the general population are inclined towards racial prejudice (Young, 1992). In the light of these widespread representations of the nation and the folk as essentially characterized by extreme forms of hostile nationalism, ethnocentrism and xenophobia, it is understandable that, in the course of presenting themselves as both rational and tolerant, speakers found it necessary to implicitly or explicitly distinguish their own voice from that of their compatriots (cf. Van Dijk, 1995).

The prejudiced nature of attributions of national intolerance: an interactional dilemma

On those relatively rare occasions on which respondents were prepared to voice generalizations about their compatriots, the most usual (and least often qualified) claim was that people in 'this country' display an unusual degree of nationalist prejudice or xenophobia. These accounts were virtually never presented in the role of relayer. When speakers did externalize a claim concerning the essentially-bigoted nature of the British folk (or, relatedly, when they attempted to warrant this claim with reference to consensus of opinion, cf. Edwards and Potter, 1992) the 'others' to whom this knowledge was attributed were almost always foreigners. In general, then, accounts of 'typical' British ethnocentrism were treated as a rare form of common knowledge (cf. Edwards, 1997): one to which the speaker (and often by implication the interviewer) was privy, but to which the majority of 'typically British' people remained in unreflective ignorance.

We may speculate on how the very voicing of the stereotype of the bigoted British may serve local interactional functions for the speakers: by presenting racism and an imperialist mentality as a feature that they recognize in 'the British', they implicitly disclaim this as being characteristic of their own thought (see Condor, 1990 for an account of how the articulation of particular stereotypes may serve as a mechanism for identity-display). On the other hand, as we have already seen, the voicing of any national stereotype may potentially threaten the identity of the speaker as rationally-unprejudiced, in so far as it is itself potentially hearable as an unwarranted categorical generalization (and, as such, 'typically British'). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the use of the stereotype of the nationalist, xenophobic British occasionally involved the speaker in an explicit confrontation with the dilemma of categorization (see Billig et al., 1988):

Extract 12

I: Oh (.) well that all (.) that all sounds quite <u>negative</u> (.) is there anything you like about this country?

(3)
R: I think that (.) I like some of the places they're really beautiful and I'm sure like lots of the people (.) are really (.) nice (1) and have good ideas and I don't think that everybody's y'know (.) horrible and (.) land of hope and glory (.) it's not I'm like the only one who thinks we should [heh] share I mean I don't mean that (2) bu::t (4) I dunno (.) people seem to be (1) well (.) in my experience (1) people seem to be (.) extremely (1) y'know nationalistic don't share anything and keep it all for us and (.) we're the best (.) like we have to look after ourselves

This extract starts with the interviewer's (re)formulation of the interviewee's prior talk about levels of unemployment and racism 'here', as being 'quite negative' and as having been 'about this country' (although the interviewee's preceding account had not specified that 'here' should be interpreted in specifically national terms). The interviewee responds by mentioning her appreciation of 'some of the places',[7] and then goes on to qualify her earlier negative categorical account, 'I'm sure . . . *lots* of the people are really nice'. In an attempt to repair her earlier generalization, she provides a qualified account: 'I don't think that *everybody's* . . . land of hope and glory'. However, she then goes on to re-assert a negative categorical representation of 'the people' as the final upshot of her argument, this time presenting it as the outcome of first-hand 'experience'. This move not only allows her to represent her categorical evaluation of the-people-as-selfish-nationalists as rational and empirically-grounded, but also affords her the opportunity to soften the account by presenting it as a statement of perspective rather than a factual claim ('people *seem to be*').

Concluding remarks

In this article I have attempted to draw attention to the ways in which a sample of English respondents treated talk about 'their country' as a delicate topic in an interview setting. In general, it seemed that respondents were hesitant about articulating positive accounts of their country which they oriented to as potentially hearable as chauvinistic prejudice. More generally, it seemed that respondents were concerned that to be heard to talk about 'this country' at all, or to adopt an explicitly national footing, might leave them open to the charge of 'typical' Anglo-British nationalism, with its connotations of expansionism, jingoism, separatism, and xenophobia. Far from mobilizing 'innocent' national categories to mask or neutralize potentially accountable racist sentiments (cf. Barker, 1981; Reeves, 1983), these respondents seemed inclined to treat talk-about-this-country as essentially prejudiced, and (often) as tantamount to racism.

