

Ascriptions of migration: Racism, migratism and Brexit

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Abstract

This article offers an analysis of scholarly attempts to make sense of the nexus of race and migration in Brexit-era UK discourse. To illustrate my arguments that intend to challenge and extend existing scholarship, I discuss exemplary snapshots from news articles, blog posts and social media sources. Building on critical race and postcolonial studies as theoretical background, I trace the phenomenon of naming the discrimination against East Europeans – which is undeniably one of the driving forces of the Brexit discussion – ‘racism’. Sometimes, and this shows the pattern of the overgeneralization of the term, ‘racism’ gets extended to name the post-Brexit exclusion of any EU nationals. This use of ‘racism’, however, is based on methodological nationalism and conceptual whiteness as my analyses show. To make sense of the overlapping racist, anti-immigration and anti-EU rhetoric that marks the pre- and post-Brexit moment in the United Kingdom, this article introduces the concept of ‘migratism’ – a name for the power relation that ascribes migration to certain people, constructing them as migrants and discriminating against them. The terms ‘migratism’ and ‘migratization’ function grammatically in an analogue way to ‘racism’ and ‘racialization’. If racism is the power relation that racializes (=ascribes race to) people, migratism is the power relation that migratizes (=ascribes migration to) people. The terms are not symmetrical but have a complicated interdependent relationship. Racism and migratism are bound to each other and play a crucial role in organizing the Western nation state. The suggested concepts foreground a postcolonial understanding of race and racism and make it possible to analyse both migration-based discrimination and discrimination based on perceived migration in violence and hate crimes connected to the Brexit referendum.

Keywords

Anti-Black racism, Brexit referendum, critical race theory, East European migrants, Islamophobia, nationalism, Polish migration to the United Kingdom, racism and migration, UK news, whiteness

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'Post Brexit Racism Sees Vandals Attack German-Made Cars in London'.

Huffington Post, 29 June 2016

The epigraph is the headline of a contribution that came out in June 2016 reporting on vandalism and assaults in the days after the Brexit referendum: etched in swastikas on German-made cars, swastikas sprayed on walls in majority-Remain constituencies, people being verbally assaulted and prompted to 'go home', and an Eid festival banner vandalized with 'Fuck Islam' writing (Snowdon, 2016). Surely, it could be simply a sign of bad journalism, but the very different character of the incidents provoked some unease for me as a reader towards the accuracy of the terms. It is the obvious overgeneralization of the term 'racism' that sparked my interest and suspicion. What does it mean to use the word 'racism' for all these incidents – with the targets being German-made cars, communities that predominantly voted Remain, and 'Polish', 'Muslim' and 'German' persons? What does it mean to choose the cars of all things for the title? Even if we understand the headline on German-made cars as pointing out a 'racist' threat against Germans (and not see the material damage as already 'racist'), the formulation opens up questions on what it implies to call the discriminatory incidents against 'Poles', 'Germans' and 'Muslims' – to use the categories that the Huffington Post provides – all with the same name?

This article¹ aims to provide an epistemology for postcolonial migration research that makes sense of the entanglement of racialization and migration in postcolonial Europe. Particularly, I am looking at Brexit-era UK discourse on race and migration and deploy critical race and postcolonial studies as theoretical background for my analysis. I trace the phenomenon of naming the discrimination against East Europeans – which is undeniably one of the driving forces of the Brexit discussion and one of its affective paradigms – 'racism'. Sometimes, and this shows the pattern of the overgeneralization of the term, 'racism' gets extended to name the post-Brexit exclusion of any EU nationals. With a Foucauldian take on discourse, I am focused on what tracing and following the resurgence of this phenomenon can tell us about the specific political moment and the emergence of left- versus right-wing discursive positions on racism and migration. I demonstrate that the way how the relationship of race, colonialism, migration and the British nation is depicted in my examples is not straightforwardly explainable with existing conceptual tools. Therefore, I introduce the concept of 'migratism' – a name for the power relation that 'migratizes' (=ascribes migration to) certain people, constructs them as migrants and discriminates against them (Tudor, 2017b, 2018) and advocate for a critical differentiation of racism and migratism. The terms are not symmetrical but have a complicated interdependent relationship and, as I will demonstrate through my analysis, they are bound to each other and play a crucial role in organizing the Western nation state. I am driven by the question: what epistemological and theoretical concepts we need to analyse the overlapping racist, anti-immigration and anti-European Union (EU) rhetoric that marks the pre- and post-Brexit moment in the United Kingdom? What happens if we situate that moment transnationally?

Yasmin Gunaratnam (2003) underlines that being reflexive about conceptual decisions is a central task for scholarship on race. She asks, 'How can we make judgements

about the epistemological and the political repercussions of such decisions?’ (Gunaratnam, 2003: 5). In this vein, this is an intervention that aims to carve out a specific conceptual problem in representations of Brexit-related discrimination. My goal is not to prove a blanket coverage of the phenomenon of an overgeneralized racism concept, but to follow its occurrence in both academic and mediated discourse and theorize its discursive effects. For me, coming from a family who migrated from Romania to Germany, belonging to a Western European nation state has never been without complication and always felt open to contestation, despite my white, Christian and German passport privileges. The discriminatory discursive construction of Romanians and other East Europeans in the British media is therefore hurtful to me. However, rather than calling this discrimination plainly ‘racism’, this article is driven by the question of how solidarity across different migratized positions might work through rejecting the paradigm of nationalist epistemology and/or conceptual whiteness in theorizing the Brexit moment.

