Negotiating the boundaries of citizenship: White South African migrants in the UK and their sense of belonging

Enquire 5(1): 22-40

Kristoffer Halvorsrud

University of Nottingham

Abstract

This paper presents a qualitative study of white South Africans in the UK and their negotiations of citizenship. Acknowledging that such negotiations are circumstantial and somewhat dependent on people's legal and societal locations (Yuval-Davis 2006; 2011), the paper explores how white South Africans position themselves in British society and what this might imply for their sense of belonging. The author of this paper argues that in the context of stricter immigration and citizenship policies in the UK, revealing insights can be brought to light by paying attention to white South Africans' endeavours to legitimise their legal and more informal presence in the UK. This is especially so because they, implicitly or more explicitly, might be drawing on their privileged background and 'attributes' – whether in the form of ancestral ties or reference to skin-colour and cultural proximity to Britain. In this way, some white South Africans draw boundaries between themselves and other migrants, arguing that they should be considered as more 'deserving' than them. It is nonetheless shown that in certain situations, despite benefitting from a relatively positive reception in British society as opposed to various other migrants, white South Africans are not necessarily considered as part of the 'British nation' as such. Discrimination may occur in subtler ways than may be evident with other migrants in that their white skin-colour does not immediately mark them as 'different'. However, white South African migrant may, for instance, be singled out because of their 'South African accent, which suggests that the boundaries of citizenship may sometimes be drawn to exclude even relatively privileged migrant groups such as white South Africans.

Introduction

This paper explores the case of white South Africans in the UK and their sense of belonging, which holds great relevance to citizenship since there is an understanding that citizenship is concerned not only with the legal frameworks connecting the individual to a particular nation-state in the shape

of rights and responsibilities, but can also be implicated with more psychosocial matters as entailed by people's – whether referring to citizens' or non-citizens' – sense of belonging (Stevenson 2003: 62-4). However, rather than accepting the complex and multiple ways to which people can belong to different spaces and places, it is worrying that politicians in various European states have increasingly accommodated for the ethnic majority at the expense of 'outsiders' by promoting national citizenship as a significant value for 'social cohesion' and 'integration' of immigrants and ethnic minorities to mainstream society (Però 2008). For instance, the White Paper Secure Borders, Safe Haven insists that 'those seeking to settle here develop a sense of belonging, an identity and shared mutual understanding [with British citizens]' (Home Office UK 2001, p. 27). As convenient scare scenarios, events such as the London 7/7-bombings have been cited excessively to remind the public of what could supposedly happen if migrants and ethnic minorities are given too many rights – under the banner of multiculturalism – without corresponding duties on their part to integrate into the 'national society' in which they reside (McGhee 2009).

Despite the apparent rejection of racist vocabulary which seemed to, more explicitly, occupy government rhetoric in the earlier post-war years in Britain, the 'racial' connotations of the rhetoric surrounding immigration, citizenship and belonging should be made evident. As stressed by The Parekh Report, '[w]hiteness nowhere features as an explicit condition of being British ... [however] it is widely understood that Englishness, and therefore by extension Britishness, is racially coded' (Runnymede Trust 2000, p. 38). Hence, we can construe that it has been assumed that the white skin-colour of white South Africans have made them more assimilable into the 'British nation' and, allegedly, facilitated stronger feelings of belonging to Britain than for 'non-white' migrant groups. Partially as a consequence of such assumptions, it is revealing that even though the end of the racist apartheid regime has allowed an increasing amount of 'non-white' South Africans to leave South Africa, as many as about 90% of South Africans in the UK can be classified as white (Sveinsson and Gumuschian 2008, p. 1). This is in marked contrast to the population make-up in South Africa, where the white population makes up only around 10% of the total population (Statistics South Africa 2003)[1]. Many white South Africans have thus drawn on British or other European ancestral ties to gain legal access to the UK. However, even for white South Africans without such ties, the legacy of apartheid and socio-

[1]Numbers from the 2001 population census show that the main population groups in the South African population were distributed thus: black people (79%), white people (9.6%), coloureds – people of mixed racial/ethnic origins - (8.9%), and Asians – with an Indian majority - (2.5%) (Statistics South Africa 2003).

economic inequalities in the post-apartheid era – working to their advantage[2] – have facilitated their move to the UK in a climate privileging more affluent and educated migrants (Sveinsson and Gumuschian 2008).

