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# Brexit, British People of Colour in the EU-27 and everyday racism in Britain and Europe

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## ABSTRACT

This paper foregrounds an understanding of *Brexit as unexceptional*, as business as usual in Britain and Europe. It reports on original empirical research with British People of Colour who have settled elsewhere in Europe, to bring into view an original perspective to understandings of what Brexit means to Britons living in Europe, and to consider what these testimonies offer to emerging social science research on Brexit. As we argue, focussing on the testimonies of British People of Colour living in the EU-27 offers a unique lens into how Brexit is caught up in everyday racism, personal experiences of racialization and racial violence, and longer European histories of racialization and racism. Importantly, these experiences precede and succeed Brexit, taking place in both Britain and other European Union countries.

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## Introduction

This paper focuses on how British People of Colour living in the EU-27 make sense of Brexit. As we reveal through original empirical research, their views on Brexit are shaped by personal experiences of everyday, structural, and institutional racism. Importantly, such experiences were a feature of their lives before and after Brexit, in Britain but also in their places of home and work in other European countries. This research provides empirical grounding that supports an understanding of Brexit as unexceptional, as business as usual not only as Britain but also in other European nations. Further, it contextualises the experiences of these British People of Colour in longer European histories of racism and racialization and the routine

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racial exclusion at the core of collective imaginings of who is British and who is European.

To these ends, we adopt a paired methodological strategy that seeks to address the call for research on Brexit to move beyond methodological nationalism and whiteness (see for example Bhambra 2017). Where initial analyses of Brexit limit consideration of its impact to those living within Britain's borders, we extend the geographies of Brexit to the locations across Europe within which British citizens have migrated and settled. This shifts the geographical scale, to locate Brexit within the longstanding marginalization of the multi-ethnic polities of Britain and the normative whiteness of the European Union: its institutions, structures and politics.

The paper first outlines what Brexit means in terms of citizens' rights – that is, the rights of those who had previously exercised Freedom of Movement as EU citizens, to live and work in Britain, or in the case of British migrants, in the EU-27. We then present a critical appraisal of the emergent academic research on Brexit and what it means to those whose lives fall within the scope of the Withdrawal Agreement. We locate this within a longer history of racialization experienced by some EU citizens living in Britain; highlight that expressions that present Britain as newly racist and xenophobic, as expressed by British citizens living in the EU exemplify the normative whiteness of Britishness; and relocate Brexit into a broader account of Europe as a racializing project. Moving onto the methodology of the paper, we discuss the ethics and politics of shifting focus to more muted responses to Brexit and in attending to the diversity of British populations living in the EU, in particular British People of Colour. Through detailed empirical material, we examine how waking up to Brexit for these People of Colour is located in personal and family experiences of structural and institutional racism, before and after Brexit, in Britain and in other European locations. In this way, we draw attention to histories and geographies of racialization, racism and racial violence that precede and progress unabated, and within which their responses to Brexit are located.

### **Brexit and citizens' rights**

The future rights of the estimated 3 million non-British European Union citizens living in the UK and 1.8–3.6 million British citizens living in the EU-27<sup>1</sup>, fall directly within the scope of the Withdrawal Agreement; they are the subject of the citizens' rights negotiations. Before the EU Referendum in the UK the intra-EU migration of Western Europeans was largely unremarked within their countries of residence (Favell and Nebe 2009). Even for those European citizens who had migrated and settled in other EU member states, such mobility was deemed unremarkable; until Brexit, they had rarely been questions about their rights to residence. As such, it is perhaps

unsurprising that initial reactions to the outcome of the Brexit vote included shock and disappointment (Kilkey 2017; O'Reilly 2017; Puma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Miller 2019). As Miller (2019) stresses drawing on the case of the British pensioners living in Spain, from the outset Brexit was experienced as a challenge to “their place within the well-established structures, rules, and rights, as members of the EU supranational organisation” (Miller 2019, 9).

