



# The cultural politics of racism in the Brexit conjuncture

**Nikolay Mintchev**

Institute for Global Prosperity, University College London, UK

## Abstract

Critiques of racism figure prominently in debates about Brexit's causes and consequences. But while racism is often theorized in its social and political dimensions, it has received little attention as a concept that has become entangled in a cycle of contestations, denials and affirmations. By looking at racism's conceptual dimension, with its multiple contested meanings, this article examines the impact that racism-related critiques and counter-critiques of Brexit have had on people's political subject-positions. Drawing on case studies of both Leavers and Remainers, it is argued that the common binary view of Brexit as either racist or legitimate fails to resonate with the multiple and complex experiences of people on the ground. The article concludes with a call for a renewed conversation about Brexit on the basis of context-specific experiences and pathways to better futures for communities across the country.

## Keywords

Brexit, identity politics, performativity, racism, UK politics

Critiques of racism have played a central role in the UK's debates about Brexit both within and outside academic discourse. Following the outcome of the 2016 referendum in which a small majority of 51.9% voted to leave the European Union (EU), a number of academics critiqued Brexit for its various links to racism: 'Whatever else Brexit means or does not mean, it certainly means racism' (Sivanandan, quoted in Burnett, 2017: 85); 'Brexit and its aftermath have been overdetermined by racism, including racist violence' (Virdee and McGeever, 2017: 1802). Academic and non-governmental organization reports about Brexit reflected this concern with titles such as *Whiteness, Britishness, and the Racist Reality of Brexit* (Bowler, 2017) and *Challenging Racism after the EU*

---

## Corresponding author:

Nikolay Mintchev, Institute for Global Prosperity, University College London, 7th Floor, Maple House, 149 Tottenham Court Road, London, W1T 7NF, UK.

Email: [n.mintchev@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:n.mintchev@ucl.ac.uk)

*Referendum* (Trades Union Congress, 2016). The mainstream news media also participated in the conversation about racism by reporting a post-referendum rise in hate crimes targeting East Europeans and other ethnic minorities: for example, ‘Racism rising since Brexit vote, nationwide study reveals’ (Booth, 2019); ‘Brexit “major influence” in racism and hate crime rise’ (BBC, 2019).

Critiques and reports such as these are responses to racist acts – harassment, stigmatization, and violence targeting migrants and minorities – as well as the political and social context that has empowered such acts. However, within the register of discourse and discursive practice, such critiques have been challenged by counter-critiques of Brexit as a ‘legitimate’ political project and caught up in a polemical cycle of denial and affirmation of racism that is at the crux of the seemingly irreconcilable opposition between Leavers and Remainers. Critiques of Brexit’s racism, together with counter-critiques of Brexit as non-racist and legitimate, have become an integral part of the deadlock between Leave and Remain supporters, whereby each side fails to establish productive engagement with the other.

In this article I explore how racism operates as a concept (rather than a social process), that is contested, denied and affirmed in specific ways that contribute to and consolidate social polarization within the Brexit conjuncture. A conjuncture, as Stuart Hall defines it, is ‘a period during which the different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society come together to give it a specific and distinctive shape’ (Hall and Massey, 2010: 57). The Brexit conjuncture, in my view, began in the early 2010s (when Eurosceptic narratives and demands for a referendum gained prominence in public discourse) and is still ongoing at the time of writing (late 2019) given that the UK is yet to agree on its terms of departure from the EU. This conjuncture can be characterized by a number of key features, which, while exhibiting numerous continuities with long-established social, political, and economic trends, also represent a degree of transformation and novelty. These key features include the aforementioned polarization within the nation’s social and political fabric; empowerment of populist and anti-immigrant voices in public discourse; an emergence of new forms of xenophobia targeting immigrants from Eastern Europe; a growing preoccupation with the impact of the EU on the UK’s economy, immigration laws and sovereignty; and a continuation of massive economic and social inequalities, supported by austerity-driven cuts to welfare and public services throughout most of the 2010s.

The social polarization of the Brexit conjuncture warrants some additional attention here. The implications of the UK’s membership in the EU are extremely complex, and so are the reasons for which people opted to support one side or the other in the referendum. The categories of Leaver and Remain are not coherent and stable subject-positions (Clarke and Newman, 2019). For example, while the Leave vote is often associated with cultural conservatism on the political right, some people on the left also expressed Eurosceptic views (the so-called ‘Lexit’ position) on the basis of their discontent with the EU’s neoliberal economic policies among other issues (Buckledee, 2018: 38–40). Trajectories of support for Leave and Remain also differed between the UK’s four countries – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – each of which has different experiences of migration, political sovereignty and economic policy. Furthermore, while post-referendum analyses revealed that Leave and Remain voters tended to differ in age,

ethnicity and class (Ashcroft, 2016; Goodwin and Heath, 2016), these factors did not fully determine people's decision in the vote. Leave voters were on average older and with lower educational attainment. They were also predominantly White English and Welsh, and in working-class and middle-class occupations. Yet many younger voters supported Leave (about one quarter of 18–24s and over one third of 25–34s), as did many people with university degrees (slightly over two fifths), and a significant proportion of ethnic minorities (one third of Asian voters and one quarter of Black voters, among others) (Ashcroft, 2016).

However, one of the main problems with the Leave and Remain campaigns prior to the referendum, as well as with the referendum itself and the media discussions afterwards, was that they reduced the complexity of issues to a simple binary choice between Leave and Remain. This augmented the symbolic terrain through which people identified as political subjects. Leave and Remain became dominant political categories, and this polarized not only political discussions, but also the ways in which people experienced their political identities and commitments in relation to those of others (see Clarke and Newman, 2019: 72; Mintchev and Moore, 2019). In the aftermath of the referendum, the Leave–Remain binary became firmly entrenched as a central organizing principle of political experience. In fact, the salience of this binary became so strong that it led to a widespread willingness to accept the use of physical violence in the name of leaving or remaining. This was discovered in 2019 by the Future of England Survey carried out by YouGov, which found that in England, Scotland and Wales majorities of both Remain and Leave supporters saw violence and physical injury as ‘a price worth paying’ in the political dispute over Brexit (Jones, 2019).

The reason that racism figures so prominently within this conjuncture is that immigration was a major political issue for the Leave campaign in the run-up to 2016. What is more, the referendum's outcome catalysed a sharp rise in xenophobic narratives, harassment and physical violence, targeting primarily East Europeans but also other ethnic minorities. This led to a flurry of criticism of the Brexit campaign and the violence it empowered and encouraged.