For the purpose of illustrating my claims that intend to challenge and extend existing scholarship, I discuss snapshots from media articles, mainly digital versions of print newspapers but also complementary digital commentary outlets and blogs. Mediated representations are significant, as Anamik Saha (2021) points out, because media ‘is a site of ideological struggle – where race, or rather ideas of race – are constantly being made and remade’ (p. 4). I suggest that this ‘ideological struggle’ ‘where ideas of race are constantly being made and remade’ can also be found in scholarship on racism. Methodologically, my discourse analysis relies on different approaches. The examples with which I open my argument in the introduction and in Part I were collected as an avid follower of social media threads before and after the Brexit referendum (2014–2018), and I use them illustratively without claiming full representational coverage. The second Part engages with scholarly attempts to make sense of discrimination against East Europeans in the context of Brexit. Part III discusses a case study and the analysed newspaper articles were sampled with LexisNexis, as it is my aim to look at the spectrum of formulations with which the case was debated publicly.² I show why it is important for leftist and progressive voices to critically reflect on the occurrence of the term ‘racism’ used as a name for any migration-based exclusion from the nation state and not related to postcolonial racialization. Through an examination of the discursive position ‘at work’ in my material, in Part IV, I disentangle the layers of migratism and its complex overlaps with racism. I argue that an analysis that both differentiates the two *and* manages to think them as radically intersectional, helps to shed light on the complex and contradictory facets of Brexit-related nationalist discourse.

British self-perceptions within European hierarchies

Germans and Romanians? ‘You know what the difference is!’ (Nigel Farage, 2014)²⁰

The example with which I begin this article speaks about vandalized German cars and Eid banners in the same breath. Although striking in its explicitness, it is not alone in referring to post-referendum discrimination against people from EU countries as

'racism'. Reacting to similar coverage, Akwugo Emejulu (2016) asks us to be suspicious of the ways in which 'some people are only concerned with racism and xenophobia when their own privileged migration status is challenged'. Very aptly, Emejulu points towards a *Guardian* article in which, only days after the referendum, an 'Austrian' complains about 'suddenly' being seen as an unwelcome 'immigrant' (Ebner and Anderson, 2016). What is conspicuous is the expressions of surprise in testimonies of people who only seem to be able to see problems of exclusion from the nation state when they are experienced against oneself. In the *Guardian* article that Emejulu criticizes, the feeling of a sudden loss is contrasted with a previous romanticized image of a multicultural Britain, which was 'believed to be a more open-minded, multicultural, inclusive and tolerant country' (Ebner and Anderson, 2016).³ Similarly, in 2019 Reuters reported that an actor who had lived in the United Kingdom since 1996 moved back to Germany 'in hope of rediscovering the peace and certainty she lost when Britain voted for Brexit' (Williams, 2019). These accounts of Germans, Austrians and other Western Europeans who 'suddenly' become aware of a restrictive border politics when their own bodies are used as borders, as Emejulu (2016) remarks, appears hypocritical as most of them certainly were not No-Border-activists pre-referendum (or indeed, now). And most certainly, they are not aware of the history of their uncomplicated presence in the United Kingdom, namely that Britain's entry to the EU came with concerns from the EU side about how to restrict the freedom of movement of British colonial and commonwealth citizens (Bhambra, 2017b: 93)?

The point I am making here is not that it is justified that German and Austrian nationals in the United Kingdom live in uncertainty due to Brexit, nor do I want to downplay post-referendum incidents against them. While the chauvinist nationalism that Brexit activated and the ease with which the hostility was extended, is obvious, I argue that generic 'EU nationals' are not the main target of the specific hostility, and certainly not of 'racism', displayed in the discourse. For example, the far-right (formerly UKIP, later Brexit party) politician Nigel Farage, who is one of the key architects of Brexit, is married to a German and accordingly his children have a German-British background. This fact alone is not as telling as Farage's formulations in an interview with LBC radio moderator James O'Brien in 2014. Farage had previously said that he would be concerned if a 'group of Romanian men' moved in as his next-door neighbours. O'Brien, alluding to Farage's own children, asked, 'What about if a group of German children did? What's the difference?' (14:59) with Farage simply replying, 'You know what the difference is!' (15:02).

In this interview, Farage takes a position in which he claims not to be racist as he insists in legitimately targeting another 'nation' and not another 'race' (14:21). With this, as it seems, he wants to make his politics appealing not only to white Britons but also to right-wing Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) voters, a target group that he mentions on various occasions.⁴ However, it was not BAME, but white voters who delivered the Leave result later (Bhambra, 2017a: S215; Emejulu, 2016).⁵ Farage suggests in the interview that it is benign or even legitimate to discriminate against Romanians as it does not happen on the basis of 'race' or 'colour' but on the basis of nationality and, as it becomes clear as he goes on, on the basis of anti-communism. Therefore, he propagates migration control from 'those communist countries' (15:17). From here, analytically, we

could go into two directions: agree with O'Brien's diagnosis of Farage being 'racist' against Romanians, or make the point that what Farage says is no 'less bad' even if we do not call the hatred directed against another country or nationality 'racism'. But how can we analyse the hierarchy between Germans and Romanians that Farage introduces as a given, as something that is self-explanatory? Indeed, Farage underlines this idea with absolute certainty as if it were common-sense. When he says to his host, 'You know what the difference [between Germans and Romanians] is!', he means 'everybody' knows (15:02). The differentiation is – as he might know and play into – not fact-based, but feeling-based, affective. Bringing this back to the vandalism of German-made cars in the above-mentioned article (Snowdon, 2016), we could analyse the Brexit situation as a complex overlap of racisms, Islamophobia, anti-immigration propaganda and national chauvinisms. But what we do not know is if the swastikas on German-made cars are meant as a sign to reject Germans *or* as an a homage to German fascism that implies similarity of thought with the Brexit vandalism. Clearly, vandalized Eid banners and vandalized BMWs are not the same thing, nor does the aggression behind it have the same history.