With the increasing South African emigration in the post-apartheid era owing partially to the formal end of the white apartheid regime in 1994 and subsequent opening up of South African borders, the UK has remained the primary destination for South Africans with roughly half of all South African émigrés in the world now residing in the country (Andrucki 2010, p. 359)[3]. It is therefore surprising that relatively little research has been conducted on South Africans in the UK (notable exceptions include Israel 1999; Sveinsson and Gumuschian 2008; Crawford 2009, 2011; Andrucki 2010). Without denying the crucial contribution of the vaster amount of research highlighting the plight of disadvantaged 'non-white' migrant or ethnic minority groups in the UK, the relative lack of research on South Africans seems to indicate that scholars have also deemed white South Africans as relatively assimilable into British society. This feeds into Richard Dyer's general observation that 'to say that one is interested in race has come to mean that one is interested in any racial imagery other than that of white people' (1997, p. 1). This paper draws on the deepening pool of 'whiteness studies' that has sought to rectify such assumptions by revealing discourses of 'whiteness' that are circulating in society. The concepts 'white' and 'non-white' are used strategically to denote that 'non-white' people in general have been marginalised by Western/ apartheid ideologies because they have not been seen as 'white', while more privileged positions in society typically have been reserved for 'whites' (Dyer 1997).

Against such a backdrop, I shall argue that revealing insights can be brought to light by paying attention to white South Africans' endeavours to legitimise their legal and more informal presence in a context of stricter immigration and citizenship policies in the UK. This is especially so because they implicitly or more explicitly might be drawing on their privileged background and 'attributes'. Ancestral ties certainly enable some white South Africans relatively unproblematic access to the UK and may, thereby,

[2]Numbers referring to 2005/6 show that; white people's share of household income was strikingly 5 times their share of the population, for Indian/Asian people it was almost twice their population share, for 'mixed race' people it was closely aligned to their population share, whereas for black people it was only half their population share (Statistics South Africa 2008: 34).

[3]The total number of South Africans in the UK varies according to different sources. Robert Crawford (2009) shows that the number was around 550,000 as of 2008, although some indications would suggest that the actual number is even higher, making South Africans one of the largest foreign national groups in the UK.

facilitate their participation in British society. However, even for white South Africans without such ancestral ties, reference to their white skin-colour, and/ or cultural proximity to Britain, is another available strategy to legitimise their inclusion. In this way, some white South Africans appear to draw boundaries between themselves and certain other migrants, arguing that they should be considered as more 'deserving' migrants than them. It is nonetheless shown that white South Africans are not necessarily considered as part of the 'British nation' in all circumstances, for example by being singled out because of their 'South African accent'.

In the remainder of this paper, I will first point out some theoretical and analytical leads which have informed this study. This will entail clarifying how I understand citizenship as a negotiated process and how a focus on the negotiations of citizenship can be related to migrants' sense of belonging. I will then present my findings from a study with white South Africans in the UK. This section will be structured around the significance of ancestral ties for white South Africans, how they may mobilise their South African whiteness to ensure their inclusion into the 'British nation' and, finally, how such attempts may nevertheless not be sufficient to be accepted as fully-fledged members of the 'British nation' as such. The conclusion will then sum up and suggest avenues for further research.

Theoretical/Analytical Leads

Citizenship as a Negotiated Process

This research is based on the understanding of citizenship as a negotiated process, challenging analyses that uncritically assume citizenship to be a static concept entailing an uncontested relationship between the state and citizens of the particular state (Stasiulis and Bakan 2003). As they are negotiating the boundaries of inclusion/exclusion stipulated in immigration and citizenship policies devised by the state, the white South Africans being investigated here do not need to be British citizens as such. Although much attention will be paid to the involvement of the state in negotiations of this kind, this is not to say that the state has exclusive bearing on white South Africans' negotiations of citizenship. Explanations of the decline of the state (e.g. Soysal 1998) look appealing in a climate with intensified international flows of communication, information, goods and people across national borders. Yet, we must take the potential power of the state seriously even in our proclaimed age of globalisation. Holston (2008), for example, stresses that while some measures exercised by states to control their populations are drastic – such as slavery, forced migration and genocide – the most common and seemingly humane measure in the world today is the legal application of

'a citizenship that manages social differences by legalizing them in ways that legitimate and reproduce inequality' (p. 3-4).

Recognising this, it is nonetheless the case that people may not be completely subsumed and inhibited by the state. We should also appreciate that:

> *[p]recisely what is meant by the word 'citizenship' ... is historically-specific and will vary dramatically from one national context to the next. In any given society this process of definition is never secured once and for all, of course, but rather is subject to the contradictions of power, especially as they are experienced, negotiated and resisted as part of everyday life (Allan 2003, p. xi).*

It is suggested here that negotiations of citizenship – for citizens and non-citizens alike – take centre-stage in ordinary people's everyday lives. Although it may not always be clear how the political dimensions of people's everyday lives come to matter, everyday matters of life may contest – but also (re)produce – existing structures of power and inequality in society (Karner 2011). With this insight in mind, the extent to which ordinary people 'succeed' with their endeavours – whether this involves the (re)production or contestation of power structures and inequality in society – could to a greater or lesser extent be dependent on the relative bargaining power of the legal or societal positions which they occupy (Yuval-Davis 2006; 2011).