The emergent body of research on what Brexit means for and to those whose rights fall directly within the scope of the Withdrawal agreement has, to date, focussed almost exclusively on the case of EU nationals living in the UK. In what follows, we outline the key themes emerging from research in this area. However, it is also important to highlight that the British living in the EU-27 – for whom Brexit means the loss of their EU citizenship and the reworking of the rights pertaining to residence, settlement and employment – are relatively absent in this field of research. This signals methodological nationalism, the scope of analysis limited to the geographies of the nation-state.

Initial academic publications about Brexit and British citizens living in the EU-27 foregrounds their reactions and experiences of Brexit (Higgins 2018; Miller 2019) and how this has instigated political mobilization among these populations (Macclancy 2019). Through the *BrExpats* research project<sup>2</sup>, on which this paper draws, we have been tracing Brexit's diverse outcomes for these Britons as the negotiations have been unfolding, with particular attention to how it interplays with axes of social division including age, race, class, gender and disability. While we focus in particular on race and ethnicity here, future academic papers will explore in more detail Brexit's uneven impacts for this heterogeneous population.

In the corresponding field of research that considers Brexit and its implications for EU nationals a central theme has been how it interplays with and amplifies questions of belonging (see for example Piętko-Nykaza and McGhee 2017; Lulle, Moroşanu, and King 2018; Botterill and Hancock 2019; Lulle et al. 2019; McCarthy 2019; Ranta and Nancheva 2019). A prominent way into understanding this has been to take as a starting point respondents' narrative positioning of Brexit as an affective moment. As Guma and Dafydd Jones stress:

[T]he campaign and its aftermath furthered a process of ‘othering’ and unsettling as manifest in increased attacks on people and property, anxieties and uncertainties around future rights and complex tensions where belonging is contested through formal and informal practices and processes. (2019, 2)

What becomes clear is that while Brexit marks a moment where European populations living in Britain find themselves newly Othered (Lulle, Moroşanu, and King 2018; McCarthy 2019; Ranta and Nancheva 2019), for other European citizens this is an unwelcome amplification of longer-standing structural and institutional discrimination and everyday racism (see for example Ryan 2010;

Fox, Moroşanu, and Szilassy 2012, 2015; Fox 2013; Moroşanu and Fox 2013; McGhee and Pietka-Nykaza 2016; Lumsden, Goode, and Black 2018; Lulle et al. 2019; Rzepnikowska 2019). Indeed, research with intra-EU migrants originating in the accession states has revealed how discrimination and racism are a daily experience, notably through restriction of access to justice, labour markets and social protections (Wemyss and Cassidy 2017; Lafleur and Mescoli 2018). A particularly stark illustration of this can be found in stigmatization and everyday bordering experienced by Roma populations (see for example Fassin et al. 2014; Humphris 2019). What this points to is that Freedom of Movement was always stratified; indeed, as Lafleur and Mescoli (2018) stress “restrictions to the ‘mobility of the poor’ ... the use of welfare by poor EU migrants leads to their depiction as a group that is ‘undeserving’ of the right to freedom of movement” (2018, 481). While the research listed above focuses on how nationality various positions individuals within these systems of stratification, understanding the differential impacts of Brexit for those who fall within the scope of the withdrawal agreement requires attention to hierarchies of belonging within Britain and Europe beyond nationality.

British citizens living in Europe are a case in point. Critical social science research with these populations has communicated the value of British citizenship in crossing borders and in international settings, but might also reflect, *inter alia* being middle class and the social production of whiteness through migration and settlement (Benson 2011, 2018). Indeed, the latter is the heart of Higgins’ (2018) evaluation the responses of the remain-supporting, White British citizens responding to her survey who present Britain as *newly* xenophobic and insular. As she argues, their responses are telling of the privilege of whiteness in overlooking the racial exclusion at the heart of British social formation. However, it is important to recognize that for some of these Britons such structural privileges might be tempered by precarity (Benson and O’Reilly 2018; Leonard and Walsh 2018), notably the elderly (see for example Oliver 2008; Hall and Hardill 2016) and the working class (see for example O’Reilly 2000, 2007; Bott 2004, 2006; Oliver and O’Reilly 2010; Leivestad 2018). It is this sense of vulnerability that Miller (2019) so adeptly communicates in describing how British pensioners in Spain respond to Brexit.