One particularly formidable challenge within the broader conversation on racism is that of generalization and loss of nuance in the process of communication and interpretation. While it is true that numerous commentaries and analyses have made sweeping statements about the racist nature of Brexit as a whole, many others have presented carefully nuanced analyses. The latter have drawn attention to the racist undertones and consequences of dominant pro-Leave narratives and imagery, as well as their shared traits with historical forms of racist exclusion. Yet, I would argue that even the most nuanced analyses are highly susceptible to being distorted and misinterpreted as generalized accusations of racism against Brexit and its supporters. One reason for this is that the concept of racism carries with it powerful critical connotations and a heavy historical legacy, which make people hyper-sensitive to any claims that associate them with the term, no matter how meticulously direct accusation is avoided. Another reason is that within the Brexit conjuncture, a culture of political frustration and mutual recrimination between Leave and Remain supporters has further heightened this sensitivity to accusation (see Mintchev and Moore, 2019). Right-wing populists, as discussed below, have both taken advantage of this divisiveness and contributed to it by presenting

anti-racism as the remit of a 'liberal elite' that antagonizes 'the people' and their democratic will (Pitcher, 2019).

Studies and commentaries on Brexit have primarily addressed racism as a social phenomenon – namely, as a reality that pertains to people, practices and ideas – but they have paid little attention to the fact that the meaning of racism is defined and redefined through contested practices of pointing out, explaining and critiquing racism, as well as denying it, which in turn shape social (and psychic) reality. In contrast to this approach, I am concerned with racism as both a social reality and a critical concept whose contested meanings shape lived experience.

Drawing on a range of arguments that both critique and defend Brexit, I attempt to engage with different subject-positions and focus on the dynamics and effects of their tensions, rather than making a case for my own view, which, for the sake of transparency, I admit is pro-Remain. With this approach in mind, I dedicate the next section to arguing for the importance of understanding the dynamics of racism as a concept at the level of discursive practice. I do this by describing how the concept of racism and the transformation of its meaning have historically shaped the social and political experience of power and injustice.

In the two sections that follow, I examine racism as a politically charged concept with reference to two specific themes – the performativity of the concept and the debatability/deniability of its meaning. In terms of performativity, I show that critiques of racism aimed at Leave supporters are often experienced as adversarial acts. Calling someone racist or associating them with racism can be seen as a dismissal of their legitimate concerns, whatever these may be. Similarly, calling anti-racist critiques into question can be seen as a dismissal of victims' right to express their legitimate grievances against racism – something that in itself is seen as a form of racism that confirms and exacerbates the original racist transgression. The outcome is a spiralling impasse between incommensurable, yet mutually reinforcing, claims to express and defend one's position. Racism and legitimacy are conventionally treated as mutually exclusive terms in a zero-sum game: an idea, demand or action can be either racist or legitimate, but never both. Calling a person a racist in particular is often experienced as a performative act that discredits the addressee, and, in doing so, establishes an antagonistic relation to him or her. This performative dimension of the concept of racism – its propensity to delegitimize and discredit – prompts equally performative responses that seek to defend the legitimacy of the subject accused of racism. In such instances, debates, or rather polemics, about racism in the Brexit conjuncture become about the subject-position of individuals with specific political views, rather than the more structurally and institutionally embedded inequalities that have been identified in the UK since at least the 1980s (e.g. Hall, 1996). Admittedly, this is more often the case in media discourses than in academic writing, but academic critiques of the Leave campaign as racist are frequently (mis)interpreted as implying that Leave voters are racist (in virtue of their support for a racist project), no matter how careful they are to avoid stating this explicitly.

Next, I consider the closely related problem of racism's debatability and deniability (Hesse, 2004; Lentin, 2016; Titley, 2016), as well as its affirmability (its ability to be affirmed in the face of denial). Here, I draw attention to the multiple and contested meanings of racism as a condition for both affirming and denying that racism is at work. What it means to be racist, what constitutes a legitimate concern, and who gets to define racism

and legitimacy are all political questions linked to power and authority. With no established consensus on these issues of definition, the opposition between racism and legitimacy is an opposition between ‘floating signifiers’ with no agreed meaning that can serve as a starting point of effective dialogue. Thus, the definition of racism and its applicability to specific people, practices and ideas is often open to debate, denial and affirmation, and the high reputational stakes of being labelled a racist – or, conversely, having one’s claims about racism dismissed – make contestation likely, if not inevitable.

In the final section of the article I consider existing ethnographic accounts of how people on the ground experience Brexit. While on one level hostility against migrants and minorities has become commonplace in many communities across the country, on another level anti-racist critiques of Brexit are failing to resonate with Leave supporters. This, I suggest, calls for a rethinking of current critiques of Brexit and a move towards a localized research agenda that rejects polarization, while acknowledging the consequences of polarizing discourse in different social contexts across the UK.

## **The political life of the concept of racism**

Historically, the phenomenon of racism pre-dates the emergence of the concept, yet once the concept of racism emerged people’s experience of the phenomenon was fundamentally altered. Barnor Hesse (2004, 2011) makes this point convincingly by drawing attention to the history of the term ‘racism’ and its uses in transforming popular perceptions of racial injustices. Hesse points out that the entry of ‘racism’ into common language occurred in the 1930s to describe Nazism in Germany (see also Taguieff, 2001: ch. 3). This equation of racism with Nazism had very specific consequences for the way in which different regimes of oppression across the world were taken into consideration as objects of knowledge and critique. Racism, according to Hesse, was a Eurocentric concept which, while supporting the critique of Nazism, also posited a conceptual split between Nazism, on the one hand, and the experience of colonized people and African Americans on the other:

It is perhaps unusual to consider the concept of racism as a social construction, yet its appearance during the 1930s and 1940s in the lexicon of ardent European and American opponents of the Nazi regime posited an object that had not previously existed in the discrete terms conferred on it by such a conceptualization. For this critique of race to emerge, its indictment of race had to be disarticulated from a primary association with the routine colonial landscapes of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Oceania, and inserted into the spaces and problematics of Europe [ . . . ]. (Hesse, 2011: 159)