Manuela Boatcă's (2013) theoretization of 'multiple Europes' can help us makes sense of the distinct patterns one can see in anti-East European hostility, the British rivalry with Western European EU members, and the always present racism and Islamophobia. There is a centuries-old divide within Europe, Boatcă (2013: 6) explains, that can be traced back to early modernity and is based in colonial competition and imperial difference, but also is the result of a version of 18th-and 19th-century Orientalism turned against Europe's East – against the frayed Eastern borderlands facing Europe's outside other (p. 7). She, therefore, suggests speaking of *multiple Europes*, a differentiation in which the Iberian peninsula is 'decadent Europe (which had lost both hegemony and, accordingly, the epistemic power of defining a hegemonic Self and its subaltern Others)', France, England, and Germany and other Western nations form 'heroic Europe (self-defined as the producer of modernity's main achievements)', and Eastern Europe and the Balkans are 'epigonal Europe (defined via its alleged lack of these achievements and hence as a mere re-producer of the stages covered by heroic Europe)' (Boatcă, 2013: 6). With this division in mind, what we are witnessing in the Brexit discourse cannot be called 'racism' or even 'xenophobia' towards Germans but a rivalry which is based in centuries of scrambling for European hegemony. Britain's relationship to other nations within Europe's 'heroic' core (Boatcă, 2013: 6) can best be described in terms of competitiveness, a feeling of imperial pre-eminence (Cohen, 1994: 25) and the investment in Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism (Marcussen et al., 1999: 626). Winston Churchill, and he sounds like a contemporary Brexiteer, is quoted in Marcussen et al. (1999) from a speech delivered in 1953, describing Britain's relationship with Europe: '[W]e are with them, but not of them. We have our own Commonwealth and Empire' (p. 625).⁶ Of course, nothing about Churchill's statement on the Commonwealth and the British Empire and nothing about Farage's utterances on the Commonwealth, for that matter, is 'not racist', as the British position within the evoked Empire is defined through racist colonization, exploitation and genocide. In 2016, shortly before the referendum, Farage launched a propaganda poster titled *Breaking Point*. While the original photograph shows refugees crossing the Croatian–Slovenian

border, with the subheading ‘We must break free of the EU and take back control of our borders’, the UKIP (UK Independence Party) version implies that the migrants were depicted entering the United Kingdom.⁷ The obsession with ‘taking back’ and ‘regaining control’ is an indication for ‘Britain struggling to conceive of its place in the world post-Empire’ (El-Enany, 2016). This not only proves the British desire to re-establish their imperial sovereignty built on a colonial racial hierarchy (Bhambra, 2017b), but also works to fuel the fear of racialized migrants ‘invading’ the United Kingdom, exactly like UKIP’s *Breaking Point* poster, and calls for ‘taking back’ national sovereignty. It becomes clear, Brexit certainly is about racism, even if not directed against generic ‘EU nationals’ – a category that has been used in simplistic ways, detached from racialization and from analyses of internal hierarchies in Europe.

Thinking racialization and migratization together, rather than holding them apart

[W]hy can’t [the British] focus more on blacks and Asians? (Polish migrant cited in Rzepnikowska, 2019: 73)

Progressive media representations of East Europeans in the context of Brexit often use the term ‘racism’ for naming the discrimination against us.⁸ Furthermore, recent scholarship uses the term ‘racism’ in the same way – and sometimes, in combination with or in opposition to ‘xenophobia’ (e.g. Komaromi and Singh, 2016; Sime et al., 2017). Alina Rzepnikowska (2019) draws on ‘xeno-racism’ approaches for making her argument that the discrimination against Poles around the Brexit referendum should be called ‘racism’. The tradition of thought Rzepnikowska relies on can be traced from the 1980s to early 2000s when both in the United Kingdom and in continental Europe many scholars claimed there was a ‘new’ racism that was not based on race anymore. In 2001, A. Sivanandan published an article titled with the very telling phrase ‘Poverty is the new Black’, in which he defines a ‘new’ racism solely in terms of capitalist class and migration. He coins the term ‘xeno-racism’: ‘a racism that is meted out to impoverished strangers even if they are white’ (Sivanandan, 2001: 2). Criticizing ‘xenophobia’ as a term that is ‘innocent’ and implies ‘the (natural) fear of strangers’, Sivanandan suggests using ‘racism’ as a word to capture migration-based discrimination as this indicates culpability. This approach also can be seen in a tradition that was mostly taken up in continental Europe based on Etienne Balibar’s (2007) contribution ‘Is there a “Neo-Racism”?’ in which he ponders if migration or culture-based racism has replaced race-racism.⁹ However, postcolonial approaches have demonstrated convincingly that culturalizing argumentations have always been part of racializing ones (Hall, 2000: 223; Gunaratnam, 2003: 5; Saha, 2021: 5) and ‘race’ is as much a cultural construct as it is a biological one (and indeed ‘biology’ itself is not immune to culture). Gunaratnam (2003) makes clear, ‘colonialism, and the “idea of Europe,” was a founding moment of racial categorization (“racialization”)’ (p. 8). Therefore, racism is about the binary construction of Europeanness and Extra-Europeanness and focusing solely on migration and class as categories of difference is insufficient for grasping the functioning of racism (Tudor, 2018).

