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Your Country Needs You (To Be Other)

By Josephine Berry Slater

In the lead up to the May local elections in the UK, the selection of a Greek-Armenian candidate by the British National Party (BNP) has seen the party descend into turmoil. The admission of 'ethnics' to the party, hardliners have claimed on bulletin boards and in the national press, has destroyed one of the last bastions of white working class racists. The party's 'modernisers', responsible for the selection of Sharif Abdel Gawad, are defending their choice using the new rationale of post-multiculturalism: this man is a 'totally assimilated Greek-Armenian', they say, and 'not a Pakistani Muslim'. Ever since the advent of multiculturalism in the 1970s, race has increasingly been defined in cultural rather than biological terms. But if this era also saw respect for cultural difference come to the fore in official culture, the fallout from 9/11 and 7/7 has put an end to the widespread promotion of tolerance. Assimilation is back on the agenda, however this time around the onus is not on the 'host' culture to accommodate immigrants, but on individuals to integrate themselves (see Hari Kunzru, p.14, and Matthew Hyland, p.44).

In a biopolitical era which, as Luciana Parisi states in this issue, 'has always dealt with the transformation of bios – organic life – into politics', it may seem an irony that science has, by and large, rejected the notion of a biological basis for race (see p.54). But, as Matthew Hyland observes, 'while either "race" or "culture" may be projected onto someone in order to assign them to a group only culture can then be attributed to the will of the presumed group members. Unlike race, they can be *held answerable for it*.' This new culpability of the other for the social conditions which produce and oppress them as (cultural/racial) other, is the logic of biopolitics writ large. In the name of producing harmonious co-existence, everyday life, indeed life itself, is opened up to scrutiny and exposed to the arbitrary rule of law. Against this reframing of racism along cultural lines, whose intent is to breed panic over the mass migrations of globalisation and rekindle the clash of Islamic and Christian civilisations for geo-strategic ends, this issue of *Mute* attempts to read the evident crisis of multiculturalism geo-politically, economically, in class terms and in relation to developments in science.

The signs of multiculturalism's demise are often stark – pace the introduction of citizenship tests across Europe, in the name of promoting 'shared values', as a new form of border control (see Hari Kunzru, *Melancholic Troglodytes*, p.22, and Eric Krebbers, p.96). The head scarf ban in French schools and the drastic new immigration laws in Holland which have stopped legal economic immigration dead and practically abolished the right to asylum are just a few cases in point. In the UK, the Terrorism Act has been upgraded, albeit with the collusion of so-called 'community leaders', to proscribe many Islamic organisations and speech acts which 'glorify' terrorism. But the rising intolerance was highlighted more worryingly, because more pervasively, by the Danish cartoons furor (see Daniel Jewesbury, p.66, and Benedict Seymour, p.88) where media pundits of all political hues, and using quite different rationales, jumped on the opportunity to argue for the accelerated integration of Muslim populations into social democracies. Amidst all the column inches this generated over the problems of multicultural societies, the underlying economic conditions which produce their tensions were seldom challenged and all too easily deflected by the limited discourse of free speech.

In this issue, many of the contributors have tried to think beyond the traps of multiculturalism and its flawed concepts of culture and race. Tracking multiculturalism to its limit point, Benedict Seymour, Daniel Jewesbury and Angela Mitropoulos (p.34) focus on capital's underlying unfreedom and inequality which make a mockery of the concept of rights and equality. Luciana Parisi and Marek Kohn discuss signs of crisis in science's culturalist rejection of race and debate whether or not biology's distinction between species is, in any case, intrinsically racist. The networked and mutant

development of evolution across species, proposed by Parisi, finds a parallel in the Melancholic Troglodytes' discussion of the proletarian production of mutant and subversive systems which contest the bourgeois notion of respect. Disrespecting the false pieties of multiculturalism seems to be a popular occupation all round!

[IMAGE]

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