This ‘disarticulation’ meant that in the aftermath of the Second World War struggles for social justice that evoked the concept of racism had to rely on appropriating and adapting the concept as it was established with reference to Nazi ideas and practices (eugenics, biological hierarchy, nationalist militarism and mass murder, among others). This, according to Hesse, was a process of ‘conceptual mimesis’ in which non-European critiques of racism often modelled themselves on the Eurocentric notion of racism – as paradigmatically exemplified by Nazi Germany – in order to legitimate their claims (Hesse, 2004: 14, 2011: 168). Although early sociological works in the US had made

reference to 'race prejudice' and 'the color line' prior to the Second World War, it was only after the war that 'racism' as a concept entered the lexicon of African American activists (Hesse, 2011: 169), and only in the 1960s, during the civil rights movement, that it entered mainstream language as a term describing the experience of African Americans (Fredrickson, 2002: 167). Today's consensus that Jim Crow and Apartheid are also historically significant and paradigmatic examples of racism is relatively recent:

It is only in postcolonial retrospect, from the US civil rights movement to the South African anti-apartheid movement, that it seems the Black experience of racism has been either primary or always conceptually significant in western political and academic discourse. (Hesse, 2004: 16)

The point of approaching racism as a social and historical construct is not to downplay its social and political reality, as some people might interpret it; while considering 'race' as a social construct usually means that the biological essentialism that often underpins racist thought is a fiction, looking at racism as a construct is not to challenge its imposing social and political existence. The point, instead, is to look at racism from a wider theoretical angle – not just as a reality that is either present or not, but also as a multiple and contested concept that is inherently tied to power and politics when it comes to its definitions, uses and discursive effects. In the context of Brexit, the question I pose in this article is not whether the referendum has created a more hostile, abusive and violent environment for migrants and minorities (which, as evidence shows, it undoubtedly has); nor whether race, particularly whiteness, played a role in people's aspirations for greater sovereignty and reduction of immigration (which it surely did). The question that interests me instead is what happens when this reality is articulated through the language of racism and caught up in discourses about the racist or legitimate nature of Brexit. This is an empirical question that requires attentiveness to context (after all, Brexit is fundamentally different from Nazism, colonialism, Apartheid and Jim Crow). My concern is that many of the academic and public discourses about Brexit as a racist or legitimate project have been caught up in a deadlock of polarization, while failing to shift public opinion on ethnic/racial inclusion and equality, and other Brexit-related issues. This is why support for Remain and Leave has remained stable, with little change in public opinion since 2016 (Curtice, 2019). Needless to say, populist rhetoric has played an important part in mobilizing support for Leave, as made evident in the 2019 parliamentary election which saw a landslide win for a pro-Leave Conservative government. Additionally, however, pro-Remain voices, including anti-racist ones, seemingly have been unable to connect with Leave voters and garner support among those not already converted.

## **Racism vs legitimacy: the performative dimension of a debate**

The concept of racism has been instrumental in the fight against racial, ethnic, and religious discrimination. Despite a clear historical association with equality and inclusion, however, certain uses of the concept, especially in the context of Brexit, have been interpreted as adversarial on the grounds that they associate their addressees with ignorance

and/or moral failure. The racist subject is perceived as a pathological subject; its racism is seen as the result of something that has gone awry – a cultural, cognitive or emotional anomaly (see Hesse, 2004: 10; Taguieff, 2001: 13–14). Labelling someone racist can be seen as an attempt to pathologize, and thus to defame, dismiss, silence and censor that person, rather than to invite them to a conversation (Gest, 2016; Goodman, 2010). As Justin Gest (2016: 72–3, 2018: 63–6) points out in his ethnography of white working-class Britons on the outskirts of London, accusations of racism were often viewed by his interlocutors as a ‘mute button’ intended to silence their voices. Such experiences of censorship are part of a larger culture of what Owen Jones (2011: 117–18) has referred to as ‘anti-racist chav-bashing’, in which members of the white working class are routinely derided, moralized and dismissed as uneducated racists (see also Biressi and Nunn, 2013: 142; Rhodes, 2013: 51).

White British working-class people have long been stereotyped as racists *par excellence* – and, more generally, as the embodiment of socially and politically dysfunctional whiteness. However, in the context of Brexit, the derogatory attribution of racism to others has expanded to the wider demographic of white Leave supporters, most of whom are in middle-class occupations but with little experience of, or appreciation for, multicultural urban life (Clarke and Newman, 2017; Dorling and Tomlinson, 2019). The insulting term ‘chav’ which associates white working-class people with ‘unemployment, welfare dependency, drug and alcohol abuse, criminality, promiscuity, family breakdown, poor consumptive tastes, high rates of illegitimacy, racism, and moral and embodied degeneracy’ (Rhodes, 2013: 23) has declined in popularity as a designator of dysfunctional whiteness, and given way to the concept of ‘gammon’ which is said to refer to ‘angry, middle-aged, white Brexiters – presumably made red in the face by all their fury, bigotry and nationalism’ (Noor, 2018). The act of associating Brexit and its supporters with bigotry/racism in this way amounts to throwing their legitimacy into question. Claiming that Brexit is a political project supported by racist and bigoted individuals amounts to saying that it is based on moral failure and/or ignorance, neither of which is a particularly desirable quality.

Responses to such widespread accusations and stereotyping, however, have rarely focused on countering the claim that hostility and prejudice towards immigrants and minorities is part of the Brexit ethos. In fact, they have left the problem of racism unaddressed. Rather, they have made a case that Brexit, together with the closely linked demand to curb immigration into the UK, should be taken seriously as ‘legitimate concerns’. One way to interpret such responses is to see them as deflections: the issue of racism is cast aside – deflected – and replaced with talk about the legitimacy of holding one view or another. A second interpretation is to see them as performative responses to a performative gesture, namely, as defences of legitimacy in response to attempted delegitimation. From this perspective, both sides see each other as deflecting from the ‘real’ issue – one side deflecting from the ‘legitimate concerns’, the other from the problem of racism.

So what do such responses look like? Consider, for example, the following excerpt from an interview on Brexit and immigration given by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby:

There is a tendency to say ‘those people are racist’, which is just outrageous, absolutely outrageous [. . .]. Fear is a valid emotion at a time of such colossal crisis. This is one of the

greatest movements of people in human history. Just enormous. And to be anxious about that is very reasonable. In fragile communities particularly [. . .] there is a genuine fear: what happens about housing? What happens about jobs? What happens about access to health services? There is a genuine fear. (Welby, 2016)

Welby's intervention opposes racism to 'genuine fear' as a 'valid emotion', implying that the two are mutually exclusive: if one's fear of immigration is genuine and legitimate, then it cannot be racist at the same time, according to him.

