

IMMIGRATION, RACE AND NATION IN BRITAIN: THE POLITICS OF BELONGING ON TWITTER

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BRITISH VIEWS ON IMMIGRATION



- Long standing antipathy to immigration (Blinders and Richards 2018), and since 2000s, political and media debates focused on European migration to UK (Dennison and Geddes 2018).
- Political saliency of immigration, e.g. in Brexit vote.
- Concern over economic strain on welfare & negative impact of non-British values on shared customs and way of life.
- Immigration has stirred up ideological questions about 'British' identity



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Who defines the symbolic boundaries of the nation?
 - Who is included?
 - Who is excluded?
 - How are these definitions contested?
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- Yuval-Davis (2011) – significance of politics of belonging across the globe.
 - Existing research focuses on elites (political actors & mainstream media).
 - Do not know whether elite discourses on the symbolic boundaries of the nation are simply absorbed/accepted or contested by ‘ordinary’ people.



METHODOLOGY

Murthy (2012) on Twitter:

- Micro-blogging platforms represent a ‘demotic turn’
- Twitter can capture people’s unsolicited articulations of the nation
- Tweets offer ‘posed view of the backstage: [where] we see what people want us to/let us see’.

Mixed methods approach to analysing Twitter data.



DATA

Initial sample:

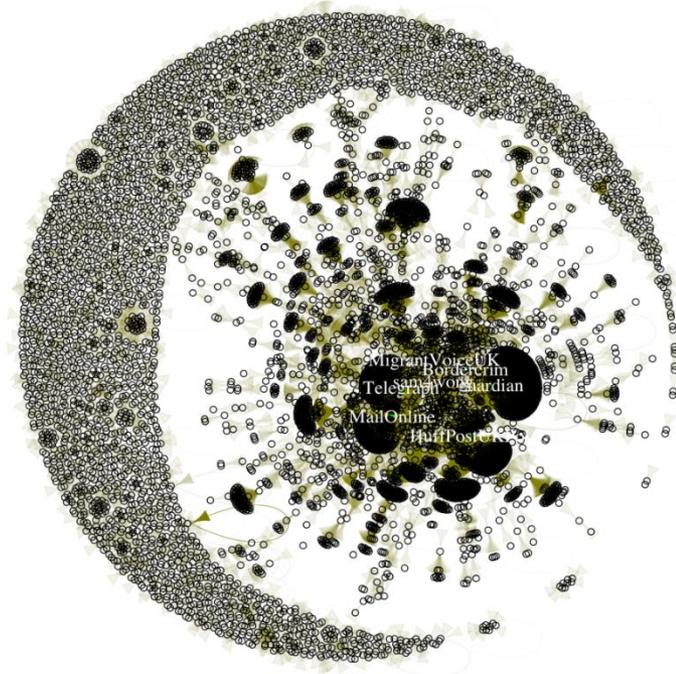
- Purchased all public status updates on Twitter created between October 1, 2013 and March 1, 2014 containing the key words "immigration," "immigrant," "migration", or "migrant" = 2 million tweets
- 1st selection of tweets to match Bulgaria/Bulgarian, Romania/Romanian, England, UK, or Britain = 136,960 Tweets.



METHODOLOGY STEP1: INITIAL QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Quantitative analysis identifies 'ordinary' users with low digital capital (with low network influence, measured in terms of reach and scale) resulting from their online behaviour in an online field.

Whole Retweet Network



METHODOLOGY — 2ND STAGE - QUALITATIVE

- CDA on 5% random sample of tweets from ‘ordinary’ users in each month
 - ordinary users as defined by tweets that are not re-tweeted (134,019 tweets).
 - Sample split by month.
 - Focused on both pro- and anti-immigration tweets.



KEY ANALYTICAL CONCEPTS

Hage (1998)

- National cultural capital:

‘the sum of accumulated nationally sanctioned and valued social & physical cultural styles and dispositions (national culture) adopted by individuals & groups, as well as valued characteristics (national type and national character) within a national field’.

- Hierarchy of belonging:

- Governmental belonging

- Passive belonging

Anderson (2013)

- Community of value:

- Embodies values & behaviours rooted in liberal ideas about individual, autonomy, freedom, belonging and property.