Citizenship and Migrants' Sense of Belonging

Negotiations of citizenship can occur in a legal or a more informal sense, which are often associated with each other. I have suggested this above with respect to states' potential attempts to control its subjects, including both formal requirements enforced by immigration and citizenship policies and more informal requirements of cultural belonging to the supposedly, but never in reality, homogenous 'nation' inhabiting the state's territories. Thus, we have witnessed not only political statements requiring migrants to integrate and develop a sense of belonging to Britain, but also the stipulation of these informal requirements in law. A notable example is the recent introductions of various tests requiring non-EEA migrants – including certain South Africans – to demonstrate their knowledge of life in the UK to 'earn' their right to British residency or citizenship status (McGhee 2009).

We should thus acknowledge Nira Yuval-Davis' (2006; 2011) differentiation between 'belonging' and the 'politics of belonging'. Yuval-Davis argues that the 'politics of belonging' relates to the political projects that politicians representing the state, among others, pursue in their attempts to

naturalise and (re)draw 'the boundaries that separate the world population into 'us' and 'them'' (2006, p. 204, apostrophes in original). For some British politicians – however, not for all as different versions can be advanced – 'us' consists of the ethnic majority population and others seen to belong to the 'nation', whereas 'them' comprises all others excluded from the 'nation' as such. The politics of belonging, stresses Yuval-Davis, should therefore not be reduced to people's actual sense of belonging. Although anyone might internalise and (re)produce the boundaries conjured up under the banner of the politics of belonging, Yuval-Davis stresses that people's sense of belonging also might contradict the dominant political projects of belonging. There are several ways that people can belong and there may be divergences – as well as parallels – between self-ascribed feelings of belonging and the ways other actors see and define a particular individual or 'group'. Yuval-Davis also sees belonging as an on-going and relational process, which is negotiated over time and graduated with different degrees rather than any clear-cut division between belonging and not-belonging. In sum, Yuval-Davis' framework should allow for clarification of the extent to which white South Africans feel included or excluded in British society, and the ways in which this might correspond to the projects of belonging conjured up by politicians representing the state.

Against the backdrop of Yuval-Davis' analytical framework, we would also need to examine more specifically the ways in which being white can shape white South Africans' sense of belonging. This is particularly important when bearing in mind the potential influence of the white apartheid regime, which very much permeated most aspects of everyday life in South Africa and reserved privileges for white South Africans at the expense of non-white South Africans. The effects of this regime on white South Africans' mind-sets are spilling over into the post-apartheid era in that the rhetoric of the 'rainbow nation' and 'racial equality' advocated by the post-apartheid government is resisted by some white South Africans. Steyn (2001) contends that 'white talk' constitutes a form of talking amongst some white South Africans in order to ensure the reproduction of their privileged racialised position, which may involve the implicit or more explicit use of the racial rhetoric brought into play by the old apartheid government. An interesting exploration of white South Africans' identities thus emerges in the analysis of those who have migrated to the UK. Steyn stresses that '[r]elatively little work has been done on white diasporas, which, besides being of intrinsic interest in themselves, also can throw light on racial dynamics within the center' (2001, p. xxxi). Addressing the racial dynamics prevalent in the UK through the lenses of white South Africans, could help us discern how white people in this particular context have been rendered 'invisible' by political projects ignoring their 'whiteness',

thus concealing the appropriation of resources by whites in general at the detriment of the 'racial others' (Dyer 1997).

The Case of White South African Migrants in the UK

Findings from a study on white South Africans in the UK will be presented below. A qualitative methodology defined the parameters of the research, whereby semi-structured interviews provided the main method to elicit data. Thus, although some structure was maintained on my part by asking fairly similar questions to all the participants to enable some form of comparison, I also encouraged participants to talk about issues which concern them by letting them speak and asking follow-up questions relating to the issues raised by them (May 2001). This form of semi-structured interviews was, therefore, conducive to the 'thematic analysis' approach (Ritchie et al. 2003) utilised in the analysis of the interview transcripts, in which close attention was paid to the emerging themes brought up by the participants.

This paper examines 25 interviews (21 one-on-one interviews and four with couples). The interviews lasted around one to two hours each and were conducted face-to-face with participants primarily residing in London and surrounding areas. Participants were recruited in different ways. In the initial stages of the recruitment process, South African friends or acquaintances of the researcher were contacted, some of whom procured the details of white South Africans in the UK willing to partake in the study. Then, a snowball sampling technique was employed whereby all participants were asked, after their respective interviews, whether they could direct the researcher to any other potential interview participants. Some participants were also recruited through a call for participants on the 'walls' of different Facebook groups for South Africans living in the UK. All participants except two had migrated to the UK in the post-apartheid era (from 1994 and after[4]), and all had settled, or were planning to settle, in the UK for an extended period[5]. Care was taken to anonymise the names and any other identifiable details of the participants, as well as to follow other required ethical guidelines.