Similar defences of immigration concerns have also been put forth by academics. For example, Tom Simpson, a political philosopher at Oxford University, makes the following claim about Brexit supporters and immigration: 'Leavers have been generally accused of racism or being in bed with racists. And this because many think that controlling immigration matters [. . .]. What is needed is clear articulation of the reasons why, without any hint of racism, you could be concerned about immigration' (Simpson, 2016). Simpson then goes on to argue that the ability to control immigration is fundamental for a functioning democratic society. He offers three reasons for which this is the case. The first is that such ability is 'one of the fundamental prerogatives of a sovereign nation' (Simpson, 2016). In order to have sovereignty, a country must be able to control who can and cannot enter its territory. The second reason is that mass migration undermines social cohesion and people's sense of belonging. Finally, Simpson's third argument is that democracy is based on trust, which, in turn, is based on a sense of peoplehood. If mass migration undermines the nation's community spirit, then it also undermines the trust that is necessary for a genuinely democratic society. The article then concludes by reiterating that concern about immigration is 'legitimate': 'What I have been trying to do is to articulate the reasons why this should be a matter of legitimate concern in the first place' (2016).

Both Welby's and Simpson's claims could be readily challenged. For example, if the source of worry about immigration is vulnerability and not racism, then why were vulnerable minorities significantly less likely to vote for Leave than their White British counterparts (Bhambra, 2017)? If immigration always undermines social cohesion, then why are there communities that thrive as a result of immigration and see diversity as a public good (Mintchev and Moore, 2017, 2018)? If Brexit is said to be legitimate because halting immigration ought to boost trust among the public, then does the social polarization between Remain and Leave supporters since 2016 mean that Brexit is now less legitimate? The point, however, is not to argue whether Welby, Simpson and others who make similar arguments are right or wrong, but to show how racism and legitimacy are locked in a zero-sum game. Arguing that concerns about immigration are not racist and making the case that they are legitimate is one and the same thing for both commentators. These are intellectual arguments, clearly, but they also have a performative function, which is to defend Leavers and their concern for immigration against perceived attempts to discredit them as racist.

## **What is racism? The debatability/deniability of the concept's meaning**

Racism, then, is clearly antithetical to 'legitimate', 'valid' and 'reasonable' concerns. However, when it comes to providing a definition of the concept there is very little

agreement about what counts as racism (Song, 2014). Identifying racism is a contested and inconclusive process which is inseparable from divergent and politically charged definitions of the term. In the context of Brexit, the question of whether opposition to immigration (as discussed in the aforementioned examples) is racist or not can have no answer that exists outside of political discourses and power structures. Any attempt to construct an argument about the racist or non-racist reality of anti-immigration views must start from specific, and inevitably political, constructs of both 'racism' and 'legitimacy'. This means that there is no 'objective truth' or 'real answer' to the question of whether opposing immigration is racist, or whether Brexit is racist. Practices of exposing and critiquing, as well as denying, racism rely on often-implicit definitions of racism which serve as criteria for making a judgement on the matter. In fact, contestation over the definition of racism has been a big part of the political work done by the multiple forms of racism identified by academics and activists since the 1960s. Theories of 'institutional racism' (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1968), 'colour-blind racism' (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), 'xeno-racism' (Fekete, 2001) and 'cultural racism' (Taguieff, 1990), among others, can all be seen as attempts to redefine the boundaries of what racism means, often in response to new forms of power and exclusion and in the face of staunch conservative opposition.

The process of redefining racism is characterized by what Barnor Hesse (2004) calls the 'double bind' of conceptual inclusion and exclusion. Hesse argues that the inclusion of new experiences within the conceptual framework of racism relies on the articulation of equivalences between paradigmatic cases of racism and the new experiences that seek inclusion in the concept. This articulation leads to a double process in which both the concept and the experience are transformed: on the one hand, paradigmatic understandings of racism change because they expand beyond their original meaning; on the other hand, categorizing new experiences as racism leads to reductionism, whereby the heterogeneity and complexity of the new experiences in question are inadvertently compromised (see also Taguieff, 2001: 82–3). Hesse, again, makes this argument with reference to the historical inclusion of colonialism and the African American experience into the western discourse on racism:

once the concept of racism became universalised (internationalised), beyond the particular paradigmatic experience (nationalism, Nazism, the Holocaust) in which it was initialised, it could be and was subject to conceptual claims for inclusion by 'other' particularised experiences (e.g., US racial segregation, European colonialism). A conceptual logic emerged where what became foregrounded (exclusion, discrimination, ghettoisation, exterminations) supplied the conceptual resources to translate 'other' experiences into the vaunted paradigmatic template. [ . . . ] [T]he paradigmatic experience underwriting the concept (valorised for its theoretical and political insights) incorporates the experiences of 'others' where they approximate to the 'originating' insights and at the same time proscribes these 'other' experiences where they resist translation and challenge the 'originating' insights. (Hesse, 2004: 14)

The simultaneous equivalence and discrepancy between 'paradigmatic' and 'other' experiences leaves room for competing claims of denial and affirmation. Whether the 'other' experience counts as racism depends on how convincingly and successfully it can be articulated as racism in a way that transforms the latter's conceptual boundaries.

Critiques of Brexit as a racist political project have closely followed the logic of drawing equivalences, and they have also faced formidable contestation. Racism today is paradigmatically understood to include hatred, segregation, discrimination, derogatory racial epithets, violence and murder based on race/ethnicity. This list of items has become the kernel of racism that functions as a reference point for those who try to shield themselves from being seen as racist (on the grounds of their anti-immigration or other exclusionary views), as well as those who try to expose, demystify and critique racism.

Opposition to immigration, as suggested earlier, is typically justified through ‘legitimate’ issues such as sovereignty, jobs, welfare, public services and community life – issues that are about quality of life with no explicit link to race or any of the aforementioned markers of what is seen as racism proper (see Jones et al., 2017: 135; Valluvan, 2016: 2246). This practice of articulating one’s intolerance of otherness through proxies – a practice which has a long and ongoing history of justifying xenophobia and ethnic/racial exclusion – enables a denial of any existing link between anti-immigration sentiment on the one hand, and cultural, ethnic or racial grievances on the other. This denial in turn shields anti-immigration sentiments from being indicted as racist, and it also allows the expression of cultural/ethnic/racial grievances in a language that political stakeholders are more likely to engage with (see Kaufmann, 2019: 166–9).

