

## Book Review: Gender and Queer Perspectives on Brexit edited by Moira Dustin, Nuno Ferreira and Susan Millns

*In Gender and Queer Perspectives on Brexit, editors Moira Dustin, Nuno Ferreira and Susan Millns bring together contributors to offer explicitly feminist and queer approaches to Brexit that broaden the scope of theoretical and policy debates. This is an important collection that tells a different story of the possible implications of Brexit, writes Toni Hastrup.*

*In this review, you can read an interview with the editors of the collection [here](#).*

**Gender and Queer Perspectives on Brexit. Moira Dustin, Nuno Ferreira and Susan Millns (eds). Palgrave Macmillan. 2019.**

### Find this book:



*Gender and Queer Perspectives on Brexit* is a timely contribution to understanding the process and implications of Brexit, particularly (but not exclusively) from the British perspective. This volume takes explicitly feminist and queer approaches to broaden the scope of the theoretical and policy debates around Brexit, and provides more nuanced attention to and beyond the two policy issues that have become the main proxies for Brexit scholarship – trade and (im)migration. By paying attention to what Brexit might also mean for families, human rights more broadly and minoritised peoples specifically, this work tackles identity issues head on by centring the lives of migrants, gender and sexual minorities and how they are situated within the Brexit landscape.



In the Introduction, editors Moira Dustin, Nuno Ferreira and Susan Millns frame the book around a series of essential questions. These, however, can be grouped into two broad categories: what does Brexit mean for the lives of people who are minoritised in society? And what impact does Brexit have on the human rights of minoritised people? These questions are explored and answered across sixteen main chapters and a conclusion.

The first section of the book, 'Setting the Context to Gender and Queer Perspectives', lays the foundation for the rest of the collection to show the ways in which gender is implicated in Brexit and why a gendered analysis that draws on feminist and queer theories is essential to more nuanced understandings and alternative explanations of the implications of Brexit beyond existing hegemonic narratives. Following a broad outline of the book in Chapter One, Chapter Two calls attention to the prevalence of toxic masculinity in the referendum campaign and the approach to Brexit. Focusing on the language of the campaign, Columba Achilleos-Sarll and Benjamin Martill show how campaigners' rhetoric replicated militarism as well as a zero-sum mentality that narrows the field of debate with, as we see, potentially devastating consequences if an amicable exit is not attainable.

Chapter Three focuses on the implications of Brexit on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women. Here, Aisha K. Gill and Nazneen Ahmed use an intersectional feminist lens to reflect on the embodiment of Brexit, focusing on the everyday racist experiences of women. This is a significant contribution not least because the perspectives and perceptions of BAME people, and especially BAME women, are consistently overlooked in policymaking so much so that they were hardly a target demographic for consultation in the lead-up to the referendum itself. In its method of execution, this contribution is also notable in that it utilises personal narratives and poetry. What may then be drawn from this chapter is quite visceral and underscores the complexities of identities that go beyond the polarising pro-Remain/pro-Leave dichotomy, which now seems to define the contemporary political landscape of the UK.



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'The UK and the EU: What Future Ahead?' is the second section of the collection and includes eight chapters. Each chapter focuses on a distinct yet overlapping policy concern centred on social policy, migration and citizenship, and gender and sexual identity. Eugenia Caracicciolo di Torella in Chapter Four examines the unintended consequences of Brexit for work-life balance. In this policy area, a worst-case scenario sees a loss of British expertise at the EU level in law-making and a loss of protection of EU citizens. In Chapter Five, Dieuwertje Dyi Hujg focuses on the National Health Service (NHS), a key flashpoint in the discourses around Brexit. This intersectional take asks what Brexit means for disabled EU migrants in the context of health service delivery. Part auto-ethnographical, the chapter brings home to the reader the devastating choices made by successive UK governments. Thus, rather than an exacerbation, Brexit may also be read as the logical outcome of a state that has abandoned its ethics of care.

The next two chapters cover two different aspects of family law. While Lara Walker in Chapter Six focuses on the legal quagmire likely to be thrown up by Brexit regarding divorce, child abduction and domestic violence, Iyiola Solanke's intersectional analysis in Chapter Seven focuses on the impact of Brexit on a group of Black British children. These children, *Zambrano*, are born to third country nationals and their rights are left in limbo as both British and EU citizens. Solanke advocates for *Zambrano* parents to attain British citizenship in order to guarantee their children's rights. Yet, the choice to end freedom of movement and the continuance of the hostile environment makes this still less likely. Still on the topic of children, Ingi Iusmen highlights how Brexit may exacerbate risks for male unaccompanied minors without the protections offered by EU legal frameworks and policy practices. Christel Querton, however, convincingly shows how historical precedence would suggest that Brexit is unlikely to significantly affect refugee recognition; this analysis nevertheless reminds us of the context within which Brexit is taking place. Brexit is not just departure from the EU; it is also a new context for British policymaking and practices. Without further safeguards, more of the same is not actually good news.

