

Divided Families: Brexit and the Working Class

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I followed the debate the whole night whilst at work, discussing the results with my peers on Facebook until I was the only one left standing, and in that silence I started thinking about the broader social meanings of the results. I thought about ideas of 'Britain being great again', independence, ideas of migrants flooding our shores, how many times I had heard 'I'm not a racist but...' during this campaign, the desperation and despair for 'freedom' the English are feeling after buying into propaganda by the leave campaign and old right wing rhetoric.

I watched as the BBC mapped out results by wards and couldn't help but notice the divides between the countries. I remember thinking to myself, what is it that they told the Scot's and couldn't tell the English? I kept checking Facebook statuses to see how my white family voted, although pretty sure I already knew the answer, I was searching for their reasoning. Unfortunately much of it was to do with migration and jobs. How do people from the same family have such different ideas on what is right in politics and best for our country?

I grew up in an all-white family, although I do have a mixed white and black Caribbean heritage. But my influences and primary socialisation occurred on a white working class south London estate, in a white working class part of Herne Hill. My mother was on benefits with three kids. We were the underclass trash that the media demonises and pits against the migrants so often. However I now live in a community of diversity, in an area that thrives on its multiculturalism, in East London and has contributed to my own understanding of self and made what is foreign a part of my everyday life.

I understand that for members of the white working class feelings of increased marginalisation have surfaced during the referendum campaign. Ideas that support anti-immigrant and economic insecurity are all too often spoon fed from media sources to those who belong to communities like the one I grew up in. I know that many of my family members who work in skilled labourer jobs feel they are in constant competition with migrants who suppress wages and short them of work. I have other family members who feel apathy, they feel they have lost control over the future of the UK and that their participation meant nothing when decisions were made in Brussels. The referendum result has returned a sense of political agency to them.

However, I can't identify with this, I feel as though the referendum results are reflective of a wider intolerance in English culture fuelled by a right wing media and conservative government. The

propaganda around migration wasn't solely focussed on European migrants, it was aimed at black and Asians and refugees from all over the world as illustrated in Nigel Farage's 'Breaking Point' picture campaign and led to the death of an MP, Jo Cox, who was in support of immigration. From Facebook posts to Twitter comments these ideas of obtaining freedom feel as though they are closely linked with nostalgic beliefs of how the British Empire operated, how history is taught to us and what we are told to remember about British conquests. England choosing to leave the EU does not feel as though it is directly about our position in Europe, but more so that being part of Europe does not allow us to embrace our strong-arming imperialist history. Is it possible that the people of England and Wales feel weak being part of a 28 country strong economic bloc and feel like they are not in the driving seat of world politics?

It feels as though the EU and 'open' borders have been blamed for a lack of British prosperity. They don't look to their fellow Brits for explanations on why they are unemployed, why the NHS is underfunded, why education systems fail them and their children and why social mobility and financial freedom are unobtainable for them. Unfortunately working class people like those in my family have been guided towards propaganda and do not look to social structures or taught to question what happens to British people at the hands of British people. In fact I feel the opposite is true, they are taught to externally blame for their downfalls, believe in ideas of great British power and question very little about great British history. I can't help but feel my family have failed me, but at little fault of their own, they were primed for years to vote for the exclusion of migrants and to be part of the scapegoating rhetoric that is all too familiar in Britain, that is responsible for the death of an MP and has served to legitimise right wing extremists in recent months. I now look to a future that feels bleak and lonesome and feel glad I made plans to live and work outside the UK post-graduation as I'm unsure of my place in Great Britain any longer.

June 27th, 2016 | [Brexit](#) | [1 Comment](#)

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