What becomes clear in looking across this body of research is that this is often underpinned by a normative assumption of the British migrant as White (for notable exceptions see Bolognani 2014; Khambhaita and Willis 2018) that also frames popular understandings of Britons abroad. In foregrounding the testimonies of British People of Colour living in the EU-27 in this paper, we counter assumptions of the British population living abroad as exclusively White, and insert the views of a population who have, until now, been completely absent from academic commentary about Brexit and citizens’ rights. This allows us to bring into view comparative accounts of

racialization in Britain and other European countries, resituating Brexit in longer European histories.

### **Brexit: a very European project**

Our starting point is an understanding of British and European social formations as racialized from their inception given the significance of colonialism to the production of modern European nation-states (see for example Gilroy 1991; Goldberg 2002, 2006; Hesse 2007); in Lentin's words "race has become a central ordering principle of modern western societies" (2008, 492). As Goldberg clearly lays out, the "Europeanization of Europe" is a racial project that produces the European polity as Christian and white:

Europe has long nurtured the civic drive to identify the foreign, to uphold the possibility of keeping the foreign foreign, of permanently foreignizing the '(racially) non-European'. The reproductive logic of Euro-racism ensures that those 'racially non-European' are never nor can ever be European. (2006, 254; see also Hesse 2007; Lentin 2008)

This is made visible in the everyday racism (Essed 1991), structural and institutional exclusion experienced by People of Colour as they find themselves, in Hall (2003) words, "in but not of Europe".

As Bhabra (2017) stresses, the neglect of these histories has been a significant epistemological shortcoming in social science and media accounts of Brexit. As she stresses, to date the predominant class analyses of the Brexit referendum have been underpinned by racialized assumptions (see also Shilliam 2018; Virdee and McGeever 2018), rationalizing the "indigenous" White working class and their vote to leave the European Union on the grounds that they are the real victims of the contemporary economic system. As she emphasizes forcefully, this reading neglects Britain's multi-ethnic polity and the racialized workings of the capitalist economic system, the emergent body of social science research on Brexit dogged by methodological whiteness. Virdee (2017) in a similar call emphasizes that analyses of contemporary political transformation urgently need to acknowledge "the ethnically diverse proletariat in the imperialist core" (2017, 2406; Virdee and McGeever 2018) – the Black and Brown Britons otherwise erased from the predominant analyses. These interventions are powerful reminders that the neglect of imperial histories limits the possibilities for a radical social science that might attend to contemporary socio-economic inequalities and mount anti-racist solidarity.

Locating Brexit within a history that recognizes the intrinsic intertwining of the national and colonial projects permits an alternative view onto its production (Emejulu 2016; Bhabra 2017; Virdee 2017; Virdee and McGeever 2018; Shilliam 2018). It may be a peculiarly British articulation, but is situated in longer histories of racism and racialization that are not unique to Britain. In

other words, Brexit is European in its making and as such its geographies extend beyond the borders of Britain.

### **Research with British People of Colour in the EU-27**

These conceptual and theoretical framings that position Brexit as part longer histories of racism and racialization within Britain and Europe have significant implications for how research is designed. In what follows, we describe a process of working against methodological whiteness and methodological nationalism in a project on what Brexit means for British citizens living in the EU-27 for the ESRC-funded project *BrExpats: freedom of movement, citizenship and Brexit in the lives of Britons living in the EU-27*.