However, denials that anti-immigration sentiments have anything to do with racism can be countered by affirmations that they actually do have something to do with it. Although opposition to immigration may be presented in non-racist terms, the extent to which racial/ethnic prejudice informs people’s views remains debatable, which means that it can be affirmed as much as denied. Critics of Brexit have made use of this debatability by highlighting the elements that resonate most closely with the public’s understanding of racism proper. The post-referendum increase in violence against migrants and minorities has been evoked as a ‘confirmation’ or proof of Brexit’s relationship to race and racism. For example: ‘If confirmation were needed that the case for Brexit was intimately bound up with questions of race, it was to be found in the wave of racist hate unleashed against migrants as well as the long-established black and brown British’ (Virdee and McGeever, 2018: 1807; see also Burnett, 2017; Guma and Dafydd Jones, 2018). UKIP’s ‘Breaking Point’ poster, unveiled during the referendum campaign, has also been commonly referenced as evidence of racist foul play. This poster, which depicted a column of people (presumably intending to migrate to the UK), drew immediate public attention as soon as it was unveiled, and was heavily criticized for its strong resemblance to Nazi propaganda imagery (Bartlett, 2016).

References to hate crimes and Nazi-like imagery have been presented as expressions of a racist kernel, often assumed to permeate the whole of Brexit’s politics and ideology. They have been treated as anchorage points that link Brexit and its supporters to racism. The so-called ‘legitimate concerns’ about health care, jobs, sovereignty, loss of community and so forth – insofar as they are expressed by Leave supporters – have subsequently been perceived as disguises for an underlying Brexit racism that has revealed its true nature through hate crimes and Nazi-like imagery. This strategy of defining Brexit as racist relies on the use of a narrow definition of racism to argue for a wider definition of the term. By emphasizing instances that represent what is commonly seen as racism *par excellence* and tying them to a larger set of practices and beliefs that are associated with Brexit and its advocates,

the critique of racism expands the remit of the concept to include anything from complaints about cultural change to disillusionment with European integration.

Critics of this widening of the concept have called for more constrained and moderate use of the term (e.g. Goodhart, 2017; Kaufmann, 2019; Miles and Brown, 2003). David Goodhart, for example, has put it as follows:

Racism [. . .] has come to refer to any kind of racial stereotyping or mild partiality towards an in-group [. . .]. Race activists and some people on the left want the widest and loosest possible definition in the mistaken belief that this somehow contributes to the elimination of racism [. . .]. By describing as racist everything from ethnic cleansing to national citizen preference and the greater comfort people (of all backgrounds) often feel in settled communities among people they are familiar with, the term loses precision and force and ends up calling into question what most people regard as normal human feelings. We need to use far more careful terminology to describe the spectrum from fear of the unfamiliar and clannishness to stereotyping and genuine hatred. (Goodhart, 2017: 32)

This statement – with its blatant omission of structural racial inequalities – is a call to treat racism as something that is more contained, rather than using it to describe any and every preference for an in-group or aspiration for sovereignty. According to this logic, while Leave voters may have been responsible for hate crimes, and Nigel Farage may have unveiled an inappropriate and dangerous poster, these incidents should not be used to indict all of the 17.4 million people who opted to leave in the referendum. The hate crimes in question, according to this view, should be seen as the deeds of racists who were empowered by the referendum's outcome, but they should not be used to reduce all Brexit aspirations to bigotry and racism.

Ardent Leave campaigners, however, have been more aggressive in their critique. In the wake of the 2016 referendum, criticism of Brexit prompted Leavers to stereotype Remainers as anti-democratic, out of touch with reality, and scaremongers (Meredith and Richardson, 2019a, 2019b: 51). The referendum was a democratic vote and efforts to delegitimize it by calling it racist were seen as assaults on the majority's democratic decision. Remainers have thus been seen as unable to accept their loss and as stubbornly trying to undermine democracy by misrepresenting the majority of voters as racists, while defending allegedly unsustainable mass migration. Furthermore, as Ben Pitcher (2019) has recently argued, the pro-Brexit far right has been quite successful in presenting the Leave–Remain division as an opposition between 'the people' and the anti-democratic 'liberal elite'. In this context, the far right can articulate any critical association of Brexit with racism as a sweeping liberal accusation that 'the people' are racist. Anti-racist rhetoric, then, has been used by Farage and other Leave campaigners to portray the 'liberal elite' as out of touch with reality, and as conspiring to discredit, silence and insult 'the people' and their democratic decision to leave the EU.

## **Experiencing Brexit on the ground**

How, then, do discourses about Brexit's racism and legitimacy correspond to realities on the ground? The evidence suggests that the dialogue on racism/legitimacy stands at odds with the complexity of people's social, political and psychic realities, but it also

shapes those realities. Recent ethnographic and interview-based studies have pointed to a multitude of experiences, ranging from encounters of unapologetic racist hostility and xenophobia, to aspirations for national and communal belonging. The binary nature of existing discourses – stipulating that Brexit is either racist or not (with no room for anything in between) – misrepresents this complexity, but in doing so contributes to social and political polarization (see Clarke and Newman, 2019).

Remain supporters are generally concerned that Brexit would lead to a rise in ethnic nationalism that challenges the UK's cosmopolitan ethos of equality and diversity as public goods. Brexit is seen by many Remainers as a nationalist, isolationist and majoritarian project, that is fundamentally opposed to the ethos of engaging with others as equals (rather than through assumptions of ethnic/racial and national majoritarian privilege). Leaving the EU, of course, does not prevent anyone from respecting others or treating them as equals; what it does do, however, is call into question the political, and cultural guarantees – insofar as such guarantees ever existed – that equality, openness and the recognition of diversity as a public resource are part of the country's norms and values. As Daniel Knight (2017) has argued, Brexit has been seen as throwing cosmopolitanism into suspension and creating uncertainty about its future. Knight's argument is based on ethnographic work in Scotland (which voted to Remain), but it has clear resonances with the experience of other diverse parts of the UK where Remain won:

For many British people, and particularly in towns such as St. Andrews, everyday life has for decades been defined by cosmopolitanism – a recent past folded into a protracted present built on intimate interaction with the Other. In short, cosmopolitanism based on individual freedoms, tolerance, and social liberties has been a cornerstone of previous temporalities of Scottish European belonging [ . . . ]. The Brexit vote has thrown cosmopolitanism into suspension, leaving people [ . . . ] to question their past beliefs about the cosmopolitan project, as well as its present conditions and future trajectories. (Knight, 2017: 238)

Knight does not explain whether the threat to cosmopolitanism was experienced and talked about as racism in St Andrews. Even if it was not, however, there is a clear indication that Brexit's political culture was seen as antithetical to the cherished values of tolerance, social liberties and 'intimate interaction with the Other', and this could readily be interpreted as a racist rejection of diversity.

