ABSTRACT

AFRO-SAXONS AND OTHER EUROPEAN SPECIES: CITIZENSHIP, THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY, AND REPRESENTATION IN A MULTI-ETHNIC EUROPEAN UNION

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A person's location in a society, as defined by such factors as gender, 'race', sexual orientation, religion etc, determines the construction of their citizenship as 'different' or not from the 'norm' (Lutz '97), and 'different' has tended to mean 'inferior'. Recent Scholarship on citizenship has challenged the classic liberal assumption of automatic equality, and uncovered the 'democratic paradox' (Yuval-Davis & Werbner), which results in “some citizens being more equal than others, and the equality of citizenship making some people more powerful citizens” (Young).

Currently, there is a sharp move within the European Union towards “a defensive discourse of constructing a 'pure Europe’” that is a “homogenizing process from the inside” (Lutz). Old but familiar discourses about the dangers of 'letting more in' (new immigrants) resonate across the Union, and are being crystallised in the increasingly converging and narrowly defined entry and nationality legislation of member-states; whilst minority ethnic European citizens continue to be targeted by reactionary extreme right groups.

Against this backdrop, my research aims include an attempt to critically investigate the reality of life in the EU from the perspective of minority ethnic Europeans at the cross section of ‘race’ and gender. Until recently in the UK, discussions of ‘identity politics’ have tended to treat ethnicity and national identity separately; the former remaining within the framework of ‘multiculturalism’, and the latter restricted to the spheres of constitutional politics and the devolution of power (McCrone), with both failing to sufficiently address gender and/or ‘race’. I am interested in looking at how the ‘politics of identity’ is negotiated by minority ethnic British women in an England “…where the whole issue of English (/British) identity is full of complexity and ambivalence, of implicit superiority and suspicion of nationalism” (Modood,). Is it in fact the case that “'English’ is treated by the new Britons as a closed ethnicity rather than an open nationality”? What then are the implications for the Labour Government’s commitment “to creating One Nation…where every colour is a good colour…every member of every part of society is able to fulfil their potential…everyone is treated according to their needs and rights…” (Parekh Report). What comparisons can be made with other EU partners? And underlying all of these, at both domestic and supranational levels: what are the relations of power that are at play in the struggle for representation in the political arena, where citizens are supposed to be able to act to defend their rights?