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Unequal Europe, unequal Brexit: How intra-European inequalities shape the unfolding and framing of Brexit

Abstract

This article argues that focusing on intra-European inequalities is key to a deeper understanding of the Brexit process, as the impacts of the Brexit process on core–periphery inequalities within Europe and on intra-European migrations remain under-researched topics. Focusing on sociology, this article provides a critical analysis of the burgeoning literature on Brexit, highlighting the centrality of methodological nationalism and its critique by critical race scholars. We expand the latter's critique, providing a different solution to the national framing of the debate. Drawing on world-system theory and post-Bourdieusian social theory, we explore the role that Britain played in legitimising core–periphery inequalities in Europe and social hierarchies between West and East, and North and South, European populations. We highlight the UK's influence over EU supranational policies and its association, among non-UK EU citizens, with a 'meritocracy narrative' that shapes patterns and meanings of intra-European migration. We further explore how inequalities of nation, class, race and gender make EU citizens unequally positioned to access the promises of this narrative. Overall, we argue that a focus on intra-European inequalities is essential to an understanding of how Britain contributed to the *unequal Europe* it aims to leave, and how EU citizens' *unequal migrations* make Brexit an asymmetrical process.

Keywords: Brexit, intra-European migration, Europe, inequality, methodological nationalism, methodological whiteness, intra-European inequalities, meritocracy

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Introduction

This article clarifies the links between Brexit and wider processes of inequality by discussing the overlooked dimension of intra-European divisions and hierarchies. The aftermath of the UK's Referendum on EU membership has inspired a number of analyses from social scientists. Sociologists in particular have offered competing explanations for the Leave vote, focusing on class and regional inequalities and, more recently, on racial inequalities. In this article, we expand the critique of methodological nationalism and 'methodological whiteness' (Bhambra, 2017b) put forward by postcolonial and critical race scholars by focusing on the overlooked topic of intra-European inequalities, namely core–periphery inequalities within Europe, their impact on intra-European migrations, and the inequalities of race, class and gender that make European migrations unequal.

The article will proceed as follows. In the next section, we discuss how sociological contributions have framed the Brexit process and highlight the absence of intra-European inequalities from analyses focusing on class, 'race' and racism, and European migration. In the section 'Unequal Europe', we problematise the framing of Brexit as an outcome of the ideological detachment between the UK and the EU, highlighting the ideological *alignment* between the UK and the European project's liberal features, and the former's historical influence on the latter. This macro context of intra-European inequalities is crucial to understanding the patterns of EU migrations that came under the spotlight during Brexit. In the following section ('Land of meritocracy: the impact of core–periphery inequalities on intra-European migration'), we show how core–periphery inequalities inform the motivations of mobile EU citizens and, at the same time, how they sustain the racialisation[1] of different ethno-national groups. In the final section ('Unequal migrations'), we show how racialisation based on nation and ethnicity intersects with other inequalities in the biographies of EU migrants.

Overall, we connect different dimensions of intra-European inequalities to highlight, firstly, how Brexit is connected to the position of the UK within Europe; secondly, how the position of the UK as a core country within Europe shaped both the direction and the meaning of intra-European migration; and, thirdly, how intersecting inequalities make Brexit an asymmetrical process for EU migrants. In this article, we define EU citizens who exert their freedom of movement as 'migrants', rather than mobile citizens, as we believe that this definition better reflects their position at the intersection of different social divisions.[2] While our discussion of unequal migrations also has relevance for British citizens living in Europe (Miller, 2019), this paper's primary focus is the linkages between Brexit, core–periphery inequalities and migration from the periphery to the core of Europe. For this reason, we focus on EU citizens migrating towards (and living in) the UK.

A critical review of the Brexit–inequalities nexus

Sociologists have approached the Brexit process by focusing on how inequalities informed the Referendum vote (Dodd, Lamont and Savage, 2017) and how they will shape Brexit's impact on different social groups (Burrell and Hopkins, 2019). While Brexit can be legitimately approached from different angles, this article continues this ongoing debate by offering an original contribution to the literature on the Brexit–inequalities nexus.