Building on this insight, as a first exercise in this subsection, I am returning to my own previous formulations and especially to my use of national and religious categories. In order to make sense of the mediated representation, I used the terms that I found in the texts: ‘German’, ‘Romanian’, ‘Austrian’, and ‘Muslim’. However, what I want to get at is that the use of these national categories alongside a religious one is problematic. It implies that the Germans and Romanians and so on are not ‘Muslim’ and that ‘Muslims’ do not have a nationality as their most defining feature. And this is exactly what I aim to make conceivable with the analysis conducted here. It is the fact that anti-immigration rhetoric results not only in assaults against people with ‘other’ nationalities but is directed towards people being *perceived* as migrants in a dominant gaze. The calls towards Muslims ‘to go home’, the construction of Muslims as the ‘eternal migrants’ (El-Tayeb, 2011: xxv; Tudor, 2018: 1059), as outsiders to the ‘liberal’ British nation (Khan, 2021), is a way in which racism works through migratization, the ascription of migration (Tudor, 2018). Moreover, my above use of the national categories shows vividly how problematic it is to understand ‘racism’ as only directed against other nations or nationalities. The ‘Germans’ and ‘Austrians’ in the examples can only make the claim to be ‘suddenly’ excluded from the British nation state that formerly had accepted their status as supra-national privilege if they are already privileged by whiteness and an uncomplicated belonging to their nation state of origin, that is, not having been ascribed with migration there already. What I find troubling in the idea that there is ‘racism’ against Germans or Romanians or Austrians is the fact that Black Germans, Asian Romanians or Brown Austrians, for example, would not be attacked in the streets and media post-Brexit qua their EU-European nationality but seen as not-European. This ascription of migration is not related to anti-EU resentments or internal hierarchies between European nations but to colonialism and empire (Tudor, 2018: 1061). Being read and addressed as German, Romanian or Austrian (even in the moment of Brexit-led aggression) becomes a privilege and reinforcement of whiteness.¹⁰

Rzepnikowska (2019) claims,

While the existing literature [on racism] mainly focuses on racism experienced by non-white ethnic minorities, this paper makes an important contribution to the understanding of overlapping racism and xenophobia discussed and experienced by *migrant women coming from a predominantly white society*. (p. 74, my emphasis)

Rzepnikowska refers here to white Polish migrants to the United Kingdom which is codified rather ambiguously in her formulation.¹¹ With this, she establishes a deficit in existing literature on racism and deplors that it prioritizes the experiences of ‘non-white’ people. She refers to Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1983) who claim, ‘The notion of “black women” as delineating the boundaries of the alternative feminist movement to white feminism leaves non-British non-black women (like us – a Greek-Cypriot and an Israeli-Jew) unaccounted for politically’ (p. 63). What is worrying is that the demand of white migratized positions to be included in racism conceptualizations, the frustration that comes with the feeling of not being seen, is not centrally directed against the dominant group but is expressed through envy of

the perceived recognition of Black scholarship and anti-racist interventions.¹² In Rzepnikowska's formulation, it is 'non-white ethnic minorities' who according to her get all the representation in anti-racist approaches and in Anthias/Yuval-Davis' formulation, it is 'black women' who get to be valued as the 'alternative feminist movement to white feminism'. Similar to Sivanandan's (2001: 2) explanation regarding the use of racism = culpable in contrast to xenophobia = innocent, there seems to be the fear that hate crimes and assaults against people on the basis of (ascribed) migration could appear somehow 'less bad' if they are not named as 'racism'. But instead of making the argument through solidarity based on overlapping and dividing experiences of non-belonging and the recognition of complicity in supra-national racist structures, it is being made through claiming victimhood. The victim status in these approaches seems not only be caused by migration-based discrimination but also by critical race theory that is imagined as taking all the space in scholarship. The resulting questions from this observation are as follows: Why does it seem necessary to insist on extending the term 'racism' for migration-based discrimination? And what can the white desire to be discriminated against by racism tell us about the capacity to investigate whiteness in these approaches?

Magdalena Nowicka (2018) offers a different perspective. With a postcolonial understanding of racism in her analysis, she dedicates a full article to pointing out the racism recent white migrants from Poland express towards racialized minorities in the United Kingdom. This account of racism is in accordance with Fatima El-Tayeb (2011: xvii) who points out how the trope of a race-free continent is one of the driving aspects of racism in Europe. Such racism works through an overlap of denial and overemphasis, which also relies on the phantasmatic idea that there are no Black people or people of colour present in continental Europe. Bolaji Balogun's (2018) intervention into the narrative that Poland is not entangled in Europe's colonial past is therefore so important, as it reveals 'the colonial inheritance of racialized governance and postcolonial conditions that manifest themselves in contemporary racisms' (p. 2576) in Poland. Nowicka (2018: 825) urges us not to think of white East Europeans as importing racism into the United Kingdom but instead analyses the racism white Polish migrants in the United Kingdom display towards communities of colour as 'European racism'. Going back to Rzepnikowska (2019), it is striking that she points out that there are complaints raised by white Polish migrants in the United Kingdom about 'unfairness [. . .] about being victims of racism and xenophobia despite being white and European', as for example evident in questions like '[W]hy can't [the British] focus more on blacks and Asians'? The message to Western Europe is clear: we are like you, we are white! However, Rzepnikowska, although her article is on 'racism', fails to fully analyse the racism her interviewees proclaim towards Black people and People of Colour in the United Kingdom; against non-white migratized communities. In being 'victims of racism', Rzepnikowska's interviewees' own racist insistence on being 'different' to other migrants gets displaced. Claiming 'racism' from a white perspective – both seen in the interviewees' and Rzepnikowska's own formulations – mitigates against proper analyses of how racism works within and across European sites.

