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**Cultural Violence in the Aftermath of the Brexit Referendum: Manifestations of Post-Racial Xeno-Racism**

**Abstract**

This paper makes a novel contribution to the academic debate on Brexit and racism. It emphasizes the need to distinguish different manifestations of post-racial xeno-racism in the aftermath of the Brexit Referendum as either direct, structural or cultural violence. This distinction of different types of violence is important for everyday and academic contexts, because it affects the ways in which racist behaviour is identified and addressed. Cultural violence in the form of nationalist defensive, anti-immigration statements is the most common type of racist violence that we found in our analysis. Yet, it also tends to be more readily dismissed as “not racist” by its perpetrators and targets, and contributes to feelings of subdual and powerlessness amongst the latter. Our arguments are based on findings from 15 semi-structured interviews that we conducted in 2017 with British and non-British residents of Great Yarmouth, a seaside borough in East Anglia.

**Keywords:** Brexit, Post-Racial, Xeno-Racism, Racialization, Migration, Cultural Violence

**Introduction**

Far-right populism – a style of doing politics that emphasizes the sovereignty and majority rule of a narrowly (typically: ethnically or racially defined) people (Katsambekis 2017) – has been

on the rise again in the so-called global North. It is based on sharply antagonistic world views, challenges the legitimacy of “the establishment” (including ruling elites, state institutions and major media outlets), rejects multicultural tolerance and openness to difference, and makes emotionally intense references to “native” people being threatened by “alien” others (ibid.; Bang and Marsh 2018; Durrheim et al. 2018; Foa and Mounk 2017; Norris 2017). It becomes evident in the parliamentary seat share of political parties such as the Austrian FPÖ or the German AfD, the electoral performance of presidential candidates such as Front National’s Marine Le Pen in France or the Republican Party’s Donald Trump in the USA, and the political discourse and actions surrounding the UK’s EU Referendum on 23 June 2016 (ibid.).

It is important to note that while these far-right populist parties, actors and events use racism and xenophobia in their political toolkit, they did not invent them. Xenophobia and racism have a long history across space and time, and their aforementioned manifestations are neither new nor exceptional (Benson and Lewis 2019; Bloch and Solomos 2010a; Law 2010;

Rzepnikowska 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2018; Wilson 2016). The reasons why events such as the Brexit Referendum – which stands at the centre of this paper – are nonetheless treated as watershed moments in academic discussions (e.g. Rzepnikowska 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2018; Wilson 2016) are twofold: firstly, they signal the power of nationalist defensive, anti-immigration discourse even in long-standing liberal democracies; secondly, they allow such discourse and actions to flourish, by giving them a state-sanctioned forum in which to materialize (Abbas 2019; Benson and Lewis 2019; Patel and Connelly 2019). In this sense, political events such as the Brexit Referendum are part of a vicious cycle in which the expression of nationalist defensive, anti-immigration views through formal political acts (such as electoral campaign tactics, voting or policy debates among political elites) further emboldens their existence. This emboldening becomes evident *inter alia* in the normalization of xenoracism in elite discourse and practice, and the accelerated increase of reported racially and

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3 religiously motivated hate crimes following the Brexit Referendum, whose targets include non-  
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5 white British citizens as well as white non-British citizens (Cavalli 2019; Hunter 2017;  
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7 Rzepnikowska 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2018; Wilson 2016).  
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11 So far, most Brexit scholarship has focused on explanations for the outcome of the 2016  
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13 referendum. This has led to a complicated and partly contradictory picture of how the  
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15 referendum vote may have been caused by factors such as: internally and externally driven  
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17 neoliberalization; transformations of social structures since the late 1970s; the end of Empire  
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19 and subsequent imperial longing; low levels of representation due to the exclusionary nature  
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21 of the Westminster model of democracy; demographic changes related to migration; leadership  
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23 struggles within the Conservative Party; the 2008 financial crisis; or austerity (Clarke and  
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25 Newman 2017; Gidron and Hall 2017; Goodwin and Milazzo 2017; Patel and Connelly 2019;  
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27 Virdee and McGeever 2018). Contradictions between these explanations arise because of the  
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29 persistence of racialized myths such as that the Leave vote was carried by the white working  
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31 class (Bhambra 2017a; Virdee and McGeever 2018), or because of the failure of arguments  
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33 centring on cultural fears of white British communities (e.g. Kaufmann 2016) to recognize the  
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35 socially constructed nature of different identity categories. The latter type of argument tends to  
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37 neglect the complex interplay of individual and group identities with wider political and  
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39 economic dynamics (Gidron and Hall 2017; Virdee and McGeever 2018). The former tends to  
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41 disregard the multi-ethnic composition of the British working class (Virdee and McGeever  
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43 2018) or that 59 per cent of all Leave voters “were in the middle classes (A, B, or C1)” (Dorling  
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45 2016:1).  
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55 In a novel contribution to existing scholarship on Brexit and racism, this paper applies  
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57 Galtung’s (1990, 2007) distinction of direct, structural and cultural violence to the discussion  
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59 of everyday experiences and expressions of post-racial xeno-racism in the aftermath of the  
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3 Brexit Referendum. Post-racial xeno-racism thereby refers to a type of racism<sup>1</sup> which is “post-  
4 racial” in the sense that it relies less on the essentialist stereotyping of groups and individuals  
5 with reference to biology, and instead takes on more covert forms in which exclusionary and  
6 hostile attitudes are justified as legitimate concerns over cultural and economic preservation  
7 (Durrheim et al. 2018; Garner 2017; Patel and Connelly 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2018). It  
8 is “xeno-racism”, as it racializes anyone who is perceived to be different from “ordinary”,  
9 “native” people, be this on the basis of skin colour, religion, citizenship, language, dress or  
10 other identity markers (Garner 2017; Patel and Connelly 2019; Rzepnikowska 2019). It heavily  
11 features nationalist defensive, anti-immigration views, based on narrow and often nostalgic  
12 imaginations of one’s country’s national identity, and the presentation of migrants as a threat  
13 to its cultural and economic integrity (Durrheim et al. 2018; Garner 2017; Patel and Connelly  
14 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2018).