[4]Although the peace process was initiated in 1990, many scholars assert that the transition from apartheid to democracy did not come to a formal end before the first democratic elections in 1994 were being held (Neocosmos 2006: 20). Reference to the post-apartheid era in South Africa will here mean from 1994 and onwards as well.

[5]South Africans currently undertaking studies in the UK have not been included, apart from one participant who arrived in the UK as a child and intends to stay permanently also after her studies. Otherwise, to limit the scope of the study, the assumption has been that students might return to South Africa upon graduation.

The Significance of Ancestry

Addressing whiteness studies' preoccupation with discourses of 'whiteness' that are reproduced and circulated in society, Max Andrucki complements these studies by contending that 'the material arrangement of where bodies can be is as important, if not more so, than how racialized identity is mediated through discourse' (2010: 361, emphasis in original). He illustrates his point by referring to the demographic profile of Western countries as being frequently the outcome of discriminatory material processes, perpetuated by immigration/citizenship laws which grant white people some form of 'passport of privilege' (p. 360). In the specific case of South Africans seeking legal access to the UK, British immigration and citizenship policy 'constitutes a machine that attracts and repels bodies, and that whiteness emerges out of the workings of this 'visa whiteness machine'' (p. 361, inverted commas in original). As previously indicated, this description is apt in the UK with the large majority of South Africans being white, while white South Africans make up only a numerical minority in South Africa itself.

White South Africans have historically benefited from some type of preferential treatment compared to other migrant groups, with a notable manifestation in the relatively high number having at least one British parent, which secures them dual citizenship upon birth: British and South African. This stems from British colonialism in South Africa stretching back a few centuries, as well as more recent migration from the UK to South Africa encouraged by the white apartheid regime to increase the white proportion of the South African population (Israel 1999, p. 87). Also, a number of white South Africans have gained legal access by holding a passport from another EU country. It is therefore believed that as many as one in three South Africans in the UK were in possession of dual/multiple citizenship at the point of arrival in the UK (Crawford 2011, p. 46). And although the number of white South Africans who have secured access via ancestral visa is significantly lower than those arriving on dual/multiple citizenship, the applicant would only need at least one British-born grandparent to obtain this visa (p. 43).

James acquired dual citizenship upon birth, as his British parents migrated to South Africa before he was born in South Africa. He had therefore visa-free access to the UK and did not have to go through the immigration system. As he states:

> *in terms of legal status, it was pretty simple. We didn't even have to sign forms, it was, you just get on a plane and you join the British passport queue in Heathrow and walk in. (James, 26, researcher in the financial sector,*

arrived in the UK in 2000).

He also arrived in the UK at a convenient time in the sense that his parents came with him when he was 16 and therefore still young enough to get into the later stages of the British education system, which arguably equipped him with a competitive edge in the labour market. Below, James reflects on the consequences of this strategic move upon his life and opportunities in the UK:

I think definitely the first year or so [in the UK] when I was 16-17 ... I hadn't the key benefits I have been enjoying in my 20s, y'know, I have moved to London and had different jobs ... I also think time makes you get used to all. So the thing that I miss about South Africa, which was quite painful when I left, that pain numbs off for a while. And of course there are things I miss about South Africa, but those have been replaced by other things over time (James, 26, researcher in the financial sector, arrived in the UK in 2000).

This quote shows that the length of residency in the UK – ten years – has helped James settle in and generate a sense of belonging to British society, in addition to the lingering attachments to South Africa. Indeed, Dora Kostakopoulou (2010) demonstrates that migrant incorporation usually takes place as migrants go on with their everyday lives and become enmeshed in the social life of the host society in various ways by developing interdependent relationships with others. This process should therefore be recognised by politicians, argues Kostakopoulou, as migrants' ability to incorporate themselves in the host society is not necessarily a lengthy process unless, of course, they are being prevented from initiating and pursuing this process by the host society's legal structures. Hence, James' status as a British citizen long before he had even set his feet in the UK may have enabled him to devote more of his time and energy on settling in to British society, rather than having to deal with the potential obstacles and anxieties of the immigration law procedures.