The paper breaks new ground in communicating the views and experiences of British People of Colour living across Europe – a group who have never before been represented in research either on British migration or on Brexit. Through their testimonies it provides empirical grounding to existing theorizations of Brexit and its close association with racism and racialization. Beyond this, however, we shift the terms of reference for understanding Brexit and migration to the wider geographies within which Britons have migrated and settled, in this way challenging the tendency to use as an analytic point of departure the lives of those living within Britain's borders. We also attend to the methodological whiteness in bringing forward the testimonies offered by British People of Colour living in other EU nation-states. Our intention here is not to assume that there is anything inherently different about the way in which these British citizens understand and experience Brexit, but to recognize that a project that does not seek out these accounts – alongside those of other under-represented populations within research on British migrants, for example those of working age, British children, disabled Britons, and those living on limited incomes – rests upon an exclusionary understanding of who is British and can only partially address what Brexit means to British citizens living in the EU-27.

Influenced by critical scholarship addressing the methodological challenges of researching race and ethnicity (see for example Twine and Warren 2000; Gunaratnam 2003; Bulmer and Solomos 2004), the research was designed to bring British People of Colour living in the EU-27 into the project. We were particularly inspired by Gunaratnam's (2003) call for a "doubled research practice" that is attentive to the possible reification of racial categories through research; ensures that race and ethnicity do not become the sole category of difference within the analysis; recognizes the social and relational production of difference; and highlights both commonalities and specificities of experience (see also Brah 1996; Lewis 2000). It is with this in mind that we adopt People of Colour as a category, bringing together those from across Britain's multi-ethnic polity who took part in the research.

At an early stage in the research, it became clear that we would need to adapt our strategies to recruit British People of Colour to the project as they were not coming forward through the otherwise open calls for participation, and on the ground recruitment in France and Spain. Chantelle took primary responsibility for recruitment, drawing on personal contacts and mutual acquaintances over a period of year starting in 2017, to recruit 30 interviewees with whom she conducted in-depth interviews over Skype. The interviews were loosely structured around developing a biographical understanding of migration and settlement before progressing to talk specifically about Brexit.

To mitigate the well-documented problems with development of rapport in Internet-mediated interviews (Iacono, Symonds, and Brown 2016), an issue that had the potential to be exacerbated by the focus on three sensitive topics – Brexit, experiences of racialization and racism – Chantelle communicated clearly in advance via email and chatting informally before the interview started. The generation of knowledge through the research encounter was undoubtedly shaped by commonality of experience between Chantelle as a Woman of Colour and those taking part in the research. This is not to assert an unreflexive “racial matching”, but to be attentive, following Gunaratnam (2003), to points of alignment and difference and what these do to the research encounter (see also Twine 2000).

Our analysis started immediately following interviews during debriefing sessions; alongside listening back to recordings, checking and reading transcripts, consulting interview notes, our conversations formed the basis of the inductive development of the analysis we present below. Through dialogue and collaborating on the analysis, we were also able to develop an understanding of how these narratives converged and diverged from those prominent in other aspects of the project. In particular, it became clear that the shock and outrage reported by many responses to Brexit of Britons resident overseas (O’Reilly 2017; Higgins 2018; Miller 2019) was not matched in these interviews, which had a notably different emotional register. This is not to conclude that those People of Colour taking part in the research were not upset about Brexit. It is rather to stress that this was not accompanied by an understanding of Britain as a newly xenophobic and racist society as is common in the narratives of many other Britons living in the EU-27 (Higgins 2018).

The British People of Colour who took part in the research lived in eight countries: France, The Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Belgium, Germany and Ireland. They ranged in age from twenty-four to fifty, had different family circumstances and reasons for living in the EU-27, from work to family reunion in the case of those with non-British partners. A number of those taking part lived and worked in Brussels, for European Union institutions or related organizations; others worked in the third sector, were self-employed within the creative industries and on temporary teaching contracts.

While they universally had degree-level education and in some cases higher-level qualifications, their employment permitted them differential access to job security. All of those taking part were clear that they had voted for Britain to remain in the European Union as becomes clear in their accounts of their initial reactions to the referendum.

