

Review – The Another Europe Podcast

Written by Alexandra Bulat

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ALEXANDRA BULAT, NOV 29 2019

The Another Europe Podcast **By Another Europe Is Possible, ongoing since 21 May 2018**

Did Britain's imperial fantasies give us Brexit? Will Brexit break up the UK? Are we all "Citizens of Nowhere"? These are just three titles from the Another Europe podcast series (Episodes 1, 17, and 4, respectively), which at the time of writing contains 40 episodes. Listeners can hear about 'The leaver who changed his mind' (Episode 24) and consider practical suggestions on 'Fighting the new far right' (Episode 18). All podcasts are free and there is some extra content dedicated to paying supporters of Another Europe Is Possible, the progressive, left wing, anti-Brexit organisation which delivers this podcast series.

The episodes are provocative and debate controversial topics in current day politics and international relations. The podcast adopts a conversational and inclusive style, inviting listeners to reflect and be critical. It covers