To better understand the framing of inequality in relation to Brexit, we conducted a review of the growing sociological literature on this topic. Our analysis is informed by a scoping review of 70 academic contributions that discuss Brexit using broadly defined sociological lenses. We included academic publications from sociology and closely related disciplines (social policy, political economy, human geography, cultural studies) as well as some relevant interventions in public sociology, such as blogs in academic and public-engagement outlets. Our review was informed by the research question: 'What is the understanding of inequalities in the sociological analyses of Brexit?'[3]

The contributions we analysed can be grouped into three strands on the basis of their analytical focus and, to some extent, the different timing of their interventions: first, an early group of contributions drawing on class analysis and focusing on the 'white' working class; second, a growing group of contributions challenging this racialised trope, which draws on (broadly defined) postcolonial and critical race theory; and, third, a smaller set of contributions on non-UK EU citizens, which only occasionally overlaps with contributions on Brexit and racism (Botterill and Burrell, 2019), and which has scant connections with analyses of class and other inequalities.

The first set of contributions is shaped by an evident 'methodological nationalism', namely the 'territorial limitation which confines the study of social processes to the political and geographic boundaries of a particular nation-state' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003: 578). In this first set of analyses, Brexit is mostly understood as a phenomenon caused by British factors, such as neoliberal restructuring of the national labour markets (Hearn, 2017; Jessop, 2017; Taylor-Gooby, 2017) and the socio-economic effects of this on British nationals (Bachtler and Begg, 2017; Farnsworth, 2017;

Fooks and Mills, 2017; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2017). Other contributions addressing the motivations and demography of the Brexit vote also focus on British and, to a lesser extent, Commonwealth nationals who were eligible to vote (Antonucci et al, 2017; Flemmen and Savage, 2017). For example, McKenzie (2017) argues that it was the post-1970s abandonment of working-class areas that fuelled resentment among the 'left behind' and increased their support for Brexit (see also Davies, 2016). This analytical narrative, which set the (implicitly white) working class against upper-middle-class elites, informed a number of other early contributions (e.g. Calhoun, 2017; Delanty, 2017; Hobolt, 2016).

Postcolonial and critical race scholars have started challenging this narrative. Bhambra (2017b) has highlighted the centrality of race in the Brexit vote, arguing that nostalgia for Britain's imperial past accounts for those 'pensioned, well-off, white middle class based in southern England' (Bhambra, 2017b: 215) who supported Brexit, and who remain invisible in the 'left behind' versus 'cosmopolitan elites' narrative. Other critical race scholars have stressed the importance of enduring constructions of English whiteness (Virdee and McGeever, 2017) and have argued that intersectional analyses of Brexit are key to understanding which 'voices' have been silenced in current academic analyses (Burrell and Hopkins, 2019). These critiques are an important corrective to the 'methodological whiteness' of class-informed analyses, which implicitly assume a distinction between ethnic minorities and (white) social classes (Bhambra, 2017b). Moreover, they reveal the exclusionary nature of British citizenship and its racialised history (Shilliam, 2018), as well as the racialised nature of distinctions between European and non-European migrants (Emejulu, 2016; Raji, 2017). While such analyses focus on the material and cultural legacies of the Empire and on Britain–Commonwealth relationships, they neglect the relationship between Britain and the European Union as a key analytical locus for understanding Brexit, inequalities and migration.

A third set of contributions has started focusing on the emotional impact of the Referendum on non-UK EU citizens' sense of belonging (e.g. Favell, 2017; McGhee et al., 2018; Lessard-Phillips and Sigona, 2018; Botterill et al., 2018). Some of these contributions (e.g. Botterill and Burrell, 2019)

situate European citizens within a broader discussion of racism and Brexit, discussing in particular the limitations of the 'whiteness' of East European citizens (see further below). There is, however, a general lack of integration between this literature and the literatures discussing wider processes of inequality. While some contributions have argued that Brexit will make differences of skills and qualifications more important for EU migrants (D'Angelo and Kofman, 2018b; Kilkey, 2017; Lulle et al., 2018), they do not provide a systematic analysis of how intersecting inequalities of nation, class, race and gender make non-UK EU citizens unequally exposed to the Brexit process.