It is interesting to compare these observations with the way in which Anglo-British national sensibilities are usually portrayed within the social sciences. Typically, it seems that authors share our respondents' stereotypes of their compatriots as given to extreme, unwarranted and unreflexive expressions of xenophobic nationalism. Although empirical analyses of national discourse have tended to concentrate on unpacking the tacit racism present in formal political

rhetoric, authors also tend to assume that everyday discourse is likely to be less guarded, and that more florid examples of ethnocentric nationalism would be found 'voiced in the bus queue and the workplace' (Miles, 1993: 73). Given the supposedly unreflexive nature of commonsense national discourse, it is usually seen to be the task of the social scientist to draw attention to the pervasive and often tacit racist assumptions which, in Britain in general and in England in particular, are typically co-articulated with those of nation (e.g. Gilroy, 1987, 1993; Miles, 1993; Schwarz, 1996; Solomos, 1993). In contrast, the data presented earlier attest to the fact that, for the Anglo-British, a recognition of national accounting as implicating a form of (often racist) prejudice is available to, and helps to structure, commonsense discourse about 'this country'. This is not, of course, to argue that the respondents in this study did not, themselves, formulate accounts with racist or nationalist gists (cf. Van Dijk, 1984). However, the ways in which they typically went about expressing these opinions indicates a widespread awareness of the possibility that they might be held accountable for these sentiments.

By way of conclusion, it is worth briefly considering two issues. The first concerns the question of generalizability, and the second the issue of interpretation.

National accounting = prejudice: a universal or context-specific form of representation?
Notwithstanding the reliability of these observations within this specific corpus of data and the reasonably representative nature of the sample used, it would be premature to generalize these conclusions too widely. It would be foolish to deny the possible significance of the interview situation (in which the whole discussion was framed as an exercise in determining an individual's 'social attitudes') in affording these sorts of accounts. Moreover, it is notable that most of the illustrative extracts presented here (chosen largely for their clarity) pertain to instances which we might characterize (to borrow a formulation from Potter and Litton, 1985), as talk-about-this-country 'in theory' rather than 'in practice'. It is quite possible that, in different rhetorical contexts, such as arguments about, for example, immigration (Barker, 1981), or the Royal family (Billig, 1992) these same speakers would adopt explicitly national footings, articulate patriotic sentiments or refer to national (ethnic) difference. It is, however, worth noting that the tendency of the respondents in the present study to treat talk about their country as hearable as 'typical' Anglo-British xenophobia is remarkably similar to the findings of some other research with English respondents using rather different forms of data (Condor, 1996).

A second important consideration pertains to the possible cultural specificity of the phenomenon reported in this article. Throughout this account I have been characterizing the speakers specifically as English or Anglo-British, in order to signal the fact that I do not necessarily assume that similar behaviour would be found amongst other UK nationals.[8] There certainly seem to be some empirical grounds for suspecting that the national accounting = prejudice formulation, which appeared to structure the accounts of the participants in this study, may

not represent a universal feature of contemporary national discourse. It does not appear to feature strongly in Windisch's (1990) study of national accounting in Switzerland (in which respondents seemed prepared to articulate patriotic sentiments without qualification or explanation) nor in Bozatzis's (1997, 1999) data, which showed Greek people attempting to balance prejudice denials with openly patriotic assertions. It also differs from Wetherell and Potter's (1992) description of the ways in which the (white) New Zealanders they interviewed spoke of their nation, and from Hopkins's (e.g. Hopkins and Reicher, 1996) analyses of the national discourses of political activists and MPs in Scotland. Some of these differences might doubtless be accounted for in terms of the different contexts within, and techniques by which the data were collected. Nevertheless, there may be more general reasons why English people should demonstrate an unusual degree of sensitivity in the course of talking about 'their country'.

