

# The Contemporary Other Postgraduate Conference

A BSA-Sponsored Regional Postgraduate Event hosted by the University of York Sociology

Monday 15th April 2013, W/222

Key Note Speakers:

Prof. Gurminder K. Bhambra, University of Warwick

Prof. Simon Winlow, Teeside University

This conference aims to bring together Doctoral students from all disciplines who look into the existence and experience of those who feel that they are on the edge of society. This forum is pertinent and timely in a political and social climate wherein there is an expectation for us to believe we are 'all in this together'.

'The Other' has long been an area of academic interest, whether it is criminal, cultural, religious, economic, or political identifications that set people apart from the mainstream. This event will create an arena in which postgraduate students can share their research and seek the input of those from different disciplines, and we hope to display the breadth of research investigating the structural and experiential dimensions of 'otherness'.

This conference has been made possible by funding from the British Sociological Association and the University of York Graduate Students' Association Community Fund.

*Attendance to the conference is free of charge, but registration is essential and spaces are limited. Registration is accessible online:*

<http://www.york.ac.uk/sociology/about/news-and-events/department/2013/conference-contemporary-other/contemporary-other-conference/#tab-4>

Please contact Ros Williams at [rgw511@york.ac.uk](mailto:rgw511@york.ac.uk) with any queries.

## Proceedings

09.00 – 10.00 Registration & Refreshments

10.00 – 10.30 Introductory words from Professor Sharon MacDonald

10.30 – 11.15 PG Panel – The Political Other (*3x10 minutes + plus questions*)

11.15 – 11.30 Refreshments

11.30 – 12.15 Key Note Professor Gurminder Bhambra

12.15 – 13.15 Lunch

13.15 – 14.00 Key Note Professor Simon Winlow

14.00 – 14.45 PG Panel – Structure and the Other

14.45 – 15.00 Refreshments

15.00 – 15.45 PG Panel – Disability and the Other

15.45 – 16.30 PG Panel – Representation and the Other

16.30 – 17.00 Closing words from Dr Rowland Atkinson

17.00 – 18.00 Wine reception

# Political Other

## Huw Halstead University of York

More than 'Simply Greek': Alterity in Istanbul-Greek Identity

The 1923 compulsory population exchange between Greece and Turkey ended centuries-long coexistence between Greeks and Turks in the former Ottoman territories. Exempted from this exchange, the Istanbul-Greeks continued to live in Turkey as a Greek minority. Owing to popular and official discrimination, almost all of the Istanbul-Greeks migrated to Greece during the twentieth century, seeking freedom in a country that had long seemed to them a 'motherland'. In Greece, however, they were derided by sections of the native population as Turks. Twice an 'Other', the Istanbul-Greeks responded to this dual denial of identity through a flexible sense of self, which both downplays and emphasises otherness, contextually navigating the tensions of forced migration. Through the oral testimonies of these migrants, collected during ethnographic fieldwork, this paper demonstrates how the Istanbul-Greeks respond to being associated, and even equated, with Greece's great Other. It explores how the migrants can be 'Greekier' than the Greeks in some contexts, whilst deploying the alterity in their identity to become distinct from the Greeks in other circumstances – even, in extreme cases, 'becoming' the Turkish Other. Such observations challenge the common assumption that 'Greek' and 'Turk' are fixed and immutable categories, and reveal the potential and utility of a contextually malleable identity for communities on the move.

## Marie-Eve Hamel University of Edinburgh

This study will explore how the needs of the survivors of ethnicized sexual violence are being addressed by non-governmental organizations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda. Based on the strategic rape theory, it is argued that rape was used as a weapon of war during the Bosnian War (1992-95) and the Rwandan genocide (1994) to humiliate and subjugate the enemy group, the cultural 'Other'. However, in these two post-conflict societies, survivors of sexual violence remain marginalized and excluded from their families and communities due to the stigma associated with rape and their close contact with the 'Other'. This research, which is a work in progress, enquires how the need for social belonging of the survivors of ethnicized sexual violence in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda are being addressed by non-governmental organizations. Preliminary analysis demonstrate that most NGOs working with survivors of sexual violence tend to focus on security, psychological and physical needs, with only a few programs targeting social inclusion. This project will thus enquire if the need for social belonging should be address on the same level as security and physical needs, since it is only by being totally reintegrated within their communities that the survivors of sexual violence will access fair and complete economic and social opportunities. This study is currently in the pre-fieldwork phase, and will involve participant observation of NGOs, focus groups and semi-structured interviews with both survivors of sexual violence and NGOs' staff members.