In contrast, it is likely that the stricter immigration policies in the UK have prevented some others from developing the same ties to Britain as James. Most notably, the new points-based migration system introduced in 2008 requires non-EEA migrants – including South Africans without British ancestral ties – to collect a high amount of points based on previous work and study experience and English proficiency (McGhee 2009). Under the provisions of the new points-based system, the working holiday visa was scrapped for South Africans in 2009. This is significant as a large proportion of South Africans currently living in the UK had taken advantage of this visa as a route into the UK, as it previously enabled South Africans of any background to stay in the UK for two years with the possibility of extending

their residency if they found employment (Crawford 2009: 15). In tandem with the apartheid legacy, however, this visa also favoured white South Africans in stipulating that the visa applicant had to be wealthy enough to 'maintain and accommodate himself/herself and any dependants adequately' (cited in Crawford 2011, p. 44). The scrapping of this particular visa might nonetheless be worrying for South Africans of all 'racial'/ethnic backgrounds, in that it has shut down one of the few potential alternatives for South Africans without ancestral ties or financial means to pass through the stricter requirements of the points-based system. A participant observed some signs of friction amongst South Africans:

> *I think it's not a harsh resentment. But it's with South Africans here, when you've got an easy passport. I mean, a lot of South Africans can't afford the passport, they have to work very hard to get it. It gets very expensive for them to always keep renewing their visas and that sort of thing. So, y'know, I think that they get quite envious. (Mario, 31, accountant for investment bank, arrived in the UK in 2007)*

The historical divide between the two main groups of white South Africans – English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking[6] (see Cornell and Hartmann 2007, p. 135-146 for a historical overview) – may have been underscored by the fact that many English-speaking white South Africans have drawn on British ancestral ties not so commonly present amongst the Afrikaans-speaking group. A white Afrikaans-speaking participant, for example, lamented that his siblings are:

> *basically stuck in South Africa, because they don't have any means of applying for visas to live in any country for that matter ... With me, my wife was born in Britain, but lived most of her life in South Africa. And so it was easy for me to get a, what they call a spousal visa and then come and live in the UK. But my siblings they're there. And I can't see them ever leaving South Africa. They're happy to be there, but we know that if they had opportunity to get out of South Africa with no problems, they would leave without a question. (Gregory, 62, retired, arrived in the UK in 2000)*

[6]English-speaking white South Africans originate from Britain as well as other European countries, whereas Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans are people of Dutch descent including some other European influences. Afrikaans-speaking people make up about 60% of the white population in South Africa, while English-speaking people comprise about 40% (Griffiths and Prozesky 2010: 25-6).

The above-participant asserted that his siblings are 'happy to be in South Africa', but that they nevertheless should be granted the option to leave because they would capitalise on such an opportunity. Castles' (2005) conceptualisation of 'Hierarchical Citizenship in a World of Unequal Nation-States' might be applicable in this respect; despite the strong connection to South Africa, the country might be valued as a less favourable location of residency than countries in the Global North such as the UK that conceivably, if not in actuality, offer more 'opportunities'. Gregory also indicates that his siblings have the financial means to leave South Africa and migrate to the UK if the legal obstacles in the UK are lowered. This, of course, would contrast with the realities of the majority of 'non-white' South Africans, who lack the financial means in addition to facing the legal obstacles of migration.

Mobilising Whiteness in the British Context

Irrespective of any underlying tension with respect to access to visas and passports as hinted to above, reference to their own whiteness – in whatever form it took – still seemed to unite most white South Africans. In response to Steyn's argument that white Afrikaner South Africans' cultural background and stronger implication with apartheid make them more predisposed to engage in white talk than English-speaking white South Africans in the South African context, Crawford points out that a shift of analysis to the British context can reveal that 'Steyn's work has perhaps overlooked the broader conceptualisations of whiteness that are shared by Anglophones and Afrikaners alike' (2011, p. 108). The interview findings presented below support Crawford's claims that reference to their whiteness is a strategy amongst white South Africans to establish common ground with white Britons and, thus, ensure their own inclusion as migrants. In facilitating such inclusion into the 'British nation', it appeared that the stricter immigration policies facing some white South Africans might have exacerbated a perceived need amongst the participants to represent white South Africans as 'deserving' and 'white' migrants and, in the process, stressing their commonalities with other white South Africans in the UK. Nevertheless, it is also shown below that this negotiation process often created boundaries that came at the expense of certain other migrant groups.

In terms of white South Africans' reception in British society, we would be well-advised to recognise how their white skin-colour was viewed in a favourable light by some white members of the British population and, possibly, facilitated white South Africans' sense of belonging in British society. For example, one participant suggested a form of inclusion of him as white South African through his assumption that '[m]ost in the UK pretty much

here are white' (James, 26, researcher in the financial sector, arrived in the UK in 2000). In the same breath he expressed that he had not noticed any significant divisions in British society based on 'race'. One interpretation of this assertion is that the participant perhaps was contrasting the arguably more overt 'racial' segregation that occurred in South Africa during apartheid with British society. By using apartheid South Africa as a reference, the persisting 'racial' inequalities in British society might be harder to detect for this participant. In tandem with this, the assertion could be a reflection of the way in which western societies, represented here by the UK, have managed to divert attention away from the significance that white people's 'race' plays in bestowing them certain privileges and shaping their life trajectories (Dyer 1997).