Somewhat paradoxically, the relative absence of overt, or at least unproblematized, statements of patriotic sentiment or commitment to national identity on the part of the English may reflect the unusual degree to which the existence of the nation and the status of oneself as a national has been ideologically accomplished (Nairn, 1988). Since, for the white English, the existence of England/Britain may be accepted as a natural fact, it becomes possible to orient to the normative requirements of tolerance and individuality, without having also to attend to alternatives. There was no evidence, for example, that the speakers quoted earlier were seriously considering that they might not have a nationality, or that their country might ever cease to exist as an entity.

There are also some more specific historical reasons why the English may have developed a rather particular tendency to treat the topics of nation and national identity as delicate matters. These include local norms of modesty and gentlemanly manners which may generally preclude the open demonstration of pride; the historical construction of (English-dominated) imperial Britain as an ethnically diverse community; and a sense of noblesse oblige or collective guilt associated with imperialism (see Condor, 1996). These sorts of factors may have led to a general wariness in speaking about 'this country' as a relatively enduring cultural habitus.

In addition, it is possible that the behaviour of the respondents in the present study may also reflect more novel social influences, including a dissemination into popular culture of those liberal and anti-racist discourses which developed in response to the overt linking of nationalist and racist assumptions in debates concerning immigration during the 1960s (cf. Barker, 1981; Reeves, 1983). It is certainly worth noting that although notions of national ethnic homogeneity and racial difference continued to be mobilized by British politicians of the New Right during the 1980s, this was typically effected in a fairly covert way (Layton-Henry, 1992). Moreover, academic analyses which focus on unpacking the racist assumptions within, for example, Mrs Thatcher's evocations of British national character (Barker, 1981; Chambers, 1989; Parekh, 1994) have tended to overlook the fact that the British public would have encountered these accounts in the

context of an ongoing political and media debate, in which these forms of representation would have been questioned, critically responded to, or at least treated as potentially contestable. By focusing only on one side of a cultural debate, radical academics may have inadvertently underestimated the extent of popular awareness of the potential accountability of this form of discourse.

The interpretation of banal national referents At various stages I have pointed to the fact that, whilst respondents might strategically avoid or disclaim national accounting and identity, their talk was nevertheless still infused with banal national referents such as 'here' and 'we', which in the context in which they were uttered would appear to reflect the adoption of a taken-for-granted national frame (Billig, 1995). The question then arises as to what we, as analysts, should make of this. Within the current discourse analytic literature authors deal with situations in which respondents orient toward norms of egalitarianism or tolerance (for example, opposing categorical accounting) whilst at the same time using racist or nationalist formulations in a number of ways. For some authors (e.g. Van Dijk, 1984) an empirical solution is offered, involving attention to the structural relationship between specific utterances and the gist or upshot of the speaker's argument as a whole. Whilst this approach has much to recommend it, it does tend to focus attention on differences between the (racial) attitudes expressed by different speakers, somewhat at the expense of considering the shared features of accounts. Although the question of individual differences is certainly important (cf. Verkuyten et al., 1994a) it is equally important to consider *which particular* topics of discourse are generally oriented to as potential matters of 'prejudice'. If we simply take it for granted, for example, that 'race' constitutes a delicate topic, we may fail to appreciate the information this observation provides about cultural beliefs (why, when, where and how has 'race', in particular, come to be generally regarded as a normatively accountable topic?). This is especially important for the subject of the current article since, as I outlined in the Introduction, it is often suggested that social actors do not generally treat national categories as normatively accountable.