Chapters Ten and Eleven conclude this section focusing on LGBTQI+ rights and lives using queer theoretical perspectives. While Carmelo Danisi, Dustin and Ferreira review the UK's track record on sexual orientation and gender identity issues, they conclude that the absence of the EU as an agenda setter and the removal of the default to EU soft law instruments to advance the rights of LGBTQI+ people is likely bad news for this community. Arguably though, the UK does not receive norms just from the EU. Indeed, in Peter Dunne's analysis, he argues that while the EU has evidently shaped practices and norms at the UK national level, legally there is unlikely to be detriment. Yet there is an overall sense in this section that in assessing the reality of the lived experiences of minoritised groups since Brexit, the socio-economic fallout will impact these communities negatively.

The third section is three chapters on the devolved nations: Scotland and Northern Ireland. Michelle Weldon-Johns in Chapter Twelve focuses on work-family conflict in the context of employment policies

in Scotland. In this contribution, Weldon-Johns exposes a tension between Holyrood and Westminster priorities. While Scotland has used the EU as standard in setting a distinct devolved frame for employment policy as it affects carers and workers, Brexit calls into question whether Scotland can enact its ambitions. If it is able to do so however, Weldon-Johns suggests that this will continue to follow the EU standard. Emma Ritch's analysis of Scottish civil society, particularly women's organisations, offers a fascinating account of levels of engagement in referenda. While this chapter provides a missing narrative that looks outside of state institutional actors, its contribution to Brexit as the main context for the rest of the collection is not as apparent. Yvonne Galligan on Northern Ireland underscores the blindspots of policymaking related to Brexit, particularly the exclusion of gender equality from the broad discourse. Importantly, however, beyond gender equality policy itself, Galligan's feminist considerations expose the jeopardy that Brexit puts on the hard-won peace on the island of Ireland, a peace that had been guaranteed by the UK's and Ireland's memberships of the EU.

The final section focuses on the gendered dimensions of external relations. Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen focus on foreign and security policy, and on trade, respectively. Amy Barrow examines the institutionalisation process of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda, the global normative framework that calls for a gender perspective in security issues. The EU position is analysed against that of the UK, which has taken a leadership role in implementation within and beyond Europe. Undoubtedly, the erasure of the EU from the UK's National Action Plan is telling about Brexit itself; nevertheless, there is still scope for cooperation and engagement following departure from the EU structure since WPS coordination can happen in other forums and with EU member states. Still, it is worth highlighting that Brexit will have implications for cordial relations with other EU member states and for joint engagement on WPS. Despite the dominance of perspectives on trade within Brexit discourse, the gendered implications have not always been articulated, prompting Mary-Ann Stephenson and Marzia Fontana to examine the likely economic impact of Brexit on women. Given the reticence of the UK administration negotiating Brexit to rely on impact assessments as fundamental to evidence-based policymaking, there is rightly scepticism about the upsides of Brexit for women in the UK.

In the penultimate chapter Hege Skjeie, Cathrine Holst and Mari Teigen bring in the perspective of a non-EU member state, Norway. This chapter explains how an outsider state in the EU influences and is influenced by the EU (on gender equality) with important lessons for EU-UK relations after Brexit. The authors find that gender equality policymaking despite non-membership has been entwined in the relationship with the EU. From this we may deduce that the policymaking between these two entities will necessitate continued alignment. In the concluding chapter, Dustin, Ferreira and Millns call for greater attention to be paid in the Brexit process to the rights of the most marginalised in society, demonstrating further why an intersectional lens is essential and urgent for UK (and EU) policy and law-making.

Despite the varied perspectives, the editors have created an important collection that tells a different story of the possible implications of Brexit. This volume contributes to the burgeoning literature that looks at the gendered process of Brexit and how this is situated within broader political processes in Europe and beyond. Like much of the work on Brexit, there are still a lot of unknowns and this is reflected in many of the contributions, which often speak to 'potentials' and 'scenarios'. At the same time, it would be a mistake not to take these seriously on the basis that they are not definitive; matched up against the evolution of the Brexit negotiations and changes in UK society, the contributors argue their case well.

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*Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.*

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