



BREXIT BRITS ABROAD

Brexit Brits Abroad Podcast

Episode 45: Brexit, British People of Colour in the EU27 and Everyday Racism in Britain and Europe

First broadcast Monday 13th May 2019.

About the episode

This week, we're bringing you something a bit different. Recorded at the recent British Sociological Association conference, Michaela and Chantelle present their recently published work on what Brexit means to British People of Colour living in the EU27. This shifts focus to their experiences of Brexit and how this is located in personal histories of institutional, structural, state and everyday racism. As they argue, placing these narratives centerstage deepens understandings of the relationship between Brexit and racism, permitting a view into how it is caught up in longer histories of racism in Britain but also in Europe.

You can download this episode of the podcast at
<http://brexitbritsabroad.libsyn.com/brexit-british-people-of-colour-in-the-eu27-and-everyday-racism-in-britian-and-europe>

Transcript

Michaela Welcome back to the Brexit Brits Abroad podcast. I'm Dr Michaela Benson, a reader in sociology at Goldsmith's University of London and the research lead for a UK in a Changing Europe funded project that's all about what Brexit means for British citizens living in the EU 27. Today I wanted to bring you something a little different, I wanted you to see us in action as sociologists and the perfect opportunity came up a couple of weeks ago when Chantelle Lewis and I were presenting research from the project at the British Sociological Association. We recorded our paper for you to hear and listen to, and I thought that this would be an interesting experiment because it elaborates on a preoccupation that we've had over the course of the project which is with thinking critically about who counts as British and what do those understandings of Britishness do to the ways in which we understand Brexit. This paper has already been published in the journal Ethnic and Racial Studies and it focuses in particular on the case of British people of colour living and working in the EU 27 and asks what we might learn and understand better

about Brexit through the observations of their experiences. It seeks particularly to amplify their voices in a debate that has been dominated by some quite loud voices and seeks to further our understandings about how racism is caught up in Brexit in complex ways. In particular, it shows that through the observation of their lives which have been shaped by institutional, structural and everyday racism, we might deepen our understanding of the social forces that have produced Brexit, but importantly we might understand that these are forces that are not unique to Britain but are also at work in contemporary Europe. Take a listen and see what you think, and we'll be back in a couple of weeks with another episode.

Michaela So the first thing I want to say is that this is based on a paper that's already been published two weeks ago in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. We've got some paper copies for anyone who wants a bit of paper to take away with them. What we're going to focus on today is not the theoretical framing of the paper, there are several people in the room who we owe a great debt to because they are very prominent in our papers, so particularly Gurminder and Satnam have been very influential in shaping how we presented this, but we really wanted to amplify here the voices of the population who have been absent in the Brexit debate, but also in any kind of coverage of who the British are who live elsewhere in the world, Joel's already indicated for example that we fall into these very very ready narratives about who British people are who live abroad and we haven't been asking that question of who is the British when we're talking about these British populations. This is based on a bigger project that is all about British citizens who live abroad and Brexit, but I want to start with the voice of one of the people we've been working with.

Participant With Brexit people over here, they very rarely talk about what it's like, they'll talk about the economic side of it, they talk about the bureaucratic inconveniences with having to re-register and prove that you've lived consistently here, that you've been registered the whole time and that you work and all of this stuff but they don't consider how it heightens the existing racism that there is towards black British people across Europe or black people in general, but it's like your movements and your presence was already questionable and now people come to find you're British and a lot of Dutch people don't actually understand what Brexit means, they just think it means Britain's leaving the EU, that means all British people will become illegal immigrants. We already know that they kind of assume that if you're black and you're here that you must be an immigrant, even though the Dutch have quite a sizeable Afro-Dutch community, people that were born here. You know they just assume that you're an immigrant and that you're probably not documented and now I'm here and I'm British so it's like bringing all of these groups together, very messy complicated way. There is zero understanding, insight or solidarity of that at the forefront of the conversations about being British and being here within the British-May-Brexit moment.