Discourse analysts who focus on widely-shared interpretative repertoires typically adopt an in-principle stance on the question of variability within accounts. For Wetherell and Potter (1992), for example, it appears that the interpretative repertoires deployed by their respondents (whether egalitarian or discriminatory) were automatically granted the status of 'racist discourse'. The authors claim at the outset that the basis for attributing the label of 'racism' to discourse should be determined by attention not to the apparent intentions of the individual speakers, but to the distal functions of the talk in contributing to racist ideologies and practices. However, at no stage do they explain how this task might be accomplished, and their own analytic focus is in fact confined to the content of talk, with the authors implying that the essential difference between 'racist' and 'anti-racist' discourse is one of content rather than function (see for example Verkuyten et al., 1994b: 219). In particular, when presenting their data, Wetherell and Potter's

application of the label 'racist discourse' to the instances in which a speaker apparently expresses sympathetic or egalitarian sentiments towards Maoris often appears to be based solely on their construction of their respondents as 'white (Pakeha) New Zealanders' and heirs to British colonial culture. The implication is that these people's talk, however well intentioned, could not but contribute to racist social practices. Were we to apply this sort of perspective to the present data, this strategy might lead us to emphasize the existence of the banal national referents (which, we could argue, derive from, and reinforce, an ideology of nationalism) in the talk of these white English respondents. Conversely, we would treat instances in which nation talk is avoided or disclaimed as examples of strategic impression management which do not derive from, or contribute to, the perpetuation of commonsense beliefs about nations.

One problem with Wetherell and Potter's account is that it fails to clarify how racist social practices might be effectively challenged. The authors do not assume that change is impossible: on the contrary, they clearly adopt an anti-racist agenda. However, given their assumptions concerning the necessarily (often ironically) racist effects of Pakeha discourse, it appears that effective challenges can only emerge from discourses deriving from outside 'New Zealand culture'. The authors effectively avoid confronting this issue by failing to consider whether 'New Zealand culture' can legitimately be regarded as a closed system, and by deferring the question of who or what can be seen to inhabit a space 'outside' (are Maoris members of 'New Zealand culture'; are the authors themselves 'inside' or 'outside'?). Paradoxically, then, Wetherell and Potter's account also relies, by implication, on a form of individual differences accounting. The implicit message is that the interpretative repertoires available to some people may function only to reinforce entrenched systems of social inequality, whereas other (different) people who have access to essentially 'different' ideological and discursive resources are in a position to reinforce anti-racist ideologies.

In contrast, the 'ideological dilemmas' perspective (Billig et al., 1988) adopts an in-principle position to the effect that the co-existence of themes within accounts should be read as evidence for the existence of a fundamental dilemma existing within commonsense ideologies. With respect to the present data, the adoption of this sort of perspective would lead us to interpret the co-presence of denials of nationalist sentiment with banal national referents as evidence of a real and deep-rooted cultural contradiction. Specifically, this would orient us to the possibility that ordinary English people may (perhaps in a limited set of circumstances) be genuinely motivated to think and act in non-national terms, even if their ability to do so may be ultimately limited by a discursive straight-jacket of banal nationalist accounting. The implication would be that whereas banal or overt national accounting reinforces the moral order of nations, the routine avoidance or denial of this form of accounting similarly keeps alive the possibility of non- or anti-national forms of thought and practice. Somewhat ironically, this would represent a slight departure from the banal nationalism thesis as originally presented by Billig (1995), since it would bring into question whether national

frames of reference do, in fact, constitute an uncontestable commonplace for contemporary social actors.

An ideological dilemmas perspective would seem preferable to the sort of strategy adopted by Wetherell and Potter in so far as it allows for some measure of social scientific reflexivity. Without an appreciation of the fact that people may, on some level, accept the anti-nationalist sentiments which they express, or to which they strategically orient, we are easily left with an assumption that it is *only* academic social scientists who routinely reflect upon (and maybe critically evaluate) the discursive deployment of national categories. Certainly, social scientific texts typically present the author's concerns over the essentially malevolent nature (including specifically racist implications) of Anglo-British nationalism as a personal insight, shared only by the author and his or her putative readers. For example, in an introduction to their survey of British national attitudes, Dowds and Young (1996: 143) state that, 'it is difficult now, in mainland Britain, to speak approvingly of nationalism, as the term has come to be associated with xenophobia and bigotry'. However, two sentences later it becomes apparent that this statement only pertains to the authors and their readers, since 'in popular discourse, nationalism is rarely seen as something shameful'. We may note that this is precisely the rhetorical move made by many of the English respondents in establishing the unique rationality of their own social vision in contrast to the endemic and unreflexive jingoism of their 'typical' compatriots.