Anxieties about racism become more pronounced and explicitly articulated with regard to the more violent expressions of Brexit's challenge to cosmopolitanism. As a number of researchers have now shown, Brexit has escalated hostility and abuse towards migrants from Eastern Europe and elsewhere (e.g. Guma and Dafydd Jones, 2018; James, 2019; Rzepnikowska, 2019). In parts of the country, threats, harassment, intimidation and physical attacks are now a common occurrence in the lives of immigrants. There is strong evidence that anti-immigrant racism is embedded and normalized in many communities across the country, and that the xenophobic rhetoric trumpeted by the Leave campaign and the pro-Leave media has exacerbated both the frequency and severity of racist incidents.

At the same time, authors who have carried out fieldwork among Leave supporters in different geographical and social contexts have suggested that there is much more to Leavers' aspirations than racism and xenophobia (Balthazar, 2017; Koch, 2017; Mckenzie,

2017a, 2017b). In her study of a social housing estate in the south of England, Insa Koch (2017) has argued that people on the estate voted to leave not because they were preoccupied with immigration or hatred of foreigners, but because they wanted to reject the political elite and the state's institutions, which they saw as consistently trying to punish them instead of helping them improve their lives. Citizenship, for estate residents, was not about rights and responsibilities, but rather about being monitored, 'caught out' and punished. This was a 'punitive citizenship' in which men found that they were constantly monitored and arrested by the police, while women were continuously anxious because 'welfare agents can stop benefit payments, housing authorities evict tenants from their homes, and social services move children into foster care' (Koch, 2017: 227). A vote to leave the EU was seen on the estate as a rejection of this state of affairs – an anti-establishment vote that allowed people 'to express deeply felt frustrations with their experience of citizenship' (Koch, 2017: 226; see also Lunt, 2019). Lisa Mckenzie's (2017a, 2017b) ethnography of working-class people in East London and an ex-mining town in Nottinghamshire reveals a similar rationale for voting Leave. The economically impoverished and socially marginalized communities in which Mckenzie worked saw the referendum as 'an opportunity to push back against the expectations of the privileged elites' (2017a: 204–5). People voted to leave as a way of expressing the frustration and pain that came with decades of poverty and political invisibility. For them the Leave victory in the referendum meant that '[t]hey had ruined the party they had not been invited to' (Mckenzie, 2017b: S278).

Ethnographic material about more affluent Leave supporters also shows a feeling of disconnection and exclusion from the political elite and its values. As Ana Balthazar (2017) argues in her study of the town of Margate, residents' votes to leave the EU 'were more the consequence of a native logic of building connections and an issue of poor political representation than they are about excluding migrants – even if excluding migrants could be one of the outcomes' (Balthazar, 2017: 220). For Margate residents, attachment to a shared working-class history gave people and things 'character' and meaning, even for those who were well-off and not working class in the economic sense of the term. Taking pride in ancestors' participation in the Second World War, identifying with local histories of manufacturing, and expressing appreciation for British-made objects such as tea cups were all part of a local sociality that brought people together as a community. These valued experiences and modes of community building were seen as marginalized from a mainstream political culture that had allegedly forfeited its authority to the EU rather than championing Britain's working-class history and tradition. In this context, Margate residents did not vote Leave because they hated immigrants but because they wanted to valorize the value of the past in the face of social change: 'the referendum was less about migrants or opposing nations and more about what should not be forgotten – the working-class makers, the war-fought past, and particular experiences of the world' (Balthazar, 2017: 223).

How should we read these ethnographic descriptions in relation to public discussions about racism and legitimacy? There are two different approaches to this question, both of which get caught up in a polarizing dynamic as soon as the lens of racism/legitimacy is applied. One is to see the people in the ethnography (and perhaps the authors of the ethnographies) as making an effort to dispel the reductionist and adversarial stereotype of Leavers as racist and/or ignorant. By drawing attention to their political marginalization, practices

of community building, and demands for recognition – all of which are said to be more important than anti-immigrant sentiments – these works present us with social and affective logics that challenge the irrationality attributed to Leavers. In this sense, they can be read as attempts to understand and legitimate the Leave vote – without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing with it – by telling a story of human frustration and aspiration.

A second interpretation is to see the voices in the ethnographies as deflections from the issue of racism. They tell a convincing story that there is much more to Leave supporters than hatred of immigrants and minorities, but they offer little, if any, evidence that racism isn't rife in the communities in question. What justification is there to treat the experiences presented in the ethnography as non-racist? And why should they not be seen as motivations or expressions of racism (e.g. racism driven by anger and frustration, racism expressed through historical narratives of national belonging, or racism sustained by exclusionary forms of sociality and communal intimacy)? What if instead of seeing these experiences as non-racist dimensions of people's aspirations for sovereignty, we see them as techniques for disguising and legitimating racist exclusion? What if racism is not about people's stated intentions but about the consequences of their actions, which in the case of voting Leave can be readily condemned as racist?

Whether we interpret people's experiences on the ground as racist or non-racist depends, as I have suggested, on how we theorize racism and how we demarcate it from non-racism. It is a matter of the prior political stance from which we make the interpretation. Discourses and debates about racism, however, construct social, political and psychic reality, rather than just representing it, and the actors involved in the debates can play an active role in the process by advancing their own views and interpretations. This construction of reality, I argue, needs to be taken into account as a part of a more holistic consideration of both the principles of what constitutes racism and the effects of circulating discourses on racism. It is important to recall here that people rarely recognize themselves as racists, but they often do recognize themselves as the targets of anti-racist critiques which are seen as insults and attempts to discredit them. As McKenzie points out, her interlocutors were hurt by comments which portrayed Leave voters as 'bigots' and 'racists' because '[t]hey didn't think they were any of these things and they often commented that "race" was not part of this referendum' (2017a: 205). Similarly, the people that Balthazar worked with 'do not associate themselves with the "ignorant" people (their word) who react in racist anger toward foreigners in the streets of the country' (2017: 223). This is complemented by a similar position among Remainers who experience and criticize racism. People who call out racism do so to defend the victims of racial injustice, and voice concern about the dangers of a rising culture of hostility and violence, not as an attempt to insult or discredit others.