These three groups of contributions reveal clear disciplinary boundaries: on the one hand, between class analysis and postcolonial/critical race analyses (as stressed also by Isakjee and Lorne, 2019); and, on the other hand, between sociology and a range of contributions on EU migrants with a more policy-oriented character and/or dealing exclusively with issues of migration (Lessard-Phillips and Sigona, 2018; D'Angelo and Kofman, 2018b; Lulle et al., 2018).

This division of labour leads to two types of limitations in the current understanding of the Brexit–inequalities nexus. First, neither class-informed nor race-informed analyses pay attention to Britain's positionality in European social and economic hierarchies and, more crucially, its role in *deepening* such hierarchies. When the role of the EU is mentioned, it is with reference to the negative effects of the EU on the UK due to its neoliberal features (Callinicos, 2017; Delanty, 2017) or its migration policies (Auer, 2017). The UK's influence on EU policymaking through 'uploading' of flagship policies, for example, is discussed only by Meer (2017). Holmwood (2017) discusses the role of the EU as a platform for Britain's postcolonial strategy of economic hegemony, but without exploring the long-term structural and cultural effects of Britain's accession to the EU and its role in reinforcing inequalities in Europe.

Second, the position of non-UK EU citizens within the discussion of Brexit and inequalities remains elusive. Mobile EU citizens are rarely mentioned in contributions linking Brexit to wider processes of class and racial inequality. Key special issues on Brexit in the *British Journal of Sociology* (2017) and *Competition & Change* (2017), for example, contain no contribution focusing on intra-

European migration, even though the most contentious issue in the renegotiation of the UK's membership of the EU – the failure of which led to calls for the Referendum – was non-UK EU citizens' access to social benefits (Clegg, 2016). More importantly, European migrations are not conceptualised as *unequal migrations*. While some contributions discuss the relative disadvantage of East Europeans (e.g. Botterill and Burrell, 2019), there is no systematic analysis of how hierarchies of whiteness intersect with other social divisions in EU migrants' social biographies. This prevents sociology from grasping EU citizens' unequal social positions in British society and Brexit's asymmetrical impact. Without doubt, Brexit is having and will continue to have profound implications for non-EU migrants and racialised minorities (Burrell and Hopkins, 2019). The relative advantage of 'white' non-UK EU citizens should not be underestimated. However, as we demonstrate in the section 'Unequal migrations', conceptualising inequalities among this social group only in terms of whiteness hinders an exploration of vulnerabilities and privileges linked to other social divisions, and it risks silencing the experiences of black, female and working-class EU migrants.

In the remainder of this article, we provide a material and cultural analysis of inequalities within Europe that draws on world-system theory (WST) (Wallerstein, 2000) and post-Bourdieusian work on intersections of class, gender and race (Skeggs, 1997; Wallace, 2016). WST helps us to situate Britain's position within the EU context and to place EU migration to the UK within the context of intra-EU inequalities, while post-Bourdieusian social theory helps us to unpack how inequalities among nations intersect with other social divisions among non-UK EU citizens. Our use of WST is indebted to Kuus (2004) and Gramsci (as read by Hall, 1986), who highlight the racialising effects of capitalist core–periphery dynamics within Europe and the role that notions of 'progress' and 'backwardness' have historically played in this context, shaping relations of material and symbolic hegemony between different European regions. These macro dynamics of inequality intersect with other social divisions, which we analyse through the 'forms of capital' approach. Using Bourdieu's (1986) definition of economic, cultural and social capital,[4] we explore how class background, race

and gender shape access to unequal resources, creating unequal biographies of migration. Drawing on these theoretical resources, we are able to uncover the positionality of Britain within EU core–periphery inequalities, and the material and cultural effects of this on unequal European migrations.