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17 The research project upon which this paper draws sought to uncover the interplay of  
18 perceptions and realities of migration, (socio-economic) inequalities and political attitudes in  
19 a strongly Leave-supporting area in the aftermath of the Brexit Referendum. Our field site was  
20 the Norfolk Borough of Great Yarmouth, which had a population of approximately 98,700 in  
21 2017 (Great Yarmouth Borough Council 2019a). We chose this site for several reasons,  
22 including Great Yarmouth’s informal reputation as “Norfolk’s Brexit capital” (Hannant 2018,  
23 n.p.), being a former UKIP stronghold (Great Yarmouth Borough Council 2019b) and having  
24 had the 5<sup>th</sup> highest proportion of Leave supporters (71.5 per cent) countrywide in 2016 (BBC  
25 2016). It also is one of the 20 per cent most deprived districts in England (Public Health  
26 England 2017, 2018, 2020), and a semi-rural area which – compared to urban settings – has  
27 remained under-researched in racism studies so far (Lumsden et al. 2019).

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According to the latest available figures, there has been an increase in the borough’s ethnic minority population from 1.4 per cent in 2001 to 3.2 per cent in 2011 (Great Yarmouth Borough Council 2019a). However, it remains less diverse than the East of England and England as a whole, as 93 per cent of the borough’s population were classified as white British in the 2011 census, followed by the next largest group of “other white” with 4 per cent (ibid.). Most migrants living in Great Yarmouth are reported to be from Portugal, Poland and Lithuania (ibid.), but precise migration numbers are difficult to obtain.

**Methods and Data**

This paper draws on findings from 15 semi-structured interviews that we conducted with first-generation migrant and non-migrant residents in the Borough of Great Yarmouth in 2017. We interviewed nine women and six men, whose age ranged between 26 and 70 years at the time of the interview. Three interviewees are Portuguese (one of whom with Cape Verdean descent), two Polish, one Lithuanian, one Slovakian and eight British nationals (one of whom is a Muslim convert). Table 1 presents an overview of our research participants’ characterization. To protect their anonymity, we have changed their names.

[Table 1 here]

Our sample is self-selected<sup>2</sup> after initial snowballing via existing personal links, social media and exploratory field trips. We reached out to people from British and non-British backgrounds to ensure that we include views of Great Yarmouth residents with and without an international migration history. Talking to different people within a specific geographical space allowed us to explore how our research participants experience and enact boundaries, and how ethnic

othering strategies are related to socio-economic and spatial ones (Jackson and Benson 2014). By including research participants with and without an international migration background in our analysis, we explicitly avoid what Bhabra (2017a) describes as the racializing tendencies of much Brexit research so far, which reinforces methodological nationalism by including only migrant or only non-migrant respondents in their samples (e.g. Kaufmann 2016; Lulle et al. 2018, 2019; Moroşanu and Fox 2013; Patel and Connelly 2019).

Our interview questions centred on people's experiences or perceptions of migration, satisfaction with life in Great Yarmouth, their views on the local and national economy, and their expectations for the future following the Brexit Referendum. While, as aforementioned, the high proportion of Leave support in the borough played an important role for our field site selection, it should be noted that – given the size of our sample and type of data we collected – we neither seek to draw inferences for all Leave-supporting areas (or even Great Yarmouth as a whole), nor do we claim that the manifestations of racism we found are specific to areas with a Leave majority. Although the scope of our research project does not allow us to investigate this further, it is worth noting that similar dynamics of discriminatory othering strategies have also been found in the Remain-dominated London region (Lulle et al. 2018).