Other participants, however, constructed a clear-cut line between themselves as white South Africans and 'non-white' groups – whether from the British population or migrants – asserting that white South Africans were more assimilable into the fabric of the 'British nation' due to their skin-colour. A participant stated that because of her white skin-colour, 'I don't feel like I look any different to other people', before adding that 'I think if you're not white, your colour immediately gives you away' (Zarah, 21, student, arrived in the UK in 1999). Clearly, the participant is here pointing to the persistent racism in British society (see Runnymede trust 2000 for an overview). Another possible reading, however, is that the participant takes comfort in being white in a British society with a white numerical majority, as opposed to being a numerical minority in a post-apartheid South Africa 'without the many layers of unearned protection and privilege which they automatically had under a series of apartheid governments' (Harper 1998, cited in Crawford 2011, p. 41). The fact that white South Africans, in general terms, are still economically privileged in post-apartheid South Africa would thus seem to matter less for some white South Africans if they believe strongly enough that such privileges have been lost (Steyn 2001). Although presenting a distorted view of the realities in South Africa, the power of the imagination was brought most clearly to light by one of the participants (Gregory, 62, retired, arrived in the UK in 2000) who openly started to cry when explaining the decision to move to the UK with reference to his conviction that black state politicians in post-apartheid South Africa have ignored the needs of white South Africans.

However, feeling more comfortable as 'white' in a British rather than in a South African context only presents one part of the story, as there was also a cultural element interwoven with participants' notions of their whiteness. Some of the white South Africans drew on the colonial and cultural ties between South Africa and the UK to legitimise their stay in the UK as opposed to that of certain other migrant groups – whether white or not. The above-

participant Zarah, who believed that her whiteness made it easier for her to 'blend into' British society, also suggested that the cultural repertoire attached to her South African whiteness is preferable to the alleged cultural predispositions of other, including certain white, migrant groups:

> *I see foreigners coming and they don't bother to learn the language ... they keep to their culture group and they don't take anything on that's British ... I just think if a South African came into England to work, they'll be able to interact with people much better than some of the European countries would be. (Zarah, 21, student, arrived in the UK in 1999)*

It is unclear which European countries the participant is referring to here, but in other parts of the interview Zarah referred to migrants from Eastern Europe in particular. Building on the observations by Sveinsson and Gumuschian (2008), there are reasons to believe that the cultural racisms directed against Eastern European migrants in recent years – fuelled by political rhetoric and the media against the backdrop of the opening up of EU borders – might have fed into the above-participant's perceptions about their cultural incompatibility when compared to white South Africans.

Of course, economic explanations can retain some purchase here. That is, white South Africans are perhaps viewed more positively as 'contributing to the national welfare' in that they have one of the highest employment numbers amongst any national group in the UK and are often concentrated in highly-skilled jobs, contrary to the experience of Eastern Europeans who are more commonly relegated to lower-paid employment (p. 21-2). Yet, McLaren (2008) makes the case that serious thought should be given to the potential impact of any perceived threats to the 'core value' of the 'British nation' – however those are defined. This understanding is based on her observation that '[national] identities are terribly important to individuals, and that individuals protect these identities even if they have no realistic meaning' (p. 6). In this sense, some Britons would presumably take reassurance in the crude knowledge that some white South Africans have ancestral ties to Britain and many more have received their education in English in South African institutions closely resembling British institutions owing to the colonial legacy (see Israel 1999).

There might also be a time-dimension involved here. In some of my participants' accounts, it is indicated that they were now allowed to embrace and celebrate their various 'South African sentiments' in the UK to a greater extent than during apartheid with the negative label that the apartheid regime attached onto white South Africans. This is clearly expressed in the below-

account:

> *I think in the early years we didn't feel that we could be proud of where we came from … we wouldn't have walked around in a Springbok rugby jersey or sort of advertised where we came from. We wouldn't have had a flag on the back of our car or something like that. Whereas now, as persons like Mandela came into power … I'm proud to wear a Springbok rugby jersey or to support my country or to have the flag on the back of my car or whatever. (Sandra, 45, admin in children's centre, arrived in the UK in 1987)*

The advent of the post-apartheid government, with its first president Nelson Mandela as an internationally-renowned symbol for his reconciliatory approach and attempts to unite different 'racial' groups, appears to be celebrated by this participant as it has allowed her to be more 'proud' of being white South African in the UK. Although she went on to claim that there were still some negative sentiments associating her with apartheid merely because she was a white South African, she claimed that the outlook towards her was not as hostile as before. South African whiteness, in this sense, may have escaped some of the criticism of the past. Without denying the significance of any discrimination experienced abroad, it should still be acknowledged that attempts to claim a victim status – that white South Africans are 'really' the ones who have been oppressed because of negative sentiments from others brought upon them by the apartheid past – can work to undermine the much more severe discrimination inflicted upon 'non-white' South Africans by the white apartheid regime (Steyn 2001).

Still Outside of the 'British Nation'?