These positions, however, have become entangled in a conflict that threatens to spiral into an ever-growing division between Leavers and Remainers. The pro-Leave far right has presented anti-racism as a repression of people's voices by the 'liberal elite' in order to fuel the anti-liberal frustration that drives its political support. This is a dangerous game because it could incite people to 'push back' against that 'elite' precisely through racist hate crimes. After all, if anti-racism is presented as a tool of oppression, then racism – including racist harassment and violence – can be imagined as a means of resistance, a refusal to comply and submit to the values and norms of the 'liberal elite'.

Critiques that double down on the initial claims about Brexit's racism would then be interpreted as confirming the far right's position, and this in turn will perpetuate the cycle and create even deeper polarization.

## Conclusion

The Brexit conjuncture presents a difficult dilemma. On the one hand, anti-racist critiques – and standing up against hostility and violence more generally – are a fundamental part of the fight for a better and more just society. They are also a much-needed check on the far right's assault on diversity and equality. Yet, at the same time, there is good reason to question whether anti-racist critiques in relation to Brexit have been effective in influencing public opinion. The vote to leave, the flurry of post-referendum hate crimes, the ever-more hostile language that characterizes today's political culture, and the landslide victory of a Conservative Party whose leader is known to use racist language, were in all likelihood not prompted by a shortage of anti-racist discourse. Furthermore, despite all that has been said and reported about Brexit and its relation to racism, public support for Brexit has remained more or less stable since 2016, and the country remains divided, as opinion polls indicate (Curtice, 2019; NatCen Social Research, 2019). And while I would suggest that anti-racist rhetoric in relation to Brexit is quite effective in affirming the intrinsic value of tolerance and conviviality among the converted, there is limited evidence that it is effective in deterring hostility and community tensions from building up elsewhere.

This calls for a renewed discussion about what kinds of discourse and activism work and for whom, and a greater focus on the pathways through which a more just and safer society can be achieved through institutional change, as well as transformation of public attitudes. Given the diversity of experiences across the country, I would argue that such efforts must be necessarily grounded in locally contextualized empirical data about the everyday experiences of people and communities on the ground (see Moore and Woodcraft, 2019). They must also be careful about generalizing zero-sum discourses of racism and 'legitimate concern' as an either/or matter that can so easily be interpreted as a personal attack by Leave and Remain voters alike. What we need is a new approach that begins with locally experienced challenges to quality of life, and positive visions of the future without engaging with Brexit's toxic polarization. Racism, within this approach, must be seen not only as a social and political reality – expressed as hostility, violence, and exclusionary rhetoric perpetrated by Leavers – but also as a discursive practice that produces specific consequences and effects for the way we experience ourselves and others, and the extent to which we keep a focus on structural inequalities. Without such critical interrogation of how the concept of racism is defined, how it is used, and what it does, we risk a leap into the unknown, with little indication of whether our interventions will succeed or backfire in their quest for a more just and inclusive society.

## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## References

- Ashcroft M (2016) How the United Kingdom voted on Thursday . . . and why. Lord Ashcroft Polls, 24 June. Available at: <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2016/06/how-the-united-kingdom-voted-and-why/> (accessed 19 February 2017).
- Balthazar AC (2017) Made in Britain: Brexit, teacups, and the materiality of the nation. *American Ethnologist* 44(2): 220–224, doi: 10.1111/amet.12471.
- Bartlett E (2016) People are calling out Ukip's new anti-EU poster for resembling 'outright Nazi propaganda'. *The Independent*, 16 June. Available at: <https://www.indy100.com/article/people-are-calling-out-ukips-new-antieu-poster-for-resembling-outright-nazi-propaganda-WkTYUB18EW> (accessed 6 October 2019).
- BBC (2019) Brexit 'major influence' in racism and hate crime rise. *BBC News*, 20 June. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-48692863> (accessed 6 October 2019).
- Bhambra GK (2017) Brexit, Trump, and 'methodological whiteness': On the misrecognition of race and class. *British Journal of Sociology* 68: S214–S232, doi: 10.1111/1468-4446.12317.
- Biressi A and Nunn H (2013) *Class and Contemporary British Culture*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bonilla-Silva E (2003) *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Booth R (2019) Racism rising since Brexit vote, nationwide study reveals. *The Guardian*, 20 May. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/20/racism-on-the-rise-since-brexit-vote-nationwide-study-reveals> (accessed 6 October 2019).
- Bowler R (2017) *Whiteness, Britishness and the Racist Reality of Brexit*. Centre for Applied Social Science Working Paper. University of Sunderland. Available at: <http://sure.sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/8463/> (accessed 2 September 2019).
- Buckledee S (2018) *The Language of Brexit: How Britain Talked Its Way Out of the European Union*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Burnett J (2017) Racial violence and the Brexit state. *Race & Class* 58(4): 85–97, doi: 10.1177/0306396816686283.
- Carmichael S and Hamilton C (1968) *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. London: Penguin.
- Clarke J and Newman J (2017) 'People in this country have had enough of experts': Brexit and the paradoxes of populism. *Critical Policy Studies* 11(1): 101–116.
- Clarke J and Newman J (2019) What's the subject? Brexit and politics as articulation. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 29(1): 67–77, doi: 10.1002/casp.2376.
- Curtice J (2019) Three years on: Still divided. In: NatCen Social Research. Available at: <https://whatukthinks.org/eu/three-years-on-still-divided/> (accessed 8 October 2019).
- Dorling D and Tomlinson S (2019) *Rule Britannia: Brexit and the End of Empire*. London: Biteback Publishing.
- Fekete L (2001) The emergence of xeno-racism. *Race & Class* 43(2): 23–40.
- Fredrickson G (2002) *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gest J (2016) *The New Minority: White Working-class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gest J (2018) *The White Working Class*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goodhart D (2017) *The Road to Somewhere: The New Tribes Shaping British Politics*. London: Penguin.
- Goodman S (2010) 'It's not racist to impose limits on immigration': Constructing the boundaries of racism in the asylum and immigration debate. *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis Across Disciplines* 4(1): 1–17, doi: 10.5209/CLAC.53494.