Unequal Europe: Britain's material and symbolic hegemony within the EU

The Brexit process is deeply linked to the material and symbolic hierarchies that exist within the EU project. Indeed, the EU has presented, since the beginning, the features of an unequal project that benefits certain 'core' countries, at the expense of 'periphery' countries (Seers et al., 1979). Importantly, the UK played a hegemonic role in the EU from the creation of this project. Holmwood's (2017: 35) sociological analysis of Brexit explains Britain's decision to enter the EEC – albeit a contentious one – as a manifestation of the need to protect 'white British national identity after Empire'. While Holmwood (2017) stressed the colonial past of EEC funding members, the EU has also served to reinforce pre-existing colonial relationships. Indeed, the former Southern European British colonies of Malta and Cyprus joined the EEC precisely to continue their trade role with their former Empire (Kruse, 2016). Rather than being a uniform institutional entity, the EU includes complex core–periphery dynamics that predate its formation (Hall, 1986).

As Hopkin (2017) described, the position of the UK in Europe has always been one of scepticism and emphasis of its national difference. This scepticism was present from the time of Britain's decision to join the EEC, which was motivated by the need to maintain a comparative advantage in the global economy with low wages, by the internal issue of facing low productivity and by the possibility of accessing new markets (Holmwood, 2017) – in other words, by reasons of capital accumulation (Wallerstein, 2000). After Britain's entry into the EEC, the peripheral countries of Greece, Portugal and Spain also joined the EEC. This moment traces the reinforcement of core–periphery dynamics within the EU project (Seers et al., 1982).

There is a profound overlap between the features of the British model and the pro-market stances of the EU since its creation (Hopkin, 2017). Many of Britain's defining flagship policies have indeed been uploaded at the EU level. For example, under the Eurosceptic Margaret Thatcher, Britain was 'a driving force behind the completion of the European Single Market' (Hopkin, 2017: 468). This apparent contradiction is not just 'ironic' (Hopkin, 2017: 468). It can rather be seen as a consequence of the Janus face of British political-economic strategy and the search for the best post-Empire solution to the accumulation of capital. This strategy combines a neoliberal open-market approach to the rest of the world with an ethno-nationalist ideology popular 'at home' and consisting of a long-standing scepticism towards the European project.

Similarly, under New Labour, Britain left a strong imprint on the EU project, in particular in the area of economic reforms and competitiveness (Bulmer, 2008), while maintaining its relative policy autonomy vis-à-vis the EU. An example of this is the strategy of building a knowledge-based economy: started as a flagship New Labour policy in the 1990s, this also became a core aim of the 2000 Lisbon Strategy adopted by the EU. The key objective was to upskill workers in order to increase the employability of the population and the productivity of the economic system (Rodrigues, 2002). Importantly, the knowledge-based economy strategy reflects the existing North–South divide within the EU project, as it uses and reinforces the fundamental divide between the strongest economies (Germany, France, the UK and Scandinavian countries) and Southern and Eastern European ones (Bessant and Watts, 2014). Not surprisingly, the famous Sapir report (2003) commissioned by the EU to monitor the progress of the Lisbon Strategy mentions the 'core' Nordic countries and liberal countries (the UK and Ireland) as the 'best practice' models for the creation of a knowledge-based economy, in opposition to continental and, in particular, Mediterranean countries, which had to be reformed. Through this paradigm, the UK reinforced its material advantage in relation to other EU countries in terms of capital accumulation by attracting from peripheral countries both a skilled and trained labour force, and an unskilled labour force who would work for low salaries (D'Angelo and Kofman, 2018a). The subsequent enlargement

