Research on questions of nationality, belonging and civic engagement in Britain has exploded in recent times as policy makers, academics and media commentators have looked to make sense of an increasingly diverse, and sometimes divided, population. My own research\(^1\) has focused on the attitudes and experiences of what I have labelled the ethnic majority, those who position themselves at the centre of national life and articulate a more secure sense of belonging to the nation \textit{in relation} to ethnic minorities. I want to make two points in my submission. First, to argue that too much of the discussion of this topic tends to focus on minorities and what they should or shouldn’t do to better integrate into British society. Such an approach is deeply problematic for a number of reasons. First, it emphasizes ethnicity, rather than say class, region or gender, when it comes to thinking about integration. It is arguable that the ‘distance’ between working and middle class groups in Britain is a major stumbling block to wider social integration but few, if any, government proposals address this issue, preferring to focus on ethnicity or culture. Second, it generally ends up stigmatizing some of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in British society. Third, it fails to acknowledge the extent to which claims to belonging (I am British, I am part of this community) need to be also recognized by other more dominant members of a given group. In the case of Britain, there are countless examples of ethnic majority members refusing to acknowledge the claims of minorities to belong in this country.

Therefore, in trying to make sense of these debates, it is absolutely imperative that we begin to explore the attitudes and experiences of members of the ethnic majority; where are they situated within these debates, what is at stake for them and why might such issues be of particular significance at the current time? What my research has shown is that many members of the ethnic majority are feeling increasingly anxious and insecure about some of the wider socio-economic transformations they are witnessing and, as a result, believe that their own privileged status within the nation is being undermined. In other words, they feel that they are losing out. Now, we might not like some of the ways in which such anxieties are expressed but simply dismissing them as backward or uncivilized or racist, doesn’t enable us to engage people or offer more effective means for building bridges between different groups.

The second point I want to make concerns the English question, which again often tends to be overlooked when policy makers are discussing Britain and Britishness. Devolution in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland has meant that the situation of the English has also shifted and the possible consequences of this need to be addressed.

Put simply, making a claim to be British is quite different to making a claim to be English. For instance, when it comes to defining belonging \textit{in Britain} the terms of the debate are changing; that is, the distinction between non-whites as the interlopers and whites as the hosts is beginning to unravel. Furthermore, attitudes among both ethnic majority and minority Britons are also shifting. In the former case, there is a general tendency towards greater acceptance of ethnic diversity and a willingness to recognise non-whites as British.\(^{ii}\) In the latter case, there is growing anecdotal evidence that second and third-generation ethnic minorities are increasingly willing to assert their own sense of belonging and entitlement in relation to more recent arrivals.\(^{iii}\) In other words, they increasingly view Britain as ‘their’ country and, as a result, lay claim to the benefits (economic and social) that flow from this. This is borne out by much of the survey evidence which notes that the majority of ethnic minorities are more than willing to identify themselves as British. This is an
interesting development, and indicates the extent to which ‘British’ has become a marker of civic rather than ethnic identity for increasing numbers.

But what about England and Englishness? It is worth noting that in all the discussions of devolution, relatively little has been said of the consequences this might have for minority groups in England. This is because ‘English’ remains a far more exclusionary identity category than ‘British’, and one that is often rejected by ethnic minorities and increasingly embraced by members of the majority as a way of distinguishing themselves (in both senses of the term). In other words, debates on devolution are having a major impact on how ethnic minorities, who have so long struggled to be recognised as belonging to Britain, define themselves and are defined by the majority. This is something that few people have acknowledged even as the signs of a tentative debate around Englishness have emerged over the past few years. It may yet become another fault line in the ongoing and shifting debates around what it means to belong in Britain, and England, in the contemporary era and, as such, should be addressed by policy makers when they are looking to build programmes for improving civic engagement and community cohesion.

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i National Belonging & Everyday Life, Palgrave MacMillan