### **Understanding Racism through Different Dimensions of Violence**

We borrow the distinction of direct, structural and cultural violence from peace and conflict studies, which identifies direct violence as physical altercations that can cause (potentially severe) bodily harm; structural violence as the infliction of suffering through social, economic and/or political conditions, such as poverty, political exclusion or unequal access to services such as health care and education; and cultural violence as the prevalence of norms, values and

beliefs – e.g. of a racist or xenophobic nature – which can be used to legitimize direct and/or structural violence against certain individuals or groups (Galtung 1990, 2007). As Galtung (1990) notes, the lines between these types of violence are blurry due to their interactions with one another and their tendency to last for different lengths of time, ranging from direct violence as a particular event, through structural violence as a longer-term but dynamic process, to cultural violence as longest-lasting type of violence due to its inherent inertia. Consequently, these types of violence may occur simultaneously or with considerable gaps of time between them (ibid.), as in particular cultural violence can persist over long periods with only occasional outbreaks of direct violence and various ups and downs in systems of structural violence (ibid.). We certainly found varying temporalities in the analysis of our interviewees' responses, as there were several accounts of cultural violence without references to direct or structural violence, but also cases in which the manifestation of different types of violence overlapped. Lucia, for example, a Portuguese migrant of Cape Verdean origin and the only black participant in our research, narrates an incident where she did not receive service in a shop due to her skin colour, an experience of structural violence that was legitimized by cultural violence. "I went in the shop and the person there stared at me in a way that really showed that they were unwilling to serve me, really arrogant," she explained, before commenting on a more general feeling of exclusion in a predominantly white location.

We argue that the distinction of post-racial xeno-racism into direct, structural and cultural violence is a relevant one, as it affects the ways in which racism is identified and addressed. Specifically, we found that there was widespread hesitation to identify actions or experiences as racist, unless they involved some form of physical altercation. Out of our 15 interviewees, only three – two of whom are male migrants: Alex and Henrique, and one a female British Muslim convert: Edwina – immediately answered 'yes' to our question on whether they ever observed or experienced discriminatory attitudes against migrants. All other interviewees

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3 replied negatively to this question when it was first asked, and either continued to do so when  
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5 we circled back to it (as was the case for all our British participants except Edwina), or  
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7 acknowledged experiences of discrimination only in the later parts of their interviews (as was  
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9 the case for all our migrant interviewees apart from Alicja) while still dismissing it as minor.  
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11 Alicja, a Polish woman in her 30s, denied any experience or observation of anti-immigration  
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13 views throughout her interview, but noted towards the end:  
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18 I feel a bit like maybe they [at work] are not gonna like me because I am Polish.

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21 (...) To be honest I think (...) this is because of the Brexit, because I started my  
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23 work last year and they said a lot about Polish people in that year.  
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27 Lucia, despite her experience mentioned above, began her interview by saying that she had “no  
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29 reasons for complaint.” Soraia, a Portuguese migrant in her 20s, declared to have “never  
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31 personally experienced racism” in Great Yarmouth. Yet, as their interviews continued, both  
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33 narrate situations in which they experienced post-racial xeno-racism in a culturally violent  
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35 form, even if they do not recognize the violence of these experiences. Soraia describes what  
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37 she calls “little jokes” by co-workers, which she only hesitantly acknowledges as racist and is  
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39 keen to distinguish from the “aggression” of direct violence:  
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45 I often heard the expression ‘pork and cheese’ to refer to the Portuguese at work.

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47 Initially I didn’t understand they were referring to us, and when they realized I was  
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49 Portuguese they were really embarrassed. Apart from those little jokes, I have never  
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51 experienced racism. Never! Not with me, I’ve been lucky (...) There will always  
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53 be the odd commentary ‘there are too many foreigners working here’... but never  
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55 anything aggressive.  
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3 Similarly, after initially denying any experience of hostility and discrimination, Lucia later on  
4 mentions “a little racism that there always is”, a sense of being looked at with suspicion in  
5 public space and the aforementioned incident where she did not receive service in a shop.  
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11 Recollections of post-racial xeno-racism in structurally or culturally violent forms were much  
12 more common in our interviewees’ narratives than those of direct violence. Due to their more  
13 covert framing with references to cultural preservation and economic development (Durrheim  
14 et al. 2018; Garner 2017; Patel and Connelly 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2018), they also  
15 were more difficult to recognize both by their targets and, as we will outline in more detail  
16 below, their perpetrators. Of the three interviewees who immediately answered ‘yes’ when  
17 asked about discriminatory encounters, Alex (a Slovakian migrant in his 50s) and Henrique (a  
18 Portuguese migrant in his 40s) describe incidents in a shop and at work – the two spaces where  
19 most hostile occurrences took place according to our interviewees’ narratives. In the case of  
20 Alex, a stranger had pushed his wife in a supermarket when hearing her speaking Russian to  
21 their son. Henrique mentions a British colleague’s sabotaging behaviour at work that was  
22 accompanied by racist remarks, such as insinuations to leave the country. The manager’s  
23 downplay of the situation led Henrique to react physically and, eventually, to his dismissal  
24 from the company. Edwina, a female British Muslim convert, was the third participant to  
25 promptly recognize having experienced racism. She says that she is aware of increased direct  
26 violence towards Muslims and refers to a rise in Islamophobia after the Manchester terror  
27 attack in May 2017. She explains that “48 hours after the terrible Manchester thing, I was out  
28 delivering leaflets and within the course of one hour I was [verbally] abused three times in my  
29 own local area,” which led her to “feeling fragile” and “not leave the house” afterwards.  
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57 While neither of them was the immediate target of physical violence – as Alex observed his  
58 wife being pushed, Henrique instigated direct violence with his colleague, and Edwina  
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embodied an external episode of physical violence in her own experience of what she defines as “abuse”— the act of physical violence stood at the centre of these people’s recollections, indicating that the manifestation of direct violence was key to their immediate recognition of racist experience.

