

Representation of the Other

Elena Genova University of Nottingham

“Britain says: Bulgar off!”: “Otherness” and identity construction in the case of Bulgarians in the UK

The forthcoming removal of labour restrictions for Bulgarian nationals, set for January 1st 2014, has increasingly been portrayed by the British media as the “Apocalypse” in the UK calendar. It has been argued that the country will be flooded by a wave of unskilled labour burdening additionally the already strained British welfare system. While the process of establishing “Strangers” has been widely advocated, the analysis of the political, social and economic implications of the projection of “otherness” in the case of Bulgarians in the UK has received little academic attention. This paper reports on a pilot study conducted as part of a MA dissertation project in 2011 conducted with Bulgarian students enrolled in higher education in the UK. As such, it juxtaposes the projection of otherness as an instrument for identity construction against the current overarching governmental policies and the rhetoric launched in the media. Ultimately, the paper suggests that the shift away from multiculturalism combined with a strong sense of euroscepticism, have shaped an atmosphere where Bulgarians sometimes find themselves subjected to condescending attitude. Moreover, it also offers an insight of how they internalise the image of the “Other”, thus renegotiating the boundaries of their presence in the wider British society.

Jennifer Reynolds University of York

Evil Villains in Modern-day Britain: Traffickers as “Others” in UK National Newspapers

The media’s portrayals of criminals and victims of crime work to socially construct the way in which acts of deviance are understood by society at large. It is through this lens that my research approaches the issue of trafficking in persons. Specifically, I seek to explore the way in which traffickers and trafficked persons are constructed in UK national newspapers. Within the data, it has been found that there is a tendency to “other” the trafficker as a modern day folk devil or evil villain. Further, the trafficker is often portrayed as a foreigner in modern-day Britain whose (inappropriate) values are linked to other (outside) cultural influences. These emerging themes reveal xenophobic and, at times, Islamophobic descriptions, masked within the guise of trafficking discourse. This presentation will outline the evidence from the data and make a case that the trafficker, as presented in UK national newspapers, is a modern-day folk devil. It will conclude, as a result of being an evil “other” within the issue of trafficking in persons and present “everywhere” within society, the portrayals of the trafficker have also fuelled an undercurrent of xenophobic attitudes within the UK.

Kelly Soderstrom University of Edinburgh

“Does Refugee Repatriation Contribute to the Construction of a European Identity? The Othering and Reiterative Effects of the Return Fund Directive”

As European integration proceeds, scholars have become increasingly interested in the definition and development of a European identity. In the context of constructivism and social identity theory, identity is created through definition of an “other,” or contrasting group, and maintenance of norms through performative reiteration of the “other.” This article examines the extent to which refugee repatriation in the context of Decision 575/2007/EC (Return Fund Directive) contributes to the construction of a European identity. The Return Fund Directive, passed by the European Commission in 2007, provides a codified means by which member states can manage and fund voluntary and forced return programs for refugees. Through an analysis of the Return Fund Directive, I examine the “othering” effects on refugees sent home through sponsored programs and how the characteristics of these “others” and the rules regarding their return act as a performative reiteration of core European Union (EU) norms. By effectively identifying the “other” as high-risk and illegal refugees, the EU aligns itself with upholding the rule of law, while simultaneously supporting past human rights agreements. The Return Fund Directive also acts as a reiterative institution that maintains the collaborative, cooperative and Enlightenment values, with which the EU so strongly identifies. If identity creation through “othering” and reiterative maintenance are essential to further integration, then such institutional manifestations of identity construction and maintenance may prove vital to continued European integration.