### **Waking up to Brexit**

When asked about their thoughts on Brexit, these interviewees would often talk about the morning after the referendum; indeed, this is a common way of narrating thoughts on Brexit as we have seen in interviews across the broader project. For example, Magalie, who at the age of 45 had been living in Brussels for six years after living, studying and working in several EU countries stressed:

A bloody disaster ... It is absolutely crucial, central, the ability to move freely between countries has been fundamental to the way I have lived my life and I cannot imagine that being taken away from me ... it was absolutely vitally important that I participate fully as much as I could. So yes I went to London and voted and then stayed up that night and fell asleep in the wee hours and woke up, and the first thing I did was pick up my phone and looked at the news and I thought I was still sleeping and having a nightmare.

Daryl who was 29 and also lived in Brussels described thinking it was a hoax before immediately moving into trying to make sense of how this outcome could have come about:

When I realized that it was real and the data was coming out about it my conclusion was this is the impact of not having some sort of political scientist study from a young age, really understanding the character, the economy and politics and how the impact of the media or how the media really do impact you know, just human logic ...

These narratives communicate disappointment and a concern about what this means for lives built on the intra-European mobility made possible by Freedom of Movement. The interviewees try to make sense of why what they see as self-evident is not shared by the Leave-voting population, a familiar trope being to blame this on a lack of education and understanding. But what also becomes clear in these accounts is how they switch registers to consider how Brexit is caught up with longstanding racism and xenophobia in Britain.

### **Racism in Britain: before and after Brexit**

Bex, who lived in the Netherlands, described her observations of how racism and xenophobia drove the referendum,

I think my initial response to the whole thing, when it was announced by Cameron, was “You bloody plonker, what the fuck are you doing”, mainly from an economic point of view I suppose and also because it was so obvious that it was going to unleash all kinds of awful xenophobia that had just been simmering for years and of course it did and that has been horrible to see. I think what I was struck by as well was just how much both campaigns, both the Leave and the Remain campaign, and I am talking about the mainstream campaigns, not the fringe aspects of both, how much they were entrenched by white privilege and supremacy.

Unlike the White British citizens responding to Higgins’ (2018) survey, what these British People of Colour signal is that Brexit did not instigate racism and xenophobia, but brought it to the surface in a state-sanctioned way through the referendum. As we discuss below, these understandings of the longer durée of racism and xenophobia are drawn from personal experiences of everyday, structural, and institutional racism in Britain and other European countries. Racism for them is not a Brexit story, but a life story.

Kaamil was originally from Birmingham but had settled in Spain two years ago with his Spanish wife and two children. An academic in his late thirties, he now works in a Spanish university. For him, the referendum campaign had taken “the masks off” the racism that he and his British Pakistani family were all too familiar with:

I used to hear the stories of when my dad arrived [in Britain] with my grandparents, and then you realize that not that much has moved forward ... my parents have said it to me before but the thing that gives them so much pain is watching me or people around me go through similar things but just in a different way, not in factories but in academia or whatever. I think Brexit took a lot of the masks off in the same way that Trump has in the US ...

Ida, living in Italy, similarly explained, “racists have always been there but Brexit seems to have brought out the really ugly side and made people feel a bit more emboldened to actually come out with these really ugly views”. Such reflections on Brexit that describe racism and xenophobia in Britain as not new – or indeed, surprising – but alarmingly amplified were held in common by many of the People of Colour participating in the research. These find resonance in Khalili’s account,

what has transpired in Britain since the Leave campaign won has only shown how easily the veneer of civility and conviviality can be peeled back to reveal the virulence of racism and xenophobia seething under the skin of British social life. (2017, 253)

They also communicated an awareness of how this was caught up in longer histories of racial exclusion at the heart of the question who counts as British? This was made particularly clear in Magalie’s personal reflections on her relationship to Britishness:

This Brexit vote throws again into question the notion of Britishness, *not that we had ever reached any kind of settled understanding or agreement on what it means ...* Britishness is imbued with a sense of superiority over the rest of the world and for a long time we just thought of Brown and Black parts of the world ... *It has also been there in relation to other European peoples, North Americans ...* So as a child of peoples who have been colonized, oppressed, murdered, that is deeply problematic. And it is difficult to look at that given how deeply embedded my identity, my family, the language I speak, the way I speak that language, my education, so my sense of myself, is so closely entwined to Britain, England and all of that history. So that is a really murky history and as a child of the African diaspora, who's British, it raises some very fundamental and very troubling questions. (Emphasis added)

Importantly, and where Magalie's description of Brexit as an expression of racism and xenophobia differs from that of the White British respondents to Higgins' (2018) survey, is in her identification of the "murky history" of racialization and its residues in Brexit, and her recognition of how this was caught up in Britain's sense of its position in the world *even in respect to Europe*. This history is deeply personal for her, as she communicates her ambivalence about being entitled to being British, a category that she recognizes as exclusionary to people whose heritage in part derives from outside the British Isles. This was an ambivalence shared by others; Bola described her uneasy relationship between, on the one hand, wanting to "give the best impression as a British person living abroad", to counteract the prominent stereotypes of badly behaving Brits Abroad, while on the other hand, she described her relationship to the idea of being British while also Ugandan through her mother as complicated. Rebecca, who had dual British and Jamaican heritage, and lived in Spain working as an English language teacher described how she was regularly asked, when introducing herself as British, "No, where are you *really* from?" She described herself as caught in "a very awkward identity crisis", "too foreign for here, too foreign for there", phrases that communicated a sense of not knowing where she was allowed to belong.

In many ways these responses draw attention to the longstanding exclusionary operations of Britishness, by which People of Colour are denied the right to belong in Britain, British society underpinned by systemic and structural racism. While this offers empirical grounding to how Brexit is caught up with questions of Britishness and belonging, and particularly the racial exclusions at the heart of this, we now turn a lens onto their experiences of living and working in Europe.

### **Racialized outsiders in the whiteness of Europe**

Drawing on their experiences of living and working in other European Union countries, those taking part in the research were keen to draw attention to

their experiences of everyday racism where they lived and worked. Sophie had lived in Belgium for over 15 years; aged in her early fifties, she described the mundane encounters through which she finds herself racialized in public space.

... it's a very undercover form of racism, an undercover form of discrimination. Now I've had it where the shopkeeper tries to serve the person behind me even though I was the next customer, and then they'll say, 'I didn't see you.' I'll tell them outright 'How can you not see me when I'm the only black person here?'

Bex described how Brexit had further exacerbated the questioning about her right as a Woman of Colour to be living in the Netherlands:

... your movements and your presence was already questionable and now people come to find you are British and a lot of Dutch people don't actually understand what Brexit means. They just think it means Britain is leaving the EU, that means all British people will become illegal immigrants ... they assume that if you are black and you are here you must be an immigrant ... now I'm here and I am British so it is bringing of all this together in a very messy complicated way.

Several of those taking part in the research worked in European institutions in Brussels, and they related their daily experience of the whiteness of these spaces, despite the political and national diversity these institutions host. Ajwa, who described himself as British Indian, explained that it was common for people to look at him as he walked in the corridors of his place of work, standing out because he was one of the few non-White faces within the institutional spaces of the European Union. This was an experience shared by many of those taking part in the interviews. For example, Suzanne who had been living in Brussels for 12 years working for an advisory body to European institutions explained:

... my first experience actually going to meetings or whatever, in the parliament, I was very struck by the fact that apart from people who were maybe serving coffee or cleaning ... I was often the only black face, let alone black woman, in the meeting and things ... you always feel conscious of the fact you're obviously very, very clearly in a minority and some people, it is not that there is a malicious intent behind it, but you often get the feeling that people are quite surprised that you are articulate ...