## Chris Barnett University of York

My Conference presentation would begin by looking historically at the process by which the African was grafted, for the purposes of enslavement and colonial oppression by western powers, into the racial construct of 'black', the other than white. I will discuss how this was partially done through the ideological mechanism of euro-centric philosophy, which was used to deny the African any historical or cultural significance. Thus African peoples have been grafted out of the temporal and spatial landscape of world history and into an ahistorical static racial category designated 'black', who stand in stark contrast to the white supremacy of western civilization, as uncivilized savages.

It is from this historical point of trajectory that I will discuss data from my Doctoral research study, which looks at what constitutes African-Caribbean British male identities and the affect of these identities on this groups secondary school academic achievement. I will be discussing data, which points towards black identity crises, that is, data which indicates disorientation through an inability to make sense of black ontological reality and consequently black epistemology, the Afro-centric origin of knowledge. I will discuss this crisis in Black identity in relation to institutional racism, specifically the exclusion of black culture and history from the national curriculum and white supremacist pedagogy, I will then discuss how this crisis in black identity can manifest into gang membership and academic failure, which then leads to capitalist exploitation through structural exclusion in wider society where the black man especially is represented and seen as the cultural and criminal/deviant other.

# 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.

# Structure and the Other

**Alex Simpson** University of York

Market society, in the language of Karl Polanyi (2001 [1944]), represents the relentless spread of a societal order which places the pursuit of personal economic gain as the dominant organizing principal of social life. Rather than the principals of the market being confined to the economy, buffered and restrained by institutions and regulative practices, the raw cost/profit economic calculation has become embedded in the fabric of society itself. The costs of societal marketisation have left large swathes of society more vulnerable than before – removing many of the social safety-nets and increasing the level of insecurity and vulnerability. For Currie (1997), this movement has generated a new level of criminal deviance, sustained by a destruction of livelihood, withdrawal of public services and the spread of a materialistic ‘hard culture’. In other words, the values of a market society actively generate a new subaltern other which are pushed towards dispositions of violent and criminal activity. However, this paper highlights the need to look beyond this ‘downward gaze’ of the other and remain attentive to the oppositional one which, in Hegelian terms, reaffirms the sustained imagination which comes to define the other. In this sense the two remain intertwined in a matrix of causality and effect, the other reaffirming the status of the one and vice-versa. In the context of a market society, the representation of the other is determined through the negative outcome of the cost/profit calculation which is passed on as a negative externality and concentrated in marginalised sections of society.

**Sam Burgum** University of York

Since 2011, there has been a resurgence of activism across the globe in an attempt to resist what has come to be seen as an unjust and unfair approach to the global economy. Occupy was one of the largest ‘movements’, managing to spread across 951 cities and 81 countries in a matter of months following the initial call to camp at Zucotti Park, New York (near Wall Street). This paper is based on interviews that took place with Occupy: London in May 2012 (just before they were evicted).

Mark Fisher has suggested that, interpassivity – when “the object itself takes from me, deprives me of, my own passivity” (Žižek 2006:24) – can be seen in examples of resistive culture (such as the film ‘Wall-e’ which “performs our anti-capitalism for us” (Fisher 2009:12). In this way, the current paper suggests that we could apply this to some forms of activism to explain why some people feel like they are part of such movements without ‘properly’ joining them on the ground. Analysing some of the interview data, we find evidence that some people might be allowing the other to ‘relieve them of their passivity’ towards resistance and turning it into a kind of privatised rebellion rather than any real action against the system.