- Expressed through ethnicity, religion, culture or language



ANTI-IMMIGRANT DISCOURSES – SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF IMMIGRANTS

Immigrants have no rights to social resources:
Unemployed European Immigrants in Britain Cost £1.5 Billion to the NHS Alone.

EU is forcing its low life immigrants to come to UK this is a blatant attempt to destroy our country...

Immigrants compete with British working class/the young for jobs:

It is a BIG LIE that Britain needs mass immigration. We can easily train-up indigenous Brits



MORAL PANICS OVER NATIONAL SPACE INVADERS

- In December 2013 tweets, the word 'immigrant' is frequently preceded by:
 - 'uncontrolled',
 - 'wave of',
 - 'influx of',
 - 'flood of',
 - 'unfettered'
 - 'uncapped'.

Fox et al (2012) found similar discourses around the 'numbers game'.

Hage (1998) – concern about managing national space.



MORAL PANICS OVER NATIONAL SPACE INVADERS

‘Broken Britain’:

‘What’s to laugh at Peter, Uk is going under by immigration, THAT’S THE TRUTH’

‘Labours mass immigration has put chronic pressure on housing, schools & welfare & created huge resentment across Britain.’

Romanian & Bulgarian immigrants only been allowed in the UK since January and half the country is already sinking



PROTECTING THE NATION FROM CULTURAL 'OTHERS'

Immigrants are uncivilised:

Welcome to Britain immigration service style. In the UK we queue & in case you don't know what that is we will give you a lesson on arrival

Immigrants are criminals:

how many immigrants have convictions? we don't know. Exactly that's the problem letting anyone in with no checks on criminals

'immigrants and gypos bog off we don't want you here your scum thieves murders rapist'



PROTECTING THE NATION FROM CULTURAL 'OTHERS'

- **Curry houses are full of illegal immigrants with terrorism DVDs...send the fuckers back home**
- **Nothing wrong with immigration. Some Asians make UK better country. Non integrated BRITISH islamik Nazis are the problem**



EROSION OF LOCAL (WHITE) COMMUNITIES & CULTURES

Britain was made up of white Brits before mass immigration and were the indigenous of the land

Flooding of England with 3rd world is not immigration but ethnic cleansing

Applaud Britain for accepting immigrants, they weaken your country, your heritage, your culture



PRO-IMMIGRANTS/IMMIGRATION DISCOURSES - NEOLIBERAL VIEWS ON EARNED CITIZENSHIP

Contributions/benefits of immigration:

‘So the UK made £7billion from immigrants than it pays out on benefits etc. for these immigrants. Wonder where UKIP stands on that?’

‘Immigrants are not appreciated enough in their role in NHS and health & social care in UK.’

‘But so far, immigration to the UK has boosted our economy and culture.’



CHALLENGING RACIAL EXCLUSION & DIFFERENTIAL RACIALIZATION

Impact of immigration reform Bill:

‘Uk #immigration bill will harm communities and marginalise refugees and asylum-seekers.’

Immigration bill will introduce pass laws to UK.

Blurring/slippages in migrant categories:

‘Very sad those against Syrian refugees coming to UK can’t tell difference between ‘migrant’ and ‘refugee’.

Differential racialization:

I am an immigrant. Most UK folks don’t see me as such, because I’m white, educated, fluent in English. Double standards.

Met a Brit who lives in Spain for 20 years but hardly spoke any Spanish; complaining about immigrants in UK.



LINKING NATIONAL CLASS RELATIONS TO IMMIGRATION DEBATE

The neoliberal economic & political project::

Tories: No human rights, no NHS, no welfare state, no trained teachers, no immigrants. Just posh boys, housing bubbles and hedge funds.

The vindictive uneducated comments on welfare, immigration or just sharing wealth shows how the Tories have made a divisive Britain.

Britain's long immigration & colonial history:

'when you remember countries we ransacked in the not distant past; its outrageous to moan about immigration.'

Farage's ancestors were Huguenots. A bunch of 'bloody immigrants' harping about human rights.



CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Overall a greater prevalence of anti-immigrant tweets;
- ❖ The anti-immigrant narratives are much more cohesive and create a heightened, *affective* exclusive national imaginary based on race.

- ❖ Pro-immigration narratives construct a cosmopolitan understanding of the nation.
- ❖ But too diverse and dispassionate to construct a cohesive discourse that can challenge dominance of exclusive nationalism and promote an inclusive idea of Britishness.