Michaela So one of the things that we have been focusing on all the way through the project is in trying to move beyond the simple focus on citizens' rights which have been the focus of a lot of the discussions around British people who live abroad, for obvious reasons because these people do fall within the scope of the withdrawal agreement quite explicitly, and to ask

questions about how those transformations to people's rights are unevenly felt but within the context of their lives. And quite simply there is a very very simple narrative that gets communicated, which is around the removal of privileges from an already privileged population. But I think that what we're seeing very very clearly across the project is thinking about whose voices have been projected, whose voices are very prominent in that debate so Joel's already talked about some of the campaign groups, who's represented by those campaign groups and who is excluded from those, or who is not represented through those. It became very very clear from the clip that we just heard from Becks who lives in the Netherlands that actually she felt very clearly that the campaign groups did not speak for her, they did not understand her experiences, of having been a person of colour in Britain but also of what her experience of having been a person of colour living in another European country had been. So we wanted to ask the question which was, if we actually take seriously that question of who counts as British, when we're thinking about British citizens who live abroad in a time of Brexit, how might that contribute to the narrative about the relationship between racism and Brexit, how might it help us to think about Brexit not as an exceptionally British moment, but as something that we could locate within a longer history of European racialisation and racism, so our starting point right from setting up this project, and we've done this in various different ways, has been to take that starting point and to say okay, who is the British when we're talking about British citizens who live in Europe.

Chantelle

From both a personal and academic viewpoint, pre and post EU referendum, we've been concerned with how predominantly the Brexit narration has been a white narration of Brexit, so those who have British citizenship that are also people of colour should never have been neglected when we were looking at Brexit and how we make sense of the vote to leave the European Union and the consequences for this decision, but they have been continuously in both public and academic forums, media outlets etc, so in the back of our minds, whilst we conducted this research, the question has been where were and where are the British people of colour that live within the EU 27 within public discussions of Brexit. For me, when applying to work on this project, at the forefront of my thinking in relation to British citizens living in the EU 27 was the fact that I know a load of black British people that live in Spain and the Netherlands, and I was thinking what are they thinking about this situation, like how is this affecting them, why are their voices not being heard. In the process of recruiting and sampling I've interviewed thirty different British people of colour that live within eight different nations, there's more details about it in the paper. People were openly saying to Michaela and I and Karen and Catherine, but British people of colour wouldn't move to the EU because why would they move to these racist predominantly white countries and I was like well Britain's really racist and we live here, so Britain is multiracial and so because of that British citizens living within the EU 27 are also going to be multiracial, so in identifying this sample and these populations, we've used the term people of colour and in the paper we break this down. We've used the term people of colour and it is a really imperfect term, particularly when we're talking about processes of racialisation and racism because we know these processes vary across different racialised populations, so we really didn't want this to go unacknowledged, I'll talk a bit about that in a minute, but we were clear from

the outset that this wasn't about essentialising these populations but more about showing what they have in common and that was their experiences of racism whilst living in these EU 27 countries that were not brought about by Brexit.

Michaela And I should say that this is positioned within a predominant story that we hear from I would say the vast majority of the white British people that we speak to with a very very few exceptions, and their story about Brexit is one that's probably familiar to quite a lot of us in the room, which is Brexit as Britain's racist moment, a kind of turning point, and they're shocked and outraged at the idea that rights could be removed from people, revealing exactly their lack of knowledge and understanding of the extent to which for some people in Britain there has always been a question about whether the rights they have now will either be upheld or be removed or be deprived from them, but people who'd always had their right to be in the places that they lived and worked questioned were completely absent, any understanding or recognition of that is just not present in the predominant narrative, that you get from large swathes of the British remain voting white citizen community who live in the European Union. So actually even within these kind of frames of reference as being outraged about Britain leaving the European Union as Joel already intimated, some of these longer histories have just been completely wiped out, and with it any understanding of the sense in which Europe might be a racist place too, so they present Britain as what an awful terrible place Britain has become since I left and yet they live in some countries which also have very present and current racist equally or, well as equally racist as Britain.