A clear message came out through the interviews of how the awareness about racism that they were familiar with from the United Kingdom, was not matched in the European countries that they lived; in Daryl's words, this initial experience was often "culture shock". They witnessed the racism directed towards these countries' Citizens of Colour, their lack of representation in these privileged institutional spaces – describing how they often found themselves as the only Black or Brown face in the room – the lack of reckoning with colonial histories, and use of racial slurs in the workplace.

Kaamil talked about his experiences of being racialised in the process of trying to find work as a way of talking about the wider structural racism in Spanish society, something that he thought had been exacerbated by the recent independence referendum in Catalonia:

I kind of just wanted to get to know the academic scene a bit, feel my way in. And I sent my CV somewhere and I had a strange response back, and much later, I can't name my sources, but basically the reason why I had had quite a frosty response was because they thought I was looking for immigration papers and was trying to pull some scam ... But the difficulty here is if you think it is hard to talk about it in England here it is just impossible that racism could exist. They think that is something British people do and Americans.

What these accounts, and others like them describe is what Puwar (2004) has conceptualized as “space invaders”, as minority populations find themselves out of place in spaces deeply and uncritically vested with histories of whiteness. They report levels of everyday racism in Europe that are equal or more pronounced than what they had experienced in the United Kingdom.

But there is a further dimension of these experiences that require reflection; how being British permits them entry to these spaces in ways that others are denied. Suzanne's reflections clearly communicate this:

I took a taxi from the main station to go to where I live and got into conversation with the taxi driver and I think he was from Cameroon, but within a few minutes he was telling me about how he had lived in Belgium for quite a long time, more than 10 years, he is a guy who is a qualified engineer, had tried for a really long time to get jobs in his field, it just wasn't possible, he had done various small odd jobs and at the end of the day ended up driving a taxi. And you think what a waste. And in terms of the work that I do, working a lot where you are in contact with people in the European institutions, there are people who come from across the EU-27, if you see People of Colour, they tend to be either British or from France ... In terms of other European countries, let alone Eastern European countries, it is just in my 12 years working here I would say I have never met ... any black people or People of Colour from those countries ...

As reported in the Guardian, Brexit has been a cause of concern within these institutions because of its likely impact on the representation of People of Colour within the European Parliament (Rankin 2018); one of our interviewees reported attending a meeting focussed on #brusselsowhite, where it is stated that British People of Colour make up 60% of all People of Colour employed by and representatives of these institutions. However, it is also clear that the ambivalence that characterizes these Briton's relationships to Britishness shapes their ambiguous relationship to these European institutions. Their testimonies demonstrate their partial access to and inclusion

in spaces where other European People of Colour find themselves excluded. As they describe, they are both racialised and relatively privileged their Britishness and cultural capital derived from educational qualifications granting them access to spaces vested with colonial histories of whiteness. What these accounts of being out of place in the whiteness of Europe's institutions demonstrate is that quotidian racialization and racism are not exceptional to Britain.

### **Living in Europe as a person of Colour in a time of escalating racism**

Until now, we have given prominence in the paper to the structural and institutional racism that these British People of Colour experience in their everyday lives. This provides important context to experiences of racism and racial violence. While it is beyond the scope of the current article to explore fully how their experiences are further inflected by gender, class and ethnicity, *i. alia*, in this final section we point fleetingly to the specificities of these experiences.

For example, Kaamil, described how the security guards in his place of work in Spain had followed him into the toilets and quizzed about him what he was doing in the University despite the fact that he is a member of staff in the institution. British of Pakistani heritage, he attributed this experience to Islamophobia. Other men of south Asian descent also recalled being treated with suspicion in public spaces.

The Black women taking part in the research, described racist incidents as dehumanizing. Magalie reflected on her successive experiences of racism in Belgium, starting from being stopped by the police as a 9 year-old while walking in her neighbourhood, a gun pointed in her face; fainting in a shop at the age of 14, coming round and realizing that no one had tried to help, the shopkeeper not even offering help when she got to her feet unsteadily; and while she wanted to believe that Brussels has changed and "if my son banged his elbow and passed out people wouldn't walk past him on the street", she also recalled a recent experience where the young son of her Ugandan friend threw up in a café elsewhere in Belgium, and the café workers just slid a bucket and rag to her and said "Clean it up".