**Matthew O’Connor** University of York

This paper looks to apply Standing’s (2011) definition of the precariat to contemporary Brazil. The precariat is described as a relatively new class emerging from neo-liberal reforms of previous decades whose plight has become increasingly visible since the economic crash of 2008. Standing describes the precariat as a global class yet the majority of analysis concentrates upon insecure employment in OECD nations. In contrast to ‘developed’ nations, Brazil is undergoing a positive phase of sustained economic growth and stability with low unemployment and unprecedented income redistribution. The improvements in socio-economic indicators attributed to workers’ party government (PT) policies over the last ten years are widely celebrated both locally and globally particularly given the state of the world economy. Some influential Brazilian sociologists are quite skeptical about the much cited concept of a new emergent middle class, arguing that this section of the population are; ‘strugglers’ (Souza 2012) or the precariat (Braga 2012). Braga is critical of what he describes as the charismatic and populist domination of Lulaism impeding critical debate on employment and labour rights in Brazil. This paper looks to discuss whether the current much lauded trajectory of Brazil’s macro-economy neglects the precarious and insecure reality for many workers. This could be argued to have been the case in the OECD nations prior to the crash of 2008.

# Health, Disability and the Other

**Victoria Smith** University of Nottingham

For people with learning disabilities in the UK, living on the edge of society is part of everyday life. This paper puts forward the idea that this lived experience is positioned at the margins of society and is represented as a contemporary other, in part by the terminology used to refer to it. Learning disability is by no means a universal term. A plethora of terms exist within academic research, policy, legal documents and everyday language. Terms such as learning difficulty, mental retardation, developmental delay and mental ill health are frequently used interchangeably or in replacement of learning disability. This is not just pedantic nit picking; confusion and tensions arise when replacement terms are value laden or mean something different entirely. Indeed, the language of learning disability exists within a semantic tangle of definitions, concepts, colloquialisms, political ideology and attitudes fraught with historical, social and political tensions, that in turn impact upon the lives of people with learning disabilities and those working in learning disability practice. It is argued that such confusion is underpinned by a power imbalance, the particular characteristics of which are unique to learning disability. The paper presents current learning disability discourse as a tautological muddle and works backwards in time to seek clarification and explanation.

**Natalie Forster** University of Edinburgh

Accounts of 'otherness' in stories of Gypsy and Traveller health

There is a growing fascination in the 'otherness' of Gypsy and Traveller lifestyles in popular culture, as exemplified by the hugely popular channel 4 television series 'My Big Fat Gypsy Weddings'. Such portrayals have provoked widespread criticism for fuelling misconceptions and stereotypes of Gypsies and Travellers. Alongside this broader fascination with Traveller Community culture, interest is increasing in the health of Gypsies and Travellers in public health policy and research. The literature points to competing discourses attempting to define how Gypsies and Travellers 'are' with respect to health. Such attempts at definition hinge on oppositions such as adherence to deficit or strength models of health; the similarity or 'otherness' of Traveller Communities; and power and resistance. The presentation describes the rationale for adopting a narrative approach, informed by poststructuralism, in order to understand how Traveller Community members and public health practitioners position themselves within this contested territory of Gypsy and Traveller health, through the stories they tell. The adoption of a poststructuralist narrative approach is argued to enable an open-ended examination of the ways that practitioners or Gypsies and Travellers may draw on multiple, interacting and co-existing constructs, practices or identities with respect to health, depending on the social context. The challenges of researching 'otherness', including consideration of my positionality as a 'settled' researcher, and the paradox of (re)presenting groups while simultaneously seeking to destabilise discourses positioning groups as 'other' will be discussed, as well as possible strategies for navigating such challenges.

**Rachael Black** University of Sheffield

"Social Inclusion" is a term used in government policy (DoH 2001, 2009) indicated and measured by the number of people with learning disabilities in employment and settled accommodation (DoH 2009). However, the relevance of these indicators for people with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD), deemed to be the most disabled in our society (Mansell 2010) is not yet known.

People with PMLD are poorly represented in research and policy due to their complexity of needs resulting from longstanding sensory and physical impairments in conjunction with severe and profound cognitive disability. Ultimately, this is deemed to reduce their capacity to consent (Mental Health Act 2005) thus preventing this under represented group to participate in research which has the potential to elicit their perspectives to understand their experiences of social inclusion.

This talk will summarise current provisions of social care for people with PMLD as well as addressing the barriers currently in place that prevent people with PMLD being research participants. It will then introduce a research project which aims to use interviews with parents, carers and support staff to develop a definition of social inclusion. This definition will then be used to generate measures to apply in observational studies of people with PMLD.

This is a timely study as recent research has shown that there are more people with PMLD than ever and this number is set to continue increasing (Emerson, 2009). Research needs to identify how to represent people with PMLD in order to develop services that effectively meet their needs and also those of their families and carers.