involving Eastern European countries has further reinforced the power dynamics between the core and the periphery of the EU (Musto, 2016). As noted by Kuus (2004), the enlargement was framed around the notion of 'backwardness' of Eastern European countries in respect to core countries. The continuous hegemonic role of Britain in the EU, combined with the long-standing defence of its domestic policy autonomy (Schweiger, 2016), has continued post-2008 crisis, when the EU developed new instruments for addressing the macroeconomic issues of peripheral countries, such as the European Semester. Through the hegemonic role of Germany and with the support of aligned countries, like Britain, the countries of the peripheries have been pressured to reduce their deficits and comply with EU economic criteria (Crespy and Meinz, 2015). The governance procedure of the European Semester provides country-specific recommendations and evaluation of current policies of member states by EU officials (Bekker, 2014). Even without conducting an in-depth analysis, it is noticeable that in EU reports that assess countries' responses to EU recommendations in 2015, 2016 and 2017 (European Parliament, 2016; 2017a; 2017b), the UK, unlike most other countries, is always deemed to have made 'some progress', rather than 'limited progress'. As shown by Musto and colleagues (2016) and Ágh (2016), after 2008 the cleavage between the core economies of Europe (Germany, France and the UK) and the weaker economies of the periphery (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy) sharpened as a result of the economic crisis.

Brexit can and must be included in this framework of core–periphery inequalities. As we demonstrate below, Britain's role within Europe in terms of both capital accumulation and symbolic hegemony helps to contextualise and explain the patterns of EU migrations that have caused controversy during Brexit. The UK's decision to leave the EU, to which it is ideologically aligned, also stimulates a reflection on the new conflicts that are emerging within Europe (Vis, Kersbergen and Hylands, 2011), namely the issue of the distribution of resources between the core and peripheral countries. In this context, the rejection of EU membership (Brexit) is a rejection not only of neoliberalism and commodification (Hopkin, 2017), but of the very fundaments of the British political-economic strategy in Europe.

Land of meritocracy: the impact of core–periphery inequalities on intra-European migration

Intra-EU mobility is an essential and functional aspect of the UK's hegemonic role in Europe. The British strategy in Europe consisted of the promotion of EU workers' mobility in order to operate an efficient allocation of skills for the UK (and other 'core countries') within the European economy. The motivation behind the policy of non-restriction towards migrants from Central and Eastern Europe, adopted by the UK from the 2004 enlargement, aimed precisely to 'fill gaps in the low-skilled sector of the labour market' (Fox, Morosanu and Szilassy, 2012: 683). Many identify in low-skilled mobility the most contentious element of EU migration, because of the assumption – largely unsupported (Parker, 2017: 487–488) – that migrants will 'steal' the jobs of the British working class. The existence of low-skilled sectors, however, pre-exists intra-EU migration, and the divide between low skills and high skills is a distinctive feature of the British liberal model (Clegg, 2010). What Holmwood addresses as "[t]he policy of competition through low wages that draws in unskilled migrant workers" (2017: 38) has been adopted precisely to sustain Britain's economy post-Empire. This trend is the consequence of the intra-European divide discussed above: as shown by the ESPON report (2018), the flows of intra-EU migration tend to go from the periphery of Europe to its core countries.

Britain's political-economic strategy also has symbolic effects that remain little researched but play a significant role in legitimising a Northern model of economic development in Europe and, more specifically, hierarchies between 'modern' and 'backward' European societies. These hierarchies shape both the directionality and meaning of intra-European migration, particularly in the form of a distinctive narrative about the UK as a more 'meritocratic' country. Before Brexit, work on both East and West European migration to the UK showed that Britain, particularly London, is associated by European migrants with a more dynamic and meritocratic labour market and with a more 'multicultural' and tolerant society (Favell, 2008; Lopez Rodriguez, 2010). This image of

London and the UK also emerges from the narratives of more recent South European migrations to the UK. There is a growing literature on South European migrants and their understanding of the UK (and North Europe more generally) as a place where talent and meritocracy are naturally rewarded, in contrast to the nepotism, corruption and 'gerontocracy' affecting South European countries (Triandafyllidou and Gropas, 2014; Varriale, in press). Indeed, North European countries like the UK and Germany have attracted the highest share of South European migration since the 2008 economic crisis, which reactivated South-to-North mobilities in Europe (Bartolini et al., 2017). Similarly, East-to-West patterns of migration have been a distinctive feature of intra-EU mobility since the 2004 enlargement (Recchi, 2015: 59), and core–periphery inequalities have long influenced intra-European migrations before the Maastricht Treaty institutionalised freedom of movement in Western Europe (Seers et al., 1979). Since becoming part of the EU, Britain has reinforced this core–periphery divide both through its economic and social policy and by providing a narrative script for the 'good nation' that other European countries, via EU policies, are compelled to implement and that EU migrants – and perhaps EU citizens at large (Melegh et al., 2016) – have internalised to a significant extent.

