

England's Green and Pleasant Lands? Categorising migrants and protecting idylls through respectibilisation

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"Uneven processes of rural change"

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England's Green and Pleasant Lands? Categorising migrants and protecting idylls through re- spectibilisation

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Abstract – Using discourse analysis on interviews conducted with host residents from a small rural town in the south of England, the aim of this paper is to explore the way residents categorise migrants in terms of their suitability and attainability of representing the town's 'rural idyll'. Analysis shows how the categorisation of migrants was contingent on their social position/standing, in which those who conformed to middle-class occupations (i.e. being a 'Doctor') were more readily accepted than those with working-class employment. This paper demonstrates how categories of migrants were used to restrict or enable belonging to the wider rural community in order to protect the 'rural idyll' of the town.

Introduction

Recently there has been a significant increase in both public and scholarly circles around the categorisation of migrants. The distanciation of time-space (Giddens, 1984) brought about by globalisation has meant that people from specific geographies are becoming disembedded from their local contexts and are moving across wide time-space distances (see also, Massey, 1994). The response by the British government has been to construct categories in order to distinguish between the differing types of migrants coming in and out of the country, facilitating the production of exclusive and exclusionary boundaries of belonging (Sibley 1997).

Contemporary research (e.g. Kirkwood *et al*, 2016) examining the categorisation of migrants has predominately focused its attention on the national context of the debate without acknowledging the experiences of migrants and the use of categories to designate belonging at the local level. Specifically, analyses of the categorisation of rural migrants is something that has been largely overlooked in the literature, mainly because of the marginalised position rural research holds within the broader social sciences.

What this paper aims to do, therefore, is to explore the ways in which rural migrants' sense of belonging are contingent on the categories given to them by members of the host community within a small rural town in the south of England. Borrowing

heavily from David Garland's (2001) concept of re-sponsibilisation and the wider informal social control literature, this paper will demonstrate how categories derived from a process I call *Respectibilisation*. Respectibilisation is the process whereby migrants are given belonging and legitimacy to the rural community through conformity with and an obligation to adhere to the existing middle-class affluent structures of the community. While the concepts of legitimacy and respectibilisation share some similarities, there is also a key difference. Whereas legitimacy refers to the migrants' abilities to conform to the rules and norms of the wider community, respectibilisation is the structured process between migrants' abilities to conform and the host community's attempt to structure, define and produce what those norms are and the boundaries around which migrants can be included. Specifically, respectibilisation is about the construction of middle-class customs and values as to not only depict a rural idyll based on a shared affluent identity but also to exclude/include and categorise migrants, depending on their ability to conform.

The article will conclude that through this process of respectibilisation, the rural community became a space of governance in which norms and community structures were both internalised by those residents who have a shared psychological and emotional investment and externalised towards migrant who are able to buy into the middle-class, affluent values of the community to protect the idyllicisation of the area.

Methods

A discourse analysis (Jorgenson & Philips, 2002) was conducted on semi-structured interviews with residents of a host rural community in the south of England. Line-by-line coding of verbatim transcripts was undertaken within a structured framework and the development and reviewing of themes was achieved abductively (Richards & Richards, 1998), whereby themes were generated taking concepts drawn from the literature (identity, community, diversity, belonging, integration, assimilation) and



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patterns that developed out of the data (middle class values, occupation, hierarchy of belonging, respectabilisation).

Analysis & Discussion

One of the central themes taken from the interviews conducted with residents of the host community was the way in which the categorisation of migrants was contingent on the migrants' claims of belonging and assimilation into the wider rural community structure. For instance, the Polish and other Eastern European residents were often identified as 'immigrants' as residents of the host community perceived them to be unable to 'fit into' and conform to the rural identity of the town. This can be seen in the way **P1** talked about Polish residents: -

P1: There is a large percentage of Polish immigrants in the town. They work locally in the factories. This has occurred in the last six to seven years.... And it's not just Polish, it's Polish, Latvians and Czechoslovakians and all the rest of them that moved here. I just don't think they represent the rural identity of (town).

What this extract demonstrates is that the phrase 'immigrant' is being used as an exclusionary device towards migrants that residents of the host community perceive do not conform to the rural identity of the town. However, whilst there were exclusionary rhetorical stances towards Eastern European migrants, the host community seemed to accept professional and generally more affluent 'migrants' as they appeared to be more representational of the conventional middle class, rural norms, values and beliefs of the town. As maintained by **P6**: -

P6: Most people from well-off or professional backgrounds: you, know, people who've got the money, can buy the houses, that sort of thing. They're accepted because they are respected and revered.

What this extract illustrates is that boundaries of acceptance are not fixed; rather the rhetorical use of categories produces boundaries of belonging which are fluid and open. These vary of course and are contingent on the perceived class status or occupation of the migrant. For instance, doctors were marked as being 'acceptable' migrants, because of their ability to position themselves with the affluent, rural values and norms of the place. This was something that was especially evident in my interview with **P11** as she talked about a local doctor of Ethiopian descent: 'We do have a doctor who is from

Ethiopia; he's dark but very posh. He makes a wonderful contribution to the community: helps out at local events, very approachable, that sort of thing'. Therefore, as long as migrants could position, or align themselves with middle-class, affluent rural identity of the town then they could be accepted or approved of within the community.

Concluding thoughts

This process of assimilation, nevertheless, into middle-class values and customs requires a certain level of 'cultural capital' for newcomers within rural communities, and in fact can only get migrants so far. Ultimately rural communities have specific sets of cultural sensibilities and practical knowledges which determine the extent to which migrants are able fit into the social networks of rural community life (see Tyler 2006). I have demonstrated one particular understanding of the way in which this is achieved. The process of respectabilisation is about the migrants' abilities to conform with and adhere to the affluent middle-class values of the rural community which are, in turn, shaped and bounded by members of the host community as to maintain and protect their rural identity. However, as this short paper has denoted this is not a process of integration, but rather about the structuring capabilities (Giddens, 1984) of residents of the host community towards migrants, leading to the realisation that no matter how much migrants attempt to fit in true insider status is never fully given (Sibley 1997).

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