- Goodwin M and Heath O (2016) The 2016 referendum, Brexit and the left behind: An aggregate-level analysis of the result. *Political Quarterly* 87(3): 323–332.
- Guma T and Dafydd Jones R (2018) ‘Where are we going to go now?’: European Union migrants’ experiences of hostility, anxiety, and (non-)belonging during Brexit. *Population, Space and Place* 25(1): e2198, doi: 10.1002/psp.2198.
- Hall S (1996) Race, articulation, and societies structured in dominance. In: Baker Jr, HA, Diawara M and Lindeborh R (eds) *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 305–345.
- Hall S and Massey D (2010) Interpreting the crisis. *Soundings* 44(44): 57–71, doi: 10.3898/136266210791036791.
- Hesse B (2004) Im/plausible deniability: Racism’s conceptual double bind. *Social Identities* 10(1): 9–29.
- Hesse B (2011) Self-fulfilling prophecy: The postracial horizon. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 110(1): 155–178, doi: 10.1215/00382876-2010-027.
- James M (2019) Brexit London: The past, present and future of racism in the capital. *Sociological Review*. Available at: <https://www.thesociologicalreview.com/brexit-london-the-past-present-and-future-of-racism-in-the-capital/> (accessed 6 October 2019).
- Jones H, Gunaratnam Y, Bhattacharyya G et al. (2017) *Go Home? The Politics of Immigration Controversies*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Jones O (2011) *Chavs: The Demonization of the Working Class*. London: Verso.
- Jones RW (2019) Future of England Survey reveals public attitudes towards Brexit and the union. Available at: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/1709008-future-of-england-survey-reveals-public-attitudes-towards-brexit-and-the-union> (accessed 27 October 2019).
- Kaufmann E (2019) *Whiteshift: Populism, Immigration and the Future of White Majorities*. London: Penguin.
- Knight DM (2017) Anxiety and cosmopolitan futures: Brexit and Scotland. *American Ethnologist* 44(2): 237–242, doi: 10.1111/amet.12474.
- Koch I (2017) What’s in a vote? Brexit beyond culture wars. *American Ethnologist* 44(2): 225–230, doi: 10.1111/amet.12472.
- Lentin A (2016) Racism in public or public racism: Doing anti-racism in ‘post-racial’ times. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39(1): 33–48, doi: 10.1080/01419870.2016.1096409.
- Lunt P (2019) The performance of power and citizenship: David Cameron meets the people. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 22(5): 678–690, doi: 10.1177/1367877919849960.
- Mckenzie L (2017a) ‘It’s not ideal’: Reconsidering ‘anger’ and ‘apathy’ in the Brexit vote among an invisible working class. *Competition & Change* 21(3): 199–210, doi: 10.1177/1024529417704134.
- Mckenzie L (2017b) The class politics of prejudice: Brexit and the land of no-hope and glory. *British Journal of Sociology* 68(S1): S265–S280.
- Meredith J and Richardson E (2019a) Categories, stereotypes, and political identities: The use of Brexiter and Remainer in online comments. In: LSE Brexit blog. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2019/09/06/categories-stereotypes-and-political-identities-the-use-of-brexiter-and-remainer-in-online-comments/> (accessed 2 November 2019).
- Meredith J and Richardson E (2019b) The use of the political categories of Brexiter and Remainer in online comments about the EU referendum. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 29(1): 43–55, doi: 10.1002/casp.2384.
- Miles R and Brown M (2003) *Racism*. London: Routledge.
- Mintchev N and Moore HL (2017) Community and prosperity beyond social capital: The case of Newham, East London. *Critical Social Policy* 37(4): 562–581, doi: 10.1177/0261018316683461.

- Mintchev N and Moore HL (2018) Super-diversity and the prosperous society. *European Journal of Social Theory* 21(1): 117–134, doi: 10.1177/1368431016678629.
- Mintchev N and Moore HL (2019) Brexit's identity politics and the question of subjectivity. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 24(4): 452–472, doi: 10.1057/s41282-019-00139-3.
- Moore HL and Woodcraft S (2019) Placing sustainable prosperity in East London: Local meanings and 'sticky' measures of the good life. *City & Society* 31(2): 275–298.
- NatCen Social Research (2019) If there was another referendum on Britain's membership of the EU, how would you vote? Available at: <https://whatukthinks.org/eu/questions/if-a-second-eu-referendum-were-held-today-how-would-you-vote/> (accessed 8 October 2019).
- Noor P (2018) 'Gammon' is a playground insult, not something to be celebrated. *The Guardian*, 7 November. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/07/gammon-playground-insult-words-of-2018> (accessed 6 October 2019).
- Pitcher B (2019) Racism and Brexit: Notes towards an antiracist populism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42(14): 2490–2509, doi: 10.1080/01419870.2019.1623410.
- Rhodes J (2013) Remaking whiteness in the 'postracial' UK. In: Kapoor N, Kalra V and Rhodes J (eds) *The State of Race*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 49–71.
- Rzepnikowska A (2019) Racism and xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants in the UK before and after Brexit vote. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45(1): 61–77, doi: 10.1080/1369183X.2018.1451308.
- Simpson T (2016) Controlling immigration is good for democracy. *Standpoint*. Available at: <https://standpointmag.co.uk/features-september-2016-thomas-simpson-brexit-control-immigration-democracy/> (accessed 5 May 2019).
- Song M (2014) Challenging a culture of racial equivalence. *British Journal of Sociology* 65(1): 107–129, doi: 10.1111/1468-4446.12054.
- Taguieff P-A (1990) The new cultural racism in France. *Telos* 83: 109–122.
- Taguieff P-A (2001) *The Force of Prejudice: On Racism and Its Doubles*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Titley G (2016) The debatability of racism: Networked participative media and postracialism. *Rasismista ja Rajoista*. Available at: <https://raster.fi/2016/02/17/the-debatability-of-racism-networked-participative-media-and-postracialism/>.
- Trades Union Congress (2016) *Challenging Racism after the EU Referendum: An Action Plan for Challenging Racism and Xenophobia*. Available at: <https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/ChallengingracismaftertheEUreferendum2.pdf> (accessed 6 October 2019).
- Valluvan S (2016) What is 'post-race' and what does it reveal about contemporary racisms? *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39(13): 2241–2251, doi: 10.1080/01419870.2016.1202430.
- Virdee S and McGeever B (2017) Racism, crisis, Brexit. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41(10): 1802–1819, doi: 10.1080/01419870.2017.1361544.
- Welby J (2016) Archbishop of Canterbury interview in The House magazine. In: *The Archbishop of Canterbury*. Available at: <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/articles/archbishop-canterbury-interview-house-magazine> (accessed 5 May 2019).

## Author biography

Nikolay Mintchev is a research associate at the Institute for Global Prosperity at University College London. He specializes in the themes of ethnic identity and subjectivity in psychoanalysis and the social sciences. He is co-editor (with R.D. Hinshelwood) of *The Feeling of Certainty: Psychosocial Perspectives on Identity and Difference* (2017).