Masani, who worked in the creative industries and lived in Berlin evocatively described racism in Germany and other European Union countries as "different levels of atmospheric pressure ... I'm not going to go to certain countries because I'll get the bends". But, as the following account of a physical assault he had experienced in Berlin describes, he had adjusted to this pressure:

I've been physically assaulted in the street by two white women ... and I thought to myself if these women have the confidence to assault you

physically then what do the men have the confidence to do? ... [brand] is like a neo-Nazi clothing label, you see people wearing it at airports, it's like their little racist code ... people are Nazis in plain sight ... But what happens is, you know when you go on a plane, you're flying, your ears pop? You get accustomed to the altitude.

What becomes clear is that the structural and institutional racism reported earlier in the paper exist alongside these everyday experiences of racial violence in different European locations. Importantly, as the examples presented intimate, importantly, as the examples presented here intimate, these have been business as usual for those British People of Colour taking part in the research; they are not shocked and surprised by them, but present them instead in matter-of-fact terms, describing how they have learned to cope with these. This is in stark contrast to accounts that pitch Britain, and indeed other locations in and around Europe, as newly racist and xenophobic. What these recollections powerfully is that Britain is not understood as an exceptionally racist society but one among many.

## Conclusion

While Brexit may have amplified public understandings of racism and xenophobia, we have demonstrated that for British People of Colour racialization and racism are business as usual. The paper adopted paired strategy of countering both methodological nationalism and whiteness in research on Brexit through its focus on the views of British People of Colour living in the EU-27. This original empirical contribution supports an understanding of Brexit as unexceptional, located in the racial exclusions at the heart of British and European social formations. Indeed, the testimonies of the British People of Colour presented above demonstrate their perception that Brexit has taken the "masks off" ever-present racial exclusion, discrimination and racism in Britain. However, their accounts position this in relation to their personal experience of structural, institutional and everyday racism in other European locations. In shifting the geographical focus to Europe and actively listening to the accounts of these British migrants, we provide much-needed empirical grounding to theorizations that locate Brexit in longer European histories of racialization and racism.

This paper has offered a methodological and empirical intervention into the emergent body of social science scholarship focussed on Brexit. Its unique focus on the views of British People of Colour living in the EU-27, breaks new ground on critical social science research concerned with Brexit in two distinct ways. In the first instance, in introducing the views of a population whose views have been completely overlooked in academic commentary, it extends understandings of what Brexit means for and to those whose lives and futures fall within the scope of the Withdrawal Agreement.

Secondly, their testimonies demonstrate powerfully that it is important to remember that experiences of Brexit are shaped by personal experience; for these British People of Colour, Brexit is not a rupture but more of the same: lifelong experiences of structural, institutional and everyday racism. This sense of the continuation of the racism and exclusion experienced before and after Brexit is shared by some EU citizens living in the UK, notably Polish and others from post-accession states (see for example Rzepnikowska 2019; Lulle et al. 2019). However, it remains to be seen who among European citizens in the UK – a population reporting high levels and anxiety and hostility (Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019) – and British citizens living in the EU-27 will find themselves subjected to structural disadvantage and discrimination as their rights and entitlements are rewritten following Brexit, the new terms of their residence enforced by the nation-states in which they reside.

## Notes

1. While the latest report from the Office for National Statistics about the numbers of British citizens living in the EU-27 list this as 784,000, as O'Reilly (2018) has written, this is a conservative estimate. She posits instead a figure of 1.8 million – 3.6 million Britons who live and / or work in other EU member states and would likely be impacted by Brexit.
2. Find out more about the project at <https://brexitbritsabroad.com>.

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