It follows from some of the underlying tensions identified above that despite having received some type of preferential treatment as opposed to certain other migrant groups – by being able to draw on their white skin-colour as well as ancestral or cultural connections to the UK – white South Africans in the UK have not been automatically welcomed in all circumstances. In the face of insecurities amongst white South Africans as to whether they are fully accepted into the 'British nation' as such, we can approach a more comprehensive understanding of why some of them saw the need to legitimate their stay in the UK in the various ways pointed out above.

Thus, one of the themes that many of the white South African research participants reported was that at least initially, they had experienced some difficulties in their attempts to settle into British society and were, at least to some extent, made to feel unsure whether they 'truly' belonged. The main

reason for this, as it appeared in some of the participants' accounts, was the unwelcoming reception they had felt from certain members of the British population. Thus, for a participant, having both her grandparents originating from England did not seem to matter for how she had settled in. In her words: 'Although this is where we originate from ... people are very unfriendly. People are actually hostile here' (Tracey, 46, unemployed, arrived in the UK in 2000).

Tsuda's (2009) research identifies some of the potential challenges which might present themselves for people who have migrated to a country they have an ethnic or cultural affinity with, but which they nevertheless may never have set their feet in before. Tsuda finds that despite expectations that these migrants' presumed affinity with the host society will facilitate their social integration, they could be excluded as 'foreigners' in the host society due to the different cultural influences they have been exposed to while living abroad in a different society. He writes that:

> *[b]ecause both migrants and hosts anticipate that the diasporic return of co-ethnics will be less problematic than other types of immigration, the mutual ethnic and social alienation that results is all the more disorienting, forcing both migrants and hosts to fundamentally reconsider their ethnic identities. (p. 7)*

It is particularly revealing how language seemed to be made relevant by some members of the British population. This was the case even though many of the white South Africans in this study had English as their mother tongue by virtue of coming from the English-speaking white South African population group. Moreover, Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans may also be equally fluent in English despite Afrikaans – a language more closely relating to Dutch – being their mother tongue (Griffiths and Prozesky 2010: 25-6). Although differences might occur in English language fluency between the two groups, as well as within the respective groups related to class status, the Afrikaans-speaking participants I interviewed had all received education in English in South Africa, at least as a secondary language. In spite of this, white South Africans from both population groups were sometimes singled out because of their 'South African accent'. It is noteworthy that such accent discrimination bears resemblance to the adverse experiences of other white migrant groups, such as some Irish people in the UK. But also some people with certain distinctive and regional 'English accents' experience such discrimination, reflecting perceived or actual class differences working to the disadvantage of people presumed to come from certain parts of England (Runnymede Trust 2000, p. 61).

Apart from a few exceptions, the majority of the white South African participants spoke of having been asked 'where their accent was from'. At first glance, this might not appear to be a noteworthy issue; however, a closer inspection gives greater cause for concern. Research shows that seemingly innocent endeavours, such as pointing out someone's difference in accent, are often easier to partake in for people, as it is seen as being more acceptable than direct forms of confrontation (Davis and Nencel 2011). Questions or comments relating to people's accents, for example, could always be justified by claiming that it was 'only out of curiosity' or 'only a joke'. By justifying it as such, blame may then be attributed to the receivers of such questions or comments for being too 'sensitive' rather than those asking the question or making the comment. Although sometimes intended to involve people in conversation about their background, we should thus be wary of how paying attention to someone's accent could be quite detrimental in its effects by making those on the receiving-end more self-conscious of their language. In the process, and especially if such statements or questions are repeated, this might even exclude people from the conversation and heighten a feeling of not belonging to a particular place (Davis and Nencel 2011).

Indeed, reference to accent seemed to have been highly significant for Tracey (46, unemployed, arrived in the UK in 2000), a participant from the English-speaking white South African population group. She was so self-conscious of her 'South African accent' that she did not want to speak when first arriving to the UK. As a consequence, she made strenuous efforts to avoid any social situations in which engaging in a conversation with someone would be expected of her, preferring instead to stay in the comfort of her own circle of South African family and friends. The extent to which this was a reaction to utterances from people, or had more to do with a concern that people would not understand her accent, was unclear. It nevertheless illustrates that some white South Africans feel that they do not quite belong in the UK because their accents might establish them as 'different' in the views of some.

Conclusion

This paper explored the case of white South Africans in the UK and the ways in which they negotiate citizenship. The importance of studying this group as a more privileged migrant group which has not received the same degree of scholarly attention as more disadvantaged migrant groups in the UK was emphasised. The minimal academic consideration given to white South Africans in the UK is surprising; it is hoped that by considering this group of migrants, this paper has thrown further light on the dynamics revolving around

immigration, citizenship and belonging in a British context. More specifically, it has been argued that white South Africans attempt to negotiate any potential exclusionary mechanisms fostered by stricter immigration and citizenship policies in the UK by drawing on their privileged background and 'attributes'.