Up to this point, the discussion has focused on the question of whether the presence of banal national referents should be treated as a more valid, or more valuable, source of information concerning commonsense than evidence of the denial or avoidance of nationalist discourse. However, it is also worth questioning the interpretation of banal national referents themselves. Throughout this article, I have been following Billig (1995) in treating many references to 'here', 'us', 'this country', and so forth as national referents (given the context in which they were articulated). I have also made the point that such referents may avoid the moral opprobrium attached to more explicit talk about nations or claims to national identity. However, if we reconsider the data, it is equally plausible to suggest that this may have been, in some cases, a reading imposed by the interviewer/researcher rather than a valid reflection of the original understandings of the speakers. For example, the responses of the speakers quoted in Extracts 1, 2 and 4 to the gist formulation of the interviewer need not necessarily be read as a reaction to the failure of their strategic attempt at topic-avoidance. It could equally well reflect the fact that the speakers had not originally understood their own words ('what you find in this country' (Extract 1), 'people here; life here' (Extract 2) or 'it's not what you get here' (Extract 4)) as referring to the type of exclusive, (or technical) national referent which the interviewer (and author) subsequently mobilized to interpret them.

Moreover, taking the data set as a whole, it often appeared that speakers were even using terms such as 'nation' and 'Britain' quite loosely, as a shorthand way of referring to abstract collectivities whose boundaries were not, strictly speaking,

national ones. It is worth noting that Billig's original account of national deixis drew upon an analysis of national newspapers, whose journalists are explicitly engaged in the task of speaking to, of and for 'the nation'. In the case of everyday talk, it may not be so easy to assume that passing references to 'here', or even 'this country' are necessarily invoking what we, as social scientists, might regard as an exclusively national referent.

It may be that, amongst the Anglo-British in particular, the construct of 'nation' is rather loosely used and imperfectly understood. Part of this confusion may be traced to the unusual constitution of Britain as a multi-national state (see Condor, 1996). People living in England are confronted with an immensely complex set of discourses concerning 'national' territory, statehood and citizenship. As Heath and Kellas (1998: 110) have recently commented, 'There are many nationalisms in contemporary British society'.

The 'British Isles' includes the independent Republic of Ireland. The adjective 'British' can properly be applied to both Great Britain and the UK, although the noun 'Britain' excludes both Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. The British Channel Islands and the Isle of Man are Crown Fiefdoms, part of the British Isles, but not part of Great Britain nor of the UK. The British Head of State is also head of the Commonwealth (a voluntary association of independent States), of which Hong Kong (which was previously a British colony) was never a member although Mozambique (which was formally a Portuguese colony) is. There are currently thirteen British Dependent Territories (including Gibraltar and Bermuda) which are not independent members of the Commonwealth. Similarly complex sets of discourses currently surround the construct of British nationhood in terms of 'citizenship'. Two British territories (South Georgia and the British Antarctic Territory) are technically uninhabited. Under the 1981 British Nationality Act there are three main forms of citizenship: British Citizenship, British Dependent Territories citizenship and British Overseas citizenship. All of these have different rules of acquisition, and have different implications for rights of residency.

Such complexities of formal terminology and constitutional law are not well understood by the majority of the British public. Nevertheless, English people daily encounter discourses which refer, often obliquely, to aspects of this highly complex account of territory, statehood and citizenship. It would hardly be surprising if, for people whose 'national' media draws attention to the existence of compatriots in the Falkland Islands and Montserrat, and whose head of state ('our Queen') is shared with Canada, Australia, Papua New Guinea and Jamaica, the terms 'the nation', 'the country', 'we' and 'here' were used rather loosely.