### **Post-Racial Xeno-Racism as Structural or Cultural Violence**

All our migrant and non-migrant interviewees repeatedly mentioned economic deprivation in Great Yarmouth, with the frequent closing down of businesses and lack of jobs as examples. Accounts of structural and cultural manifestations of racism tended to overlap in discussions of socio-economic conditions, and reflected the pervasiveness of class reductionist narratives. According to these narratives, migration may be a benefit for the rich, but is to the detriment of poor “natives” (cf. Clarke and Newman 2017; Virdee and McGeever 2018) – an argument that we found both amongst our British and non-British interviewees.

In line with previous findings on the economic guise of post-racial xeno-racism (Patel and Connelly 2019), several of our participants were racializing those who they perceived as “undeserving” migrants. For instance, Liz and Paul, two British citizens who work for a charity offering welfare and employment advice, suggest that

everybody that’s come in with one of these letters has definitely not been white. They’ve always been Black people that have come in with these letters and mainly with African-sounding names (...). They are Portuguese passport holders but of course they were born outside of Portugal.

There seems to be a suggestion here that non-white migrants put a greater demand on the benefit system than white migrants (and non-migrants) do. This suggestion is linked to the social imaginary that perceives black skin as embodying dirtiness, laziness, and otherness (Cretton 2018) and therefore as indicating undesirable migrants who, unlike the “good citizen” that shares a national history, culture and obligations, are a threat to social order and need to be controlled (Anderson 2013).

At the same time, the racialization of others shows its nature as post-racial xeno-racism amongst our interviewees (cf. Garner 2017; Patel and Connelly 2019; Rzepnikowska 2019), as it occurs not only on the basis of skin colour, but also the national origin of migrants, the time of their arrival in Great Yarmouth, their occupation and perceived socio-economic status. Edwina, for example, mentions the relevance of skin colour, language and cultural practices as she describes migration from the USA in the 1970s, related to the emerging oil and gas industry in the region. Contrary to migrants who arrived in the 2000s and 2010s, she argues that the Americans were seen as “a good thing”, not because they were educated or high-skilled professionals, but because “they spoke English and the majority that came over had white skin, so they were never seen.” However, they kept their social and cultural practices, such as to “get together in one of their houses and have barbeques.” Describing it as a lack of willingness to integrate, Edwina’s narrative suggests a hierarchy of acceptability that depends on language proficiency skills, skin colour and cultural compatibility, in this case situating American migrants somewhere between the “good migrant” and the “bad migrant” (Gilmartin, Wood and O’Callaghan 2018; see also Lulle et al. 2019; Wemyss and Cassidy 2017). In a similar way, William, a British participant who had been a local government officer for a year at the time of the interview, recalls the arrival of Greek Cypriots during the 1970s, which he remembers as a positive source of cultural diversity and economic incentive:

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3 Near enough all the restaurants along the seafront were owned by Greek families  
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5 and (...) no hassle, no trouble. (...) They changed the holiday experience along the  
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7 seafront. They brought the restaurants, they brought the gentlemen standing  
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9 outside with the menus, you know... (...) They've brought lots of different skills  
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11 to Great Yarmouth.  
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16 Caroline, who works for the same charity as Liz and Paul, agrees that migrants who arrived in  
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18 Great Yarmouth in the 1970s were better off than those who arrived in the 2000s, arguing that  
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20 the latter tend to be “undesirable people do[ing] undesirable work”. Liz adds that “people don’t  
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22 feel quite so positively about [them]” due to their lower educational background and  
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24 occupation, suggesting a judgement around which categories are imagined as stable and  
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26 needed, such as who counts as skilled and what work is relevant.  
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30 Our migrant participants express similar othering strategies when they speak negatively of  
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32 those other migrants who, they say, “abuse the system”, “drink too much” or “lack adequate  
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34 hygiene”. In this manner, they distinguish between desirable (themselves) and undesirable  
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36 (other) migrants and, in doing so, illustrate how they, too, have internalised a political elite-  
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38 and media-driven discourse of racialized everyday bordering that is part of the UK’s  
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40 exclusionary citizenship regime (Moroşanu and Fox 2013; Wemyss and Cassidy 2017). This  
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42 becomes further evident in statements on the EU by Janina (a Lithuanian migrant in her 40s),  
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44 Lena (a Polish migrant in her 30s) and Alex, and by Alex and Henrique on perceived changes  
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46 in migration patterns to Great Yarmouth. According to Janina, Lena and Alex, nationalist  
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48 defensive discourse which presents the EU as detrimental for the UK’s (more general) and  
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50 Great Yarmouth’s (more particular) socio-economic conditions is understandable, as British  
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52 nationals need to blame an external cause for their economic uncertainty. Alex also argues that  
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54 current immigration rates are higher and feed into conflicts between Muslims and Christians  
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3 over the cultural identity of the UK. Henrique agrees that migration trends have changed and  
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5 shows understanding for the growing lack of trust, as “they [the British] were living their quiet  
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7 lives in their space and suddenly more than half of the population is foreign.”  
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11 Statements by Lena similarly confirm that non-British residents in the UK may appropriate the  
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13 discourse of a “community of value” (Anderson 2013). She claims to remember King Street –  
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15 a main street in the town of Great Yarmouth where multiple migrant businesses are located –  
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17 as “the place to be” before its perceived deterioration. Similar to what British interviewees have  
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19 told us, she then describes King Street’s current status as “scary” due to the increasing presence  
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21 of migrants who, unlike herself, like to “stand outside and smoke” and may become violent  
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23 after a few drinks. This strategy of migrants othering migrants illustrates the extent to which  
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25 post-racial xeno-racism can take hold in its culturally violent form of nationalist defensive,  
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27 anti-immigration discourse even among those who are its primary target (cf. Rzepnikowska  
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32 2019).  
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35 Paradoxically, several British interviewees who describe migrants that arrived in the 2000s as  
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37 socially less desirable than those that arrived in the 1970s acknowledge recent migrants’  
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39 contributions to the local economy and recognize that they are not necessarily responsible – or  
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41 at least not the sole liable ones – for the social and economic deterioration of Great Yarmouth.  
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44 As William puts it:  
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47 They [migrants] saw it [the opportunity] and they grasped it, and that’s brilliant for  
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49 the economy. They’re employing people and then they start paying their taxes (...)  
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51 and everything, so I’d rather have them open and trading than [shops] being shut  
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53 up and boarded.  
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George is another interviewee who, like William, works for the local government and acknowledges the contribution of migrant workers, stating that, in the context of farm work in the region, “there’s no doubt that the eastern European labour was better. They did the job quicker; they got on with it. No two ways around that, you know – they were motivated and good.” In the same interview, however, he states that the arrival of migrants has led to an increase in crime, once again bringing in the notion of migrant desirability: “you just don’t know who you’re getting.”

Alice and Mark, two older British residents in the borough, associate the beginning of Great Yarmouth’s social and economic deterioration with local government policies of the 1980s and 1990s rather than with more recent international migration influx. They recall a certain governmental housing strategy as key to the borough’s decline, which consisted of bringing in members of an already impoverished population from other parts of the UK in order to attract regeneration funds. This, in their view, contributed to the start of a “dreary kind of feeling” in Great Yarmouth, with certain areas becoming “no-go” zones with increased drug use and crime rates. The way in which their statements racialize “the poor” from “other parts of the UK” illustrates how people’s definition of their place of belonging involves not only spatial boundaries (such as the aforementioned references to King Street) but also symbolic boundaries between different ethnic, national and socio-economic categories (Jackson and Benson 2014).

### **The Difficulties of Recognizing and Reacting to Cultural Violence**

The racializing undertones of our participants’ narratives express post-racial xeno-racism, as they are not based on essentializing hostilities but rather embedded in a discourse of economic

and social decline, tinged with a sense of fear about the future and a defensive position in relation to their home town, certain community values and ways of behaviour (cf. Patel and Connelly 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2019). This becomes further evident, for example, in the way in which Alice and William express their curiosity to learn more about migrants' customs, in order "to break down barriers and for the foreign people to see this is how we live but also for (...) us to see a little bit, 'okay – that's why you do that'". They provide an assurance framed in post-racial terms that they are not concerned about "how many foreigners come in, so long as they abide by our rules, they do what English people do."

At the same time, it is not only those who express post-racial xeno-racism in culturally violent forms who struggle to recognize it, but also those who are its target. As explained above, most migrant interviewees initially denied the existence of discrimination unless it involved physical altercations, before later recognizing Brexit as an event that legitimized already present (but until then partially concealed) hostility (cf. Hunter 2017). The identity markers of skin colour, language and religious dress thereby seem to have played a particularly relevant role as trigger of cultural violence.