Conceptual whiteness in the overgeneralized use of 'racism'

The killing of a Polish man exposes the reality of post-referendum racism. (The Guardian, 05 September 2016)

To make this point clearer, in the next example, I examine in more detail the reporting on the killing of Polish national Arkadiusz Jozwik in Harlow, the United Kingdom, in September 2016. The incident is also mentioned in the first paragraph of Rzepnikowska's (2019: 61) article as an example of anti-Polish post-referendum racism. It happened only a few months after the referendum and was named in progressive media as an anti-Polish hate crime directly linked to Brexit. Subsequently, a group of young people were arrested, a 15-year-old was put on trial for the attack, and Polish communities organized marches where Polish flags and national symbols were displayed. Krupa (2016) points out in *The Guardian* that '[t]he killing of a Polish man exposes the reality of post-referendum racism'. However, during the hearings a year later, the legal charge was changed from murder into manslaughter. One of the young people was sentenced for killing Mr Jozwik, but apparently not because he was Polish, but as accidental outcome from a punch in reaction to the previous racist abuse of a Black youth within the group.¹³ While *Essex Live*, the online version of a local newspaper, published the sentencing remarks in September 2017 (Mutch, 2017), none of the sources that accused the perpetrator of an anti-Polish hate crime the year before corrected their representation of the case with a specific focus on the racism towards one of the young people that had spurred the altercation. Mutch (2017) quotes the defence lawyer as follows: '[Jozwik and his friend] made racist remarks to the youths [. . .]'. Unfortunately, only the openly nationalist tabloid *The Sun* (O'Neill, 2017), specified the nature of the 'racist remarks' against the young people – in a pseudo-anti-racist attempt to claim the Black British position as 'our own' that resembles very much Farage's claiming of the Commonwealth. Accusing the Remain-leaning press, who had called the killing a hate crime, of lying, O'Neill (2017) states that the N-word was used against the young people. Clark (2017) in the conservative outlet *The Spectator* takes the opportunity to question the fact that there was a rise in hate crimes after the referendum. Gayle (2017) in *The Guardian* cites the defence lawyer's statement on the racist abuse towards some youths in the group but fails to offer any analysis of the fact that the progressive press had gotten it wrong the year before.

I argue that a critical differentiation between racism and the ascription of migration would have helped not to leave the final discussion of the case to the right-wing press and give them reason for *Schadenfreude*. Even if we assume that there could have been an anti-Polish element in the incident, calling it 'racism' or 'race-related' made it impossible to see the actual racism against some of the young people that happened before – neither the leftist or progressive press, nor academic sources like Rzepnikowska (2019) were able to even think of some of the youths as non-white in the first place. This happens according to what Gavan Titley (2019: 3) calls the 'debatibility' of racism in the media: racism is 'simultaneously everywhere and nowhere'. The specific twist that I have tried to carve out here is that racism is even 'everywhere and nowhere' in explicit denouncements of 'racism'. Racism, and what Saha (2021) identifies as the process how through

media ‘race’ becomes knowledge – the constant construction of racialized positions through representation – is there, just not located where the authors who denounced the ‘racism’ after the killing think it is. The generic youths depicted in the 2016 articles were imagined as white English, the Polish migrants were coded only through their nationality and not through possibly aggressive whiteness, in both cases, nationality and race were conflated. It is the obscuring of the ‘Black British’ position that is the main issue, so that ‘race’ sticks to the white Polish victim, enabling Polish nationalist demonstrations in support of a victim that had spurred the altercation through racist hate speech against Black young people in the group, to appear as anti-racist – an extraordinary representational twist. Rather than supporting marches in which Polish national flags were flown and nationalist signs shown in response to the incident,¹⁴ very similar to recent white supremacist far-right marches in Poland,¹⁵ leftist activist, media and scholarly interventions on the basis of a complex racism/racialization/migration analysis could have offered a more nuanced understanding of power relations and white supremacy. Moreover, it would have enabled leftist voices to engage critically and in complex ways with the incident and not let the right-wing press run with the definition of racism and even sowing doubt over the fact that Brexit indeed legitimated anti-East European discrimination and violence. The epistemological effect we are facing in representations (be that mediated or academic ones) that are based on a solely migration-based racism concept is the *impossibility* to think of racialization in terms beyond coming from another country.

Having encountered this discursive impossibility across different sites, I set out to grapple with the question of how we can make sense of the complex interdependencies of racialization and migratization in academic scholarship and mediated discourse. My argument relies on the necessity of analysing UK nationalism in transnational terms and connect it to the functioning of supra-national ideas of race (Hall, 1991). Grada Kilomba (2008) states, ‘[R]acism is white supremacy’ (p. 42). Ella Shohat’s (1992) notes on the ‘post’ in ‘postcolonial’ remind us that colonialism is not a closed epoch of the past, but is a powerful, ongoing ideology and social order that defines what can be understood as ‘Europe’. The definition of racism that I prioritize here is therefore a postcolonial one.

What is migratism?