Core–periphery inequalities also feed into forms of racialisation that frame different groups of European migrants as more or less culturally 'developed' (Kushner, 2004). In the context of Britain, this has been discussed in terms of inequalities between 'East' and 'West' European migrants, with the former being affected by higher rates of downward mobility (Johnston et al., 2015) and more direct experiences of discrimination (Briggs and Dobre, 2014). It has been argued that East Europeans have been targeted by an 'Orientalist' discourse in the UK (Lulle et al., 2018), and others have stressed that such stigma is differentially distributed among different Central and East European populations, with Romanian EU migrants in particular being associated with 'degenerate' behaviours like laziness, crime and benefit scrounging (Fox et al., 2012). A framing of East Europeans as a 'threat' to 'British' jobs, however, appears to be more widespread, as well as linked

to the assumption that the economic 'underdevelopment' of their countries makes them more willing to become a cheap labour force in the UK (Lulle et al., 2018).

Experiences of discrimination and downward mobility did not prevent East European citizens from seeing the UK as a more 'meritocratic' and wealthier European country in which it is possible to achieve intergenerational social mobility (Lopez Rodriguez, 2010). The meritocracy narrative thus attracts mobile European citizens who are unequally affected by racialisation processes, and who are unequally positioned to access the promises of this narrative.

Unequal migrations: how core–periphery inequalities intersect with class, gender and racism

In this section, we further expand our argument that European citizens possess unequal resources that enable them to access the promises of the 'meritocracy' narrative, as the forms of racialisation discussed above intersect with class, gender and colour-coded racism in complex ways. We complement our macro core–periphery analysis with a focus on how unequal 'forms of capital' shape intra-European migration. This approach, introduced at the end of our critical review, allows us to capture how configurations of inequality and privilege play out in EU migrants' social biographies. Without doubt, inequalities of capital have not been the main preoccupation of intra-European migration studies (see further below). However, some contributions are relevant for understanding the asymmetrical impact of Brexit on mobile EU citizens. We thus critically discuss some of these studies – which were conducted *before* the Referendum – through a 'forms of capital' lens.

Since the Maastrict Treaty (1993), studies of intra-European migration have focused either on skilled professionals and graduates moving from South to North Europe, or (after 2006) on the East-to-West mobilities of both low-skilled and high-skilled migrants (Recchi, 2015). Interestingly, inequalities of capital and their intersection with other social divisions appear even in studies of the so-called 'Eurostars', namely high-skilled and university-educated European migrants. Favell

(2008), in his ethnography of West European migrants living in London, Amsterdam and Brussels, shows that these upwardly mobile professionals frequently come from working-class, provincial and/or migrant backgrounds (and hence include black/ethnic minority EU migrants) and from families lacking the social capital that would enhance social mobility 'at home'. At the same time, Favell shows that these migrants do not have ready access to local (i.e. white and middle-class) networks, and that this lack of social and cultural capital, along with differences of economic capital, can affect their prospects in terms of professional advancement and access to housing and child-rearing support. These unequal biographies of social mobility (see also Varriale, in press; Gilmartin and Miggie, 2015; Ryan, 2011) are important in understanding the different social positions of EU citizens in Britain's stratification system. Moreover, they become especially important vis-à-vis the transformation of 'mobile' EU citizens into 'migrants' (Bhambra, 2017a) subject to future British legislation and no longer protected by European treaties.