The most commonly mentioned form of cultural violence that our migrant respondents experienced is based on language, which highlights how a preoccupation with preserving an "authentic" national identity is marked by a fear of linguistic estrangement (cf. Linke 2004). Soraia, for instance, who claims to have always "been lucky" for "hav[ing] never experienced racism, (...) never anything aggressive," describes the following encounter:

Once I was in the supermarket, speaking on the phone to a friend back home. A middle aged woman walks past me and says '*Bloody foreigners! It's about time they go away from here.*' Initially I just stood there, in shock, and then I said

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3 *'Excuse me? What's your problem? Have I done anything wrong in here?'* It had  
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5 never happened to me before.  
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9 Edwina's narrative introduces the religious aspect of xeno-racist cultural violence. Although  
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11 she does not have a migrant background, she explains how her hijab "changes the colour of her  
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13 skin," and exemplifies it by saying:  
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18 Even if people don't say anything, they look at you in a hostile way. Or if I travel  
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20 on the bus, I reckon nine times out of ten the seat next to me will stay empty to the  
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22 very last stop.  
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26 Edwina describes having been accused as a traitor to the UK when people eventually find out  
27  
28 that she is a "native", a discovery that she believes creates a feeling of anger amongst other  
29  
30 British people. These experiences have intensified after the Brexit Referendum, she says, when  
31  
32 the community of British converts in the area was threatened and "a plain clothes policeman in  
33  
34 a plain car sat outside of the mosque every Friday for several weeks, to make us feel secure as  
35  
36 much as anything else." This process of racialization and cultural othering experienced by  
37  
38 Edwina has origins in the view of Islam as "'brown' and foreign" (Galonnier 2015:570), but  
39  
40 may also be entwined with the aforementioned image of "native" social landscapes being  
41  
42 threatened by undesirable, lower class "aliens". Here, anti-Muslim attitudes – in their  
43  
44 manifestation of post-racial xeno-racism – tend to associate Islam with poverty, crime, security  
45  
46 risks, social exclusion and a threat to national identity (Abbas 2019; Galonnier 2015; Miah  
47  
48 2018; Virdee and McGeever 2018). The latter includes anxieties surrounding "reverse  
49  
50 colonisation" (Abbas 2019:2452) and the fear that the progress of those who are perceived to  
51  
52 be different must come at the expense of those who are "ordinary" (typically: white) "natives"  
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54 (cf. Miah 2018).  
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3 Edwina says that she actively contests discriminatory attitudes. Her willingness to do so,  
4  
5 however, may be at least partially linked to her status as a British citizen. Nearly all of our non-  
6  
7 British interviewees, by contrast, mentioned a conscious decision to live – as Henrique and  
8  
9 Alex call it – “quietly” and “carefully”, by being cautious with their friendships (both in- and  
10  
11 outside of their particular migrant community), preferring not to reveal much about their  
12  
13 private lives to others and adapting to an embodied level of vigilance (cf. Willen 2007).  
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18 The covert nature of post-racial xeno-racism (Patel and Connelly 2019) also seems to  
19  
20 contribute to a sense of feeling undervalued amongst our non-British interviewees which,  
21  
22 mixed with a certain level of “getting used to” and “understanding” anti-immigration attitudes,  
23  
24 ultimately leads to the idea that it is fruitless to contest or even talk about such episodes.  
25  
26 Following the incident that led to the loss of his job, Henrique, for example, prefers to act in a  
27  
28 way that does not give rise to further commentary. He explains, “It is better to stay silent and  
29  
30 don’t give room to that kind of thing. If it would change anything, I would speak up, you see?”  
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33  
34 The choice to remain invisible and silent results, in his case, at least in part from a feeling of  
35  
36 lack of support from his manager. Likewise, invoking the image of subordination to authority,  
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38 Alex described his preference for a discreet way of life as stemming from the need “to be very  
39  
40 careful and just close your mouth and walk like in the army”.  
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45 The verbal expression of racism is difficult to recognize when it is couched in narratives of  
46  
47 cultural and economic fears (Patel and Connelly 2019). The acceptance and inaction that may  
48  
49 follow from this difficulty is what makes culturally violent manifestations of post-racial xeno-  
50  
51 racism particularly worrisome. Amongst our British interviewees, only Edwina (despite her  
52  
53 own racialization of different types of migrants mentioned earlier) openly challenges  
54  
55 nationalist defensive, anti-immigration attitudes. Amongst our non-British interviewees, only  
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57 Lena and Henrique have taken active steps to change their situation. Lena has moved to her  
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3 Portuguese partner's country of origin, where they prefer to see their children growing up,  
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5 claiming that they "don't like what's going on" and that "the future is quite scary" in the current  
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7 economic and political context in the UK. Henrique temporarily returned to Portugal, too, but  
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9 is now back in Great Yarmouth.  
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### 18 **Contributions and Limitations of Our Research**