None of this is intended as a criticism of the general thesis of banal nationalism. However, it does point to some interesting questions concerning the potentially ambiguous character of (what may come to function as) banal national referents and symbolism. Just as the *banality* (or otherwise) of national referents and symbols may be seen as a social accomplishment, so too may the *national* reference of these symbols be seen, not as a prior fact, but as the outcome of a

socially distributed process of meaning-construction. Future research might do well to consider some of the processes by which non-specific referents to forms of collective identity (which, amongst the Anglo-British at least may even include references to 'this country') can come to be reformulated and function (in both local and distal arenas) as references to nation states as formal political entities.

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Appendix: transcription conventions

The transcription notation is adapted from Jefferson's system, as outlined in Atkinson and Heritage (1984).

Intervals within or between utterances

(2)	Pause measured to the nearest second
(.)	Hearable pause of less than one second

Characteristics of speech delivery

under<u>line</u>	Stress on syllable or word
CAPITALS	Material spoken louder than surrounding talk
co:lon	Extension of preceding sound or syllable
dash-	Abrupt cut off
°talk°	Material spoken more quietly than surrounding talk
>talk<	Material spoken more quickly than surrounding talk
<talk>	Material spoken more slowly than surrounding talk
'inverted commas'	Intonation of quotation
question mark?	Rising inflection

Overlapping utterances

[one speaker	Overlapping speech between speakers
[another speaker	
Int: Do you=	Contiguous utterances
Resp: =yes I do	

Other transcript symbols

[heh heh]	Chuckling within talk
((laughter))	Extended laughter
(. . .)	Part of turn not included in extract

NOTES

1. Social scientists often treat the discursive deployment of national distinctions as neutral statements of fact. Academic discussions of prejudice typically refer to popular beliefs about ethnic or gender distinctions, but rarely include within their remit beliefs about national categories. Billig's own work (e.g. 1991) in which he interprets the discursive deployment of national categories as an exemplary case of prejudice is somewhat exceptional in this regard.

2. The assumption that liberal values are not, themselves, culturally specific is common within North American and European social science, often revealing an unwitting ethnocentrism on the part of the authors (Condor, 1997b).
3. Moreover, contemporary pressures towards supra-national (e.g. global or European) identities may put into question the legitimacy or taken-for-granted nature of even the more banal forms of national accounting (e.g. Featherstone, 1990, cf. Billig, 1995).
4. There are, of course, general differences between speech and written texts, and between élite and everyday discourse (Van Dijk, 1993). It is likely that these differences will be magnified in the case of national discourse (Reicher et al., 1997).
5. This was done in order to enable an analysis of the extent and ways in which respondents spontaneously used the categories 'Britain' and 'England' to their talk (Condor, 1996), an issue which preliminary analysis suggested does not particularly impact upon the present topic of concern.
6. Social psychologists might explain this in terms of a general cognitive process whereby people are more disposed to present categorical accounts of outgroups than ingroups (see Oakes et al., 1994; Park, Judd and Ryan, 1991). Whilst I am happy to accept this as a partial explanation, I would also argue that there may be normative constraints which prevented English respondents from 'doing' talk about 'this country'.
7. Although space restrictions preclude a thorough discussion, it is worth noting that concerns for accountability tended to be most in evidence in those cases when 'this country' was construed as a human community or social category. It was much less apparent when 'this country' was treated as a reference to a geographical location.
8. Of course, the category 'English' may, in turn, be overly broad. There is certainly good evidence that English children display nationalistic pride. Moreover, although the general phenomenon considered in this article (the treatment of national accounting as a 'delicate' topic) was generally evidenced within the sample, it is likely that adults from different regions or social classes may orient differently to questions of national identity in a number of other ways.

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