Most studies of intra-European migration focus on single ethno-national groups or address how different groups (e.g. 'West' and 'East' Europeans) occupy different social positions in their host society (e.g. Johnston et al., 2015). However, inequalities of economic, cultural and social capital create significant divisions *within* migrant groups. Focusing on Italians who moved to the UK after the 2008 economic crisis, Varriale (in press) shows how inequalities in class background and in later educational and professional trajectories shape migrants' social mobility both before and after migration. These unequal social mobilities also feed into competing strategies of distinction: Italians working in the catering sector are stigmatised by Italian graduates for their lack of ambition and 'poor' cultural tastes and are seen as a threat to the positive reputation – i.e. the privileged whiteness – that Italian culture enjoys in the UK (Varriale, 2017). Other studies further reveal the importance of such intra-group divisions, even though they do not make them their central analytical focus (Lafleur and Mescoli, 2018).

It is well known that gendered norms about care and work shape the position of women within the family and the labour market, limiting their access to valuable forms of capital and shaping their

biographies of social mobility (Skeggs, 1997). Some studies of intra-European migration show evidence of this process. Shutes and Walker (2018) highlight that EU migrant women working part-time and on zero-hour contracts (usually in 'feminised' sectors like paid care and cleaning) are unable to prove their residency rights and, as a result, to access social benefits in the UK and other European countries (Lafleur and Mescoli, 2018). Focusing on middle-class EU migrant mothers, Bonizzoni (2017) highlights the gendered nature of their professional biographies before they became full-time mothers, which included underemployment and experience in 'feminised' (less lucrative) sectors of the labour market. These remain particularly precarious positions vis-à-vis the Brexit process, as non-working partners may find it more difficult to prove their residency status in the application for 'settled status' in the UK (Sumption and Kone**,** 2018) and will likely become more vulnerable in a post-Brexit migration system that favours high-income migrant workers (UK Government, 2019).

While European migrants have long been associated with whiteness (with the partial exception of some East European groups), some studies have recently paid attention to the experiences of black EU citizens, showing how colour-coded racism prevents access to different forms of capital. Erel and Tapini (2017) have focused on black and racialised EU citizens escaping the economic crisis from Greece and Spain, showing that while Brexit puts their participants in a situation of insecurity that is common to other EU migrants, these 'more visible' Europeans working in low-skilled sectors are also more likely to experience occupational precarity and racism. Della Puppa and King (2018) focus on similar vulnerabilities among Italian-Bangladeshi migrants who moved to the UK after the 2008 crisis. Like other EU citizens, their participants follow a well-established South-to-North migration route and are deeply invested in the 'meritocracy narrative', but they possess fewer resources (compared to white Italian migrants) that enable them to access the promises of this narrative. Experiences of racism led them to leave relatively secure factory work in Italy, but the skills deriving from this work are not recognised as cultural capital in London's service economy,

which provides them only with hourly-paid, ‘just-in-time’ positions as minicab drivers and dishwashers.

Overall, these studies show both the enduring influence of core–periphery inequalities on patterns of European migration and how class, gender and race intersect with these inequalities, which are further complicated by age and disability (Sumption and Kone, 2018).

Conclusion

While early sociological readings of the Brexit–inequalities nexus focused on (white) British nationals and on class processes, postcolonial and critical race theorists have started challenging the ‘methodological whiteness’ of this perspective and have underlined how Empire and racism inform Brexit. A number of recent articles have also started exploring Brexit’s impact on EU migrants, albeit without engaging with broader debates about Brexit and inequalities. Overall, intra-European divisions and hierarchies remain largely marginal to these debates. This has resulted in two major gaps in the emerging sociology of Brexit. The first is the lack of attention to Britain’s positionality as a core country within the EU project and its role in *deepening* intra-European divisions. The second gap concerns the impact of these core–periphery divisions on unequal European migrations. Our theoretical contribution has overcome these gaps. We have enriched the current sociological understanding of Brexit through an analytical framework that combines WST and post-Bourdieusian social theory. Through this approach, we demonstrated how the core–periphery divide concerning capital accumulation in Europe influences unequal migrations among non-UK EU citizens. We have thus analysed two interlinked stratification processes that shape the European project. In our framework, Brexit is both a product and an intensifier of these processes. Looking at the macro level, the UK contributed to a deepening of the material and symbolic divisions within the EU through its strategies of capital accumulation and by uploading to the EU level the same liberal policies that intensified inequalities in the UK. These macro dynamics feed into unequal

European migrations, making Brexit a profoundly asymmetrical process for EU citizens who have become part of the UK's socio-cultural fabric. We have also challenged the understanding of EU migrants as a socially homogeneous, non-problematic white population (Lafleur and Mescoli, 2018) and have underlined, instead, how Brexit is linked to ethno-national divisions that intersect with class, race and gender, producing under-researched configurations of inequality and privilege.