Brexit: Welsh Muslim told to ‘pack bags and go home’ after campaigning for Remain. (The Independent, 26 June 2016)

As a reaction to the conflation of racism with the ascription of migration, I want to suggest that one possibility to avoid equating racialization and the ascription of migration, is deploying the concept of *migratism* (Tudor, 2017b, 2018) – a name for the power relation that ascribes migration to certain people, constructing them as migrants and discriminating against them. I use the terms ‘migratism’ and ‘migratization’ as grammatically functioning in an analogous way to ‘racism’ and ‘racialization’. If racism is the power relation that racializes (=ascribes race to) people, migratism is the power relation that migratizes (=ascribes migration to) people. ‘Migratism’ is the term that names the fact that non-migration is considered the norm of nation states and migration is always

conceptualized as a potential threat to the nation or as something needing legitimization. With this, it is connected to nationalism which in Sharma's (2020) words creates a 'hierarchical separation' in which 'Migrants are left without a home in this world' (p. 13). The suggested concept foregrounds a postcolonial understanding of race and racism and makes it possible to analyse both migration-based discrimination and discrimination based on *perceived migration*. 'Migratism' ascribes (unwelcomed) migration to certain people, actual migrants or not. With this, it is a discrimination that can affect Black and Brown people, people of colour, Muslims – and in Western Europe, white people *only* if they are or are *perceived* as coming from Eastern Europe or Latin America, which means from outside what is constructed as the Western world. To be clear, it is my epistemological claim that migratism is not the same as racism, as not all ascriptions of migration are racist, but that racism very often functions through migratist strategies. With this, the terms suggested here are not symmetrical but have a complicated relationship that gets evoked discursively in complex ways. Hence, racism and migratism are bound to each other and play a crucial role in organizing the Western nation state. Gunaratnam and Jones (2020) mention an important dimension of this entanglement: 'Anti-immigration rhetoric and hostility, [. . .] is enfolded into the terms of national belonging, while overt racism remains socially unacceptable'. Migratism can also be used as a disguise for racism, when hostility towards migrants is used to appear 'reasonably' nationalist instead of 'unreasonably' racist, substituting a racial category with a national one but actually invoking race. It becomes clear, the analytical differentiation of racism and migratism that I suggest here is not ontological and not a concept that 'puts people into boxes' nor a dividing tool that separates migrant and diasporic struggles. Rather, it provides causes for solidarity in racialized and migratized communities and shows how, epistemologically, racialization and migratization need to be thought about as intersectional in complex ways, with their shared and divided histories in mind, but without collapsing the two analytical terms. Especially in the Brexit discussion, critical analysis would benefit from a concept that centres postcolonial racism and at the same time, helps us name the fact that migration or, indeed, the ascription of migration, is one of the most loaded aspects in national discourse. Migratism is a concept that needs to be located in time and space, as it is relational who is seen as a migrant – as a stranger in relation to the nation state – where and when. Typically, white border-crossers from Western countries, technically migrants, are not discriminated against on the basis of unwelcomed migration but benefit from supra-national belonging in the Western world.

In the Jozwik case, it would have helped to discuss the killing of the white Polish man as possible migratism that then was not confirmed as it came out that the (white) defendant reacted to racist hate speech against a Black youth in their group. Applying Sharma's (2020: 8) analytical vocabulary to the case, the British youth group consisted of 'White National-Natives' and 'Migrant-Natives' – and the victim of the killing is a 'Migrant' (with capital M in Sharma's terminology). Does this make the white defendant into an anti-racist who sought revenge for racism against their Black friend, or into a nativist who would kill a Migrant for the use of racist language against a Black fellow Native (but would not have killed a racist white National-Native)? The point is, we do not know. But it is important to find ways to grapple with this uncertainty. It is the concept of 'migratism' that can make sense of these complexities and also could give reason for

migratized subjects to unite without accepting nation and nativism as the primary marker of community. (The white defendant would be excluded in this alternate story, while the Polish migrant and the Black British youth, both migratized, would find common ground. But of course, this would first require a critical analysis of white supremacy from the white migratized position.)

Furthermore, applied to the example in the epigraph of this subsection, analysing what migratism does for racism reveals how the idea that the ‘Welsh Muslim’ should pack her ‘bags and go home’ (Stauffenberg, 2016) – ‘home’ not to Wales but to an ‘elsewhere’ (Tudor, 2018: 1064) – is a migratizing strategy of Islamophobic racism. These two meanings of ‘migratism’ (against the white Polish migrant and against the Welsh Muslim who is perceived as a migrant due to racism) again show the possibility of solidarity between differently positioned groups who are ascribed with migration.

I suggest the term ‘migratism’ instead of extending the meaning of xenophobia because ‘migratism’ is a broader concept and ‘xenophobia’, as the socially constructed ‘fear of strangers’ that relies on phantasms held up by public discourse, media representation and political rhetoric, is only a small part of it. Moreover, ‘xenophobia’ bears the danger – like all power relations called ‘-phobia’ – of individualizing or trivializing discrimination against (people who are perceived as) migrants, making it into a matter of the psyche. Most importantly, I argue that ‘migratism’ enables us to analyse how both the ‘strangers’ within the nation *and* at the border come to be ‘strangers’ in the first place. As Sara Ahmed (1999) puts it, denying differences within the nation state means assuming one ‘would only encounter strangers at the border’ (p. 340). Critical examinations of ‘migratism’ do not take the border nor the exclusion within the nation state as a given. They make it possible to see the deep structural effects and rootedness of anti-migration discourse and the normalization of non-migration in the Western nation state, and moreover, uncover how this often is a *strategy of racism* that relies on colonialist ideas of nation, territory and culture.