Chantelle So what's really important here is that I used the same interview guides as Karen, Michaela and Catherine and Mike were using for their predominantly white citizens living in the EU 27 but the interview always took a totally different path. Brexit for the British people of colour was positioned as something familiar and synonymous with Britain and Europe's long histories of racism that they have experienced on both an institutional and interpersonal level. Racialisation and racism, regardless of Brexit, would be centre stage in their interview narration, and before the interview we were unaware that the racialisation and racism that the participants had experienced both prior and after Brexit would be central to how they made sense of their position at the moment. To be clear, and we state this within the paper, we do break down, in order to recognise how this plays out, we do break down the experiences of different people of colour so whilst describing some of the racist stories they shared, so for example the majority of women I interviewed who were of African or Caribbean heritage, narrated the racism they'd experienced in accordance with processes of dehumanisation that we know is a familiar form of prejudice and discrimination used against black women, and further there was also clear cases of Islamophobia that played out through surveillance.

Kamil It's hard to tell, the reason why it's hard to tell, which is that you just had so few people of colour in higher education and academia. I don't know in that respect because I've got no-one else I can compare myself to or even someone I can talk to about it. The closest I've got is like some of the Latinos I hear, in that they feel it the same, maybe some of them have more experience of different institutions or whatever. I think there's definitely things that are specific to me,

I'm a visible Muslim as well, I have a beard and, I mean I don't make a big song and dance about it but it's great to hear for my name as well and so yeah there's stuff. I give an example, I'm nearly 40 years old, I have two kids and I'm fairly established in my own little field, and I went up into university one day and I was followed by security, right to toilet – I knew it was like, what are you doing here? But I kind of watched the security for a while, just to see am I the only one they stop --- and I literally was the only person who got stopped. Things like that. And my students, some of them, maybe they're walking round, maybe they saw it I don't know, so that delegitimises as you, you see, on top of everything else.

Chantelle Kamil's describing he's a university lecturer and describing being followed by on-site security who were asking him what he was doing, he's a lecturer, he had to explain himself and then he was searched. But what we're trying to make clear is that racialisation and racism and racial violence are not unique to Britain and rather are not unique to Brexit. We're not trying to make a point about which is worse, we're saying that the problem is with Europe. Europe is a white project and one dedicated to the exclusion of people of colour who are racialised outsiders.

Michaela **And what we do through the paper as we go through and we talk about the experiences of structural and institutional racism and we close with discussions of explicit experiences of racial violence and harassment, including at least one case of violence experienced by a black British man in Germany from the ASE but we also, and the reason we're closing with this quotation, which is on the slide, is because they also talk about state racism in the accounts of their experiences in these parts of the world, and it's probably unsurprising to many people in the room that this is what happens, but we thought it was very important that we brought these alternative narratives about Brexit and how this is located within this to the fore. And this is from Magaly who lives in Belgium, who had actually grown up in Belgium and many other parts of Europe and this is her experience as a 9 year old child walking in the street in Belgium, and actually she went on to talk about, this was an experience that she talked about at the age of 9, she talks about another experience where she's collapsed in a shop at the age of 14, and an even more recent experience where she had been out with her son in a restaurant and her son had unfortunately vomited in the, on the way into the restaurant, and the women behind the counter had not offered any help at all, they had just literally kicked a bucket over to her to clean up, so we thought it was really important just to bring these narratives to the fore, so that they can become part of the broader way in which we try to complicate understandings of Brexit.**

You've been listening to the Brexit Brits Abroad podcast, hosted by me, Dr Michaela Benson, and produced by Emma Houlton at art of podcast. The series is part of a UK in a Changing Europe funded research project, Brexit Brits Abroad, that's all about what Brexit means for UK citizens living in the EU 27. We're really keen to hear from you about the issues and concerns we address in the programme, so please do get in touch with any thoughts, queries and questions. You can find our contact details on our web page [brexitbritsabroad](https://www.brexitbritsabroad.com), or get in touch via social

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