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21 The rich and detailed data yielded by our interviews enabled us to gain new insights into  
22  
23 manifestations of post-racial xeno-racism in the aftermath of the Brexit Referendum. This  
24  
25 included, most commonly, manifestations in the form of cultural violence, whereby British and  
26  
27 non-British research participants used racialized othering strategies to distinguish not only  
28  
29 between migrants and non-migrants, but also categories of "desirable" or "undesirable"  
30  
31 migrants. Following Anderson (2013), such "hierarchies of acceptability" are part of a  
32  
33 historical concern with the mobility of the "failed citizen," dating back to the fourteenth century  
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35 in England where the vagrant were seen as not sharing national values. They are historically  
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37 situated and, as Gilmartin, Wood and O'Callaghan (2018) discuss, changeable over time, and  
38  
39 were emphasized in the Referendum campaign by Brexit supporters (Bhambra 2017a, b). To  
40  
41 be clear, Brexit as a political project did not invent but rather built on an exclusionary  
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43 citizenship regime and purposefully designed structures of state racism that had been in  
44  
45 operation for decades if not centuries by this point (Bhambra 2017a, b; Tyler 2010). In doing  
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47 so, it reinforced everyday othering practices which include symbolic boundaries between  
48  
49 "migrants" and "citizens" as well as different categories of migrants, based on the idea of a  
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51 "community of value" (Anderson 2013; Lulle et al. 2017, 2018; Lumsden et al. 2019; Tyler  
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53 2010; Wemyss and Cassidy 2017).  
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At the same time, there are certain limitations of our research design that need to be acknowledged. These include a relatively small sample size of 15 research participants which helped us to collate in-depth information on research participants' different views and emotions, but does not allow us to generalize our findings to the population of Great Yarmouth as a whole.

Given the type of evidence we collected, it also needs to be noted that our identification of direct, structural and cultural violence is based solely on what participants told us. We thus identify manifestations of direct violence when interviewees told us about physical altercations; structural violence when interviewees made references to socio-economic inequalities between migrant and non-migrant groups; and cultural violence when interviewees either expressed discriminatory views towards certain racial or racialized groups, or narrated their experience of such views.

Furthermore, we are aware that our own positionality as academics and individuals with different nationalities may have affected our interviewees' responses (cf. also Patel and Connelly 2019). We therefore made sure that the British researchers in our research team conducted the interviews with British participants, whereas our non-British participants were interviewed by non-British researchers. While conscious that other aspects of our positionality (such as gender or perceived socio-economic status) may also have affected the course of the interviews, we expect that this strategy will have reduced the risk of modified or underplayed sentiments about race and migration, and enhanced trust and openness to talk about personal experience.

Finally, it is important to emphasize the temporal specificity of our findings, as they are based on data gathered throughout 2017, within ten to seventeen months after the Brexit Referendum

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3 had taken place. The temporal proximity to the referendum may be one of the reasons why the  
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5 racializing narratives of several of our participants mirrored quite closely expressions of post-  
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7 racial xeno-racism that had been part of pro-Leave campaigns (Durrheim et al. 2018; Virdee  
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9 and McGeever 2018).  
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13 Taking the aforementioned limitations into account, our analysis nonetheless makes several  
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15 relevant contributions to scholarship on Brexit and racism: Firstly, unlike authors such as  
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17 Abbas (2019), Miah (2018) or Patel and Connelly (2019), we do not focus on racism in the  
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19 run-up to the Brexit vote itself, although we acknowledge its relevance as evident e.g. in  
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21 Leave.EU's "Breaking Point" campaign (Abbas 2019; Durrheim et al. 2018; Miah 2018).  
22  
23 Instead, our research adds insights to the fledgling academic debate on everyday expressions  
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25 and experiences of post-racial xeno-racism *after* the referendum had occurred (Lulle et al.  
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27 2018, 2019; Lumsden et al. 2019).  
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33 Secondly, similar to Lumsden et al. (2019), we provide findings from a semi-rural field site  
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35 which – compared to urban settings – has “tended to remain ‘hidden’” (ibid.:168) in academic  
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37 debates on racism and hate crimes. Unlike Lumsden et al. (2019), however, whose research is  
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39 based on the East Midlands region of Lincolnshire, our data stem from the often neglected (but  
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41 no less relevant) area of East Anglia.  
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47 Thirdly, while previous writings on Brexit have acknowledged the post-racial and “xeno-”  
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49 nature of the racism that it features (Komaromi 2016; Patel and Connelly 2019; Rzepnikowska  
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51 2019) and alluded to the different forms that racist violence after the referendum may take  
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53 (Rzepnikowska 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2018; Wilson 2016), none of them has made  
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55 explicit use of the direct, structural and cultural violence framework. As our analysis shows,  
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57 the use of such a framework helps to highlight also difficult-to-recognize guises of racist  
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3 violence, including the cultural violence of hierarchies of acceptability, exclusionary notions  
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5 of belonging and symbolic boundaries that both British and non-British research participants  
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7 draw between and within different “migrant” and “non-migrant” categories (see also Jackson  
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9 and Benson 2014; Lulle et al. 2018, 2019; Moroşanu and Fox 2013).  
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## 18 **Conclusion**