Without a doubt, the discourse around East European migrants in the United Kingdom has become more and more hostile over the last years, intensified in the run-up and after the Brexit referendum. Especially the right-wing press, both the tabloids and the conservative newspapers, leads on depicting Romanians, Bulgarians and Poles through topoi ranging from mafia gangs, welfare fraudsters, crime lords to sex traffickers or offenders (see also Rzepnikowska, 2019).¹⁶ This development is not completely new; it but has a centuries-long history of positioning Eastern Europe as backwards and culturally other compared to its Western and Northern counterparts (Boatcă, 2013). I argue that if migratism is directed towards people who are racialized as non-white, migratization is a strategy of racism; whereas where it is directed towards white people it is a strategy of perpetuating existing hierarchies within Europe, that is, reproducing the idea that ‘Eastern Europe is not Christian enough, or not white enough’ (Boatcă, 2013: 6), or in the Polish case too Catholic. If we pay close attention to the wording here, it becomes clear that ‘not white *enough*’, ‘not Christian *enough*’ is not the same as ‘not white’ or ‘not Christian’. On the contrary, it is the position in the semi-periphery of whiteness and Christianity that makes the construction of an imagined racially homogeneous East Europe into Europe’s ‘incomplete Self’ rather than ‘incomplete Other’ (Boatcă, 2013: 7; see also Todorova,

2009: 17). It is a construction of hierarchy within Europeaness, whiteness and Christianity, not outside of it.

Migratism is based on assuming that migrants' societies of origin are essentially different, have non-compatible cultures or are less developed and therefore people who are from countries considered fundamentally different (or are perceived as coming from these countries) pose a threat to the nation. Migratization, the ascription of migration, can work through strategies like normalizations of visual and auditory habits, it relies on the idea that one can 'see' who is a stranger or can 'hear' it from their language, accents and intonations. In the Brexit debate, the latter was, for example, present in the above mentioned LBC interview in which Farage scandalized a primary school in East London having 'a majority [of pupils] who don't speak English' (12:05).¹⁷ O'Brien intervened, correcting Farage by stating that a majority of pupils had English as a second language, and of course spoke English, and reminded him that the same was true for Farage's German-British children (12:34). But clearly in Farage's world, being fluent in both German and English does not pose a threat, while other languages do. In right-wing and everyday migrantist discourse they function as proof of migratization, quasi annulling the possibility of English language proficiency. The lack of social recognition for multilingualism, as well as the devaluation of languages from outside of Europe or from Eastern Europe as less relevant, has the effect of hierarchizing languages and countries of origin, and of course obscures the fact that 62 percent of Britons (presumably most of them white, non-migratized Britons) do not speak any language other than English.¹⁸ Examples for migrantist language policing are post-referendum incidents and migrantist hate crimes in which people got assaulted in the streets for speaking English with an accent,¹⁹ for example, a Polish student was stabbed in the neck with a broken bottle (Dearden, 2017).

Having had experiences with migratism does not automatically imply experiences with migration beyond processes of ascription. It is especially this point that makes the concept relevant for anti-racist scholarship. In many cases, the hegemonic ascription of migration is not dependent upon whether a migration background or migration experience exists or not. Black Britons, Asian Britons and Britons of colour are migratized in that they are almost automatically assumed to have a migration background, thereby equating Britain (or merely England; see Dyer, 1997; Emejulu, 2016) with original whiteness and a racially 'pure' past. Migratization is the sending-off to an often phantasmatic 'elsewhere' (Tudor, 2018: 1064). Circling back to the epigraph with which I started this subsection, this is seen in Muslims being assaulted and told to 'go home', cases of which spiked after the referendum result (Rampen, 2016).

Conclusion

In these times of the rise of the European far-right and white, Christian supremacy, which is also manifest in East Europe (Nowicka, 2018; Rexhepi, 2018), this article offers a transnational perspective that opposes methodological nationalism or 'methodological whiteness' (Bhambra, 2017a: S227) in academic and mediated representations of race and East European migration in the context of Brexit. I argue that an overgeneralized 'racism' concept discursively takes part in what Saha (2021: 4) calls 'media make race', it is a specific representation of what race is that can be seen as a

‘form of power/knowledge that maintains the dominance of whiteness’. While much emphasis was given to the anti-East European resentments in the public debate, and anti-EU rhetoric was explained through a British revolt against continental dominance in the EU, scholars like Nadine El-Enany (2016), who calls Brexit ‘nostalgia for empire’, and Gurinder Bhambra (2017b), who points out the ways in which the British desire to re-establish their imperial sovereignty is built on a colonial racial hierarchy, foreground a postcolonial analysis. It is my claim that anti-Brexit scholarship that focuses solely on East Europeans (who are implicitly homogenized as white in these approaches) in its ‘racism’ analysis cannot account for the complexities of simultaneous and interrelated phenomena, for example, the Windrush scandal (Bhambra, 2018), the so-called refugee crisis, or the role of anti-Muslim racism (Khan, 2021). At the same time, such scholarship reproduces white-centrism and fails to grasp the intricacy of the current political moment in the United Kingdom. Moreover, calling all migration-based discrimination ‘racism’ produces certainties about the overlap of race and nation as I have shown: the (ascribed) country of origin is always already assumed to be racially homogeneous. This phenomenon is based on methodological nationalism, as what counts as ‘other nationalities’ is only stable in one given national context. While contextualized analyses are important, transnational understandings of racism (that are not only true in one given national context) are crucial for critical race and migration scholarship. The here-raised questions show how an analysis of the entanglements of racism and migratism can both underline the necessity of seeing racialization and racism as connected to (ascriptions of) migration *and* point out and criticize discrimination against East European migrants. A differentiation of racism and migratism foregrounds Europe’s past and present as entrenched in complicated colonial, fascist and anti-migration regimes and prioritizes transnational understandings of race, migration, nation and belonging. I sympathize with the claim that the systematic discrimination against East Europeans in Western European culture, imaginary and everyday social interaction needs attention in scholarship and politics. Looking at wide-spread migratist discourse, my intention with this article is to find words that are strong enough to name the power relation that assaults and even kills people due to (ascribed) migration (Tudor, 2020: 94), but that keeps a postcolonial and transnational analysis of racism and racialization at its core. I argue that the proposed differentiation between racism and migratism can help us to disentangle the layers of ascriptions of migration and racialization we witness in the examples provided here, without downplaying the role of white supremacy on one hand, or ignoring the migration-based discrimination against East Europeans on the other hand.