Our critical review contributes to future work on the Brexit–inequalities nexus in several ways. Our discussion of inequalities among EU migrants contributes to a broader research agenda on unequal migrations. Indeed, the lines of inequality we highlighted are likely to be at work among both EU and non-EU migrants – a category that, like EU migrants, has rarely been problematised in the sociology of Brexit. As Brexit remains an ongoing legal and political process, future work should consider how the consequences of Brexit will impact asymmetrically on migrants and citizens in unequal social positions. The 'forms of capital' approach we used in this article can be particularly helpful in exploring how divisions of race, ethnicity and nation intersect with other social divisions.

Our study also has profound implications for the way Brexit is understood in relation to wider European inequalities. Future research should explore the 'Brexit effect' – namely, the growing desire to withdraw from EU membership – across Europe, clarifying how these attempts reflect the positionality of the different countries within the EU project as core or peripheral countries.

In the UK, it has been argued that growing inequalities have been legitimised through individualistic accounts of merit and success, which obscure structural privilege while stigmatising disadvantaged social groups (Savage, 2015). Our analysis shows that this 'meritocratic' politics of othering has also legitimised new hierarchies between 'modern' and 'backward' European economies. Future work should explore the extent to which Brexit will transform this symbolic division, changing the position of the UK in both European and world hierarchies, as well as immigration and emigration patterns to/from the UK.

Although there is not a coherent 'sociology of Brexit', our contribution aims to direct future research on Brexit towards a closer integration between different subfields, especially analyses of

migration and analyses of social inequalities. This approach has revealed, in this article, the embeddedness of Brexit within wider European dynamics and divisions. Without a consideration of intra-European inequalities, the sociological discussion of Brexit lacks several key dimensions: an understanding of how Brexit resulted from Britain's influence as a core country in Europe; an appreciation of how trends of intra-EU migration from the periphery are connected to these core–periphery dynamics; and, finally, an understanding of the complex intersections of privilege and disadvantage that make Brexit an asymmetrical process.

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Notes

1. Throughout this article, we use 'racialisation' in line with Fox et al. (2012: 681), as the language through which 'structured inequalities […] are expressed, maintained, and reproduced'. Such language can invoke notions of biological-phenotypical difference, but also alleged 'cultural' traits of ethno-national groups, e.g. 'crime' and 'laziness' in the case of East Europeans in the UK.

2. There is no consensus in migration and European studies about how to define EU citizens who exert their freedom-of-movement rights. Some argue that the term 'mobility' is more suitable than migration because of EU movers' legal status (Recchi, 2015). Others prefer the concept migration,

as they see mobility as a concept obscuring the legal, racial and class privileges of EU migrants (Lafleur and Mescoli, 2018). We side with this latter position, but we also use the terms 'non-UK EU citizens' and 'mobile EU citizens' to avoid repetition.

3. Outputs were found using the search engines Web of Science and Google Scholar. We read and reviewed the abstracts of approximately 230 academic outputs published between July 2016 and April 2019. To be included in our scoping review, the abstracts had to discuss the relationship between Brexit and social inequalities. We therefore excluded outputs that dealt purely with EU migration and EU policymaking. This process led to the selection of a purposive sample of 70 articles that responded to our inclusion criteria, which was read and discussed by both authors. This article discusses outputs that reflect broader trends within our purposive sample. A full list of the outputs analysed is available on request.

4. Bourdieu (1986) defines economic capital as material resources deriving from income and inherited wealth; cultural capital as symbolic resources that can be 'institutionalised' in educational qualifications and 'embodied' as tacit skills and tastes; and social capital as (unequally distributed) social ties that can be mobilised to access material (jobs) and symbolic (knowledge) resources.

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