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21 The Brexit moment did not create post-racial xeno-racism in the UK, but it gave it a state-  
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23 sanctioned forum in which it was further emboldened (Durrheim et al. 2018; Hunter 2017;  
24  
25 Miah 2018; Rzepnikowska 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2018). Our analysis has highlighted  
26  
27 the need to distinguish the different manifestations of post-racial xeno-racism as direct,  
28  
29 structural or cultural violence, based on research that we conducted approximately one year  
30  
31 after the Brexit Referendum, when the echo of the post-racial xeno-racist elements of the  
32  
33 referendum campaign could still be heard in the narratives of our (migrant and non-migrant)  
34  
35 participants. These narratives include, for instance, othering strategies by both British and non-  
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37 British respondents in our sample who talked of “undeserving migrants” in the UK and of the  
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39 EU as an entity that is alien to (or at least lacks understanding of) “the British way of life”.  
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46 The distinction of direct, structural and cultural violence matters, as all but three of our  
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48 interviewees – two migrants and one British Muslim convert, whose accounts of racist  
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50 incidents centred on the occurrence of physical altercations – initially denied that they ever  
51  
52 observed or experienced discrimination against migrants. All British interviewees assured us  
53  
54 that they are “not racist in any way shape or form” or that “I haven’t witnessed anybody making  
55  
56 racist remarks”. However, all of them acknowledged structural violence against recent migrant  
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58 communities and expressed some form of nationalist defensive, anti-immigration views in their  
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3 statements, typically couched in arguments of cultural and economic concerns. Non-British  
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5 interviewees assured us at the beginning of their interviews that they have “no reasons for  
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7 complaint”. Yet all but one of them narrated their experiences of structural or cultural violence  
8  
9 as migrant in Great Yarmouth during the later parts of their interviews.  
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13 A clear distinction of the different types of violence in which racism may manifest is of great  
14  
15 importance to both everyday and academic contexts, as it affects the level of ease with which  
16  
17 racism can be identified and addressed. Cultural violence in the form of nationalist defensive,  
18  
19 anti-immigration statements is the most common type of racist violence expressed or  
20  
21 experienced by our research participants. Worryingly, it also tends to be dismissed more readily  
22  
23 as “not racist” by both its perpetrators and targets, and contributes to feelings of subdual and  
24  
25 powerlessness amongst our migrant participants. Further research is needed to better  
26  
27 understand the extent and effects of cultural violence across different groups and places, and  
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29 to highlight how violent racism is even when it does not involve physical forms of expression.  
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**Table 1: Interviewee Details**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Migrant Arrival in UK/Great Yarmouth*</b>	<b>Further Information</b>
Alex	M	Slovakian	50	Business owner (manufacturing and engineering)	1995	-
Alicja	F	Polish	36	Service worker (cleaning)	2005	Volunteers for a mental health organization
Alice	F	British	53	Retired	-	Volunteers as reminiscence trainer
Caroline	F	British	(age not provided)	Charity worker (welfare and employment advice)	-	-
Edwina	F	British	70	Retired	-	Muslim convert
George	M	British	(age not provided)	Government officer	-	-
Henrique	M	Portuguese	43	Service worker (catering)	2001 (date of first arrival)	Performed a couple of temporary returns to Portugal since first arrival

Janina	M	Lithuanian	46	Business owner (property)	2006	-
Lena	F	Polish	30	Business owner (arts)	2008	Has migrated from the UK to Portugal in 2018
Liz	F	British	(age not provided)	Charity worker (welfare and employment advice)	-	-
Lucia	F	Portuguese	34	Business owner (sports and leisure)	2003 (London) 2012 (Great Yarmouth)	Born in Portugal with Cape Verdean descent
Mark	M	British	74	Retired	-	Volunteers as reminiscence trainer
Paul	M	British	(age not provided)	Charity worker (welfare and employment advice)	-	-
Soraia	F	Portuguese	26	Service worker (tourism)	2012	-
William	M	British	(age not provided)	Government officer	-	-

\* All migrants except Lucia migrated directly to Great Yarmouth from their countries of origin.



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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Racism more broadly can be defined as “an unequal *collective* power relationship” (Garner 2017:15) to the disadvantage of a specified racial or racialized group (ibid.; Law 2010).

<sup>2</sup> This is important to note, as not everyone whom we approached about our research project was willing to participate which, in part, may have to do with the politically sensitive nature of our topic.