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Notes

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2. Using ‘post-referendum, racism, brexit’ and ‘post-referendum, racism, brexit, polish’ as search terms with a timeframe from 23 June 2016 to 23 June 2018, interestingly, five of the first 10 of the delivered hits overlapped, while the first two from the search without ‘polish’ overlapped with the first and the third hit of the search with ‘polish’, just in opposite order. Of these two, one article (Krupa, 2016) discusses the Jozwik case that I analyse in more detail in the second subchapter of this article (sources also sampled with LexisNexis; search terms ‘jozwik, brexit’). The other (Lusher, 2016) is a newspaper write-up of an academic study that was published by the Institute for Race Relations (Komaromi and Singh, 2016), which proves how academic sources sometimes are taken up in the mainstream media.
3. See Hall (2000) on the myth of liberal multiculturalism and Lewis (2005) for a critique of liberal understandings of tolerance. Abeera Khan (2021) offers a nuanced meta-reflection on the ‘obfuscated continuities between British liberalism’s imperial hostility towards Islam and the politics of exclusion inherent to British “tolerance” of so-called diverse populations, particularly Muslims’ (p. 136).
4. See, for example, Farage’s assertion that UKIP is a ‘pro-Commonwealth Party’ and that it has more Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) voters than the Conservatives and LibDem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TG4II01Y3pM> (23 February 2020).
5. Emejulu refers to these statistics: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-36616028> (23 February 2020).
6. This quote in some variations was indeed used by Brexiteers on social media to promote a Leave vote, saying Churchill would have been in favour of Brexit. I am not making a statement here whether or not Churchill would have wanted Brexit (as his stance towards the *European Economic Community* changed over time and was ambivalent; see Ramiro Troitiño and Chochia, 2015: 78), but want to point out that British nationalist constructions have a long history of distancing themselves from other European nations and using instead ‘their’ Empire as main axis of self-identification. However, the Remainers’ rebuttal that depicts Churchill as the poster child for democracy misses the fact that Churchill’s politics were based on racial hierarchy and colonial warfare and therefore indeed overlap with the racism and colonial nostalgia of the Brexit discourse.
7. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants> (20 February 2020).
8. I come to this conclusion through the astonishing overlap of hits in a LexisNexis search using the search terms ‘post-referendum racism brexit’ and ‘post-referendum racism brexit polish’ with a timeframe from 23 June 2016 to 23 June 2018 (see Note 2).
9. See Tudor (2017b, 2018) for detailed discussions of the potentials and limits of Balibar’s approach. Upon closer reading, one can see that the question he poses, ‘Is there a “Neo-Racism”?’ is answered tentatively with both ‘yes’ and ‘no’ and not as clearly with ‘yes’ as the migration-racism scholarship that follows him suggests.
10. The certainty of accessing this whiteness is more troubled for Romanians, though. On the Western European anti-Romaist tendency to equate Romanians with Roma and the problematic insistence of white Romanians to prove proper Europeanness in return, see Tudor (2017a).

11. Interestingly, one of Rzepnikowska's interviewees is described as 'not-looking Polish'. Rzepnikowska (2019: 71) summarizes that '[w]hile she may become racialized in Poland due to her darker skin complexion, she blends in well in her ethnically mixed neighbourhood in Manchester'. In my view, the complex interplay of racialization and migratization is right there in Rzepnikowska's own material but remains unnoticed and problematically untheorized by her.
12. For a more extensive critique of a similar problematic tendency to construct postsocialist feminism as the missing other of Western feminism *and* postcolonial feminism, see Tudor and Rexhepi (2021).
13. <https://www.essexlive.news/news/essex-news/arkadiusz-jozwik-manslaughter-harlow-full-447881> (05 March 2020).
14. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/arek-j-wik-killing-polish-murder-harlow-march-silent-pictures-flags-a7224341.html> (24 March 2020).
15. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/polish-officials-march-nationalists-independence-day-181111093227508.html> (24 March 2020).
16. For a meta-analysis of Romanian press reactions to the British press hostility, see Cheregi (2015).
17. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pyYoL9ngtE> (23 February 2020).
18. <https://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/learners/skills/reading/british-worst-learning-languages> (04 March 2020).
19. See, for example, Roulet (2018) reporting that a person with a Romanian accent was asked by a member of the public when he intended to move back home: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politics-sandpolicy/eu-citizens-in-brexit-britain/> (04 March 2020).
20. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pyYoL9ngtE> (accesses 26 May 2022).

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