Pathological Integration: East Europeans, Racism and Becoming British

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For the last decade, East European migrants in the UK have been quietly integrating into British society. Racism has at turns obstructed and facilitated this. On the one hand, racism against East Europeans impedes their integration. East Europeans living in the UK have been targets of racially motivated aggression, they have suffered structural dislocations that cannot be explained by human capital deficiencies, and they have emerged as the most recent scapegoats of a more generalised xenophobia found in public and private discourse. On the other hand, racism by East Europeans facilitates their integration.

The racist and racialising practices deployed by East Europeans in the UK are not simply transplants from their countries of origin, but rather draw on and creatively manipulate a more established British repertoire of racist norms and practices. East Europeans are integrating, in part, by gradually acquiring specifically British cultural competencies of racism.

Whilst integration is generally seen in both political discourse and scholarly analysis as desirable, the elements of acculturation it involves must necessarily include the adoption of multiple cultural forms and practices, including those deemed less desirable. Racism is part of the integration equation.