It was made clear that for some white South Africans, ancestral ties – either to Britain or to another European country that is part of the EU – have made their negotiations considerably easier. However, it was also noted that for virtually any white South African, their skin-colour works to their advantage in a British context with 'racial' undertones favouring whiteness. Some participants were eager to express their relief of being white in such a context as opposed to 'racialised' and more disadvantaged migrants. Moreover, the advantage of being white and South African was linked to the cultural traits that some participants ascribed to white South Africans, allegedly putting South Africans at an advantage even in comparison to other white migrants with cultural traits which were not seen to share the same degree of affinity with the 'British culture'.

I have indicated in this paper that although white South Africans are generally being welcomed with more open arms by the white ethnic majority in the UK than 'non-white' and certain other white migrants, even a relatively privileged group like white South Africans are not unconditionally welcomed in all circumstances, as reflected in how their 'South African accent' was sometimes singled out. This attitude suggests that the modern nation-state project of distinguishing 'natives' from 'foreigners' (McGhee 2009) can be so important to some people of the majority population that even migrant groups that are generally seen in a more positive light can, in this sense, become somewhat excluded. Such boundaries of exclusion/inclusion of citizenship provide an interesting avenue for further research also in relation to other white migrant groups that can be considered to be relatively advantaged in the British context, but also in other contexts for comparative purposes.

References

Allan, S. (2003). 'Series Editor's Foreword'. In N. Stevenson, Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Questions. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Andrucki, M. J. (2010). The visa whiteness machine: Transnational motility in post-apartheid South Africa. Ethnicities, 10(3), 358-370.

Castles, S. (2005). Hierarchical citizenship in a world of unequal nation-states. Political Science and Politics, 38(4), 689-693.

Cornell, S. E. and Hartmann, D. (2007). Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World (Second Edition). Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press.

Crawford, R. (2009). The magical million? Around the Globe, 5(1), 12-18.

Crawford, R. (2011). Bye the Beloved Country? South Africans in the UK 1994 -2009. Pretoria: Unisa Press.

Davis, K. and Nencel, L. (2011). Border skirmishes and the question of belonging: An autoethnographic account of everyday exclusion in multicultural society. Ethnicities, 0(0), 1-22.

Dyer, R. (1997). White: Essays on Race and Culture. London: Routledge.

Griffiths, D. and Prozesky, M.L.C. (2010). The politics of dwelling: Being white / being South African. Africa Today, 56(4), 22-42.

Holston, J. (2008). Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Home Office UK (2001). Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain. London: HMSO.

Israel, M. (1999). South African Political Exile in the United Kingdom. London: Macmillan Press.

Karner, C. (2011). Negotiating National Identities: Between Globalization, the Past and the 'Other'. Surrey: Ashgate.

May, T. (2001). Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process (3rd edition). Buckingham: Open University Press.

McGhee, D. (2009). The paths to citizenship: A critical examination of immigration policy in Britain since 2001. Patterns of Prejudice, 43(1), 41-64.

McLaren, L. (2008). One of Us? Understanding Public Perceptions of Labour Migration in Europe. London: Policy Network.

Neocosmos, M. (2006). From 'Foreign Natives' to 'Native Foreigners': Explaining Xenophobia in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Citizenship and Nationalism, Identity and Politics. Dakar: CODESRIA Monograph Series.

Però, D. (2008). Political engagement of Latin Americans in the UK: Issues, strategies, and the public debate. Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology, 51(0), 73-90.

Ritchie, J., Spencer, L. and O'Connor, W. (2003). Carrying out qualitative analysis. In J. Ritchie and J. Lewis (Eds.), Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers. London: Sage.

Runnymede Trust (2000). The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report. London: Profile Books.

Soysal, Y. (1998). Toward a postnational model of membership. In G. Shafir (Ed.), The Citizenship Debates: A Reader. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Stasiulis, D. K. and Bakan, A. B. (2003). Negotiating Citizenship: Migrant Women in Canada and the Global System. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Statistics South Africa (2003). Census 2001: Census in brief. (Retrieved 14. December 2008): http://www.statssa.gov.za/census01/html/CInBrief/CIB2001.pdf.

Stevenson, N. (2003). Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Questions. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Steyn, M. (2001). Whiteness Just Isn't What it Used to Be: White Identity in a Changing South Africa. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Sveinsson, K. P. and Gumuschian, A. (2008). Understanding diversity – South Africans in multi-ethnic Britain. Runnymede Community Studies. (Retrieved 20. November 2009): http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/UnderstandingDiversity-2008.pdf

Tsuda, T. (2009). Introduction: Diasporic return and migration studies. In T. Tsuda (Ed.), Diasporic Homecomings: Ethnic Return Migration in Comparative Perspective. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2006). Belonging and the politics of belonging. Patterns of Prejudice, 40(3), 197-214.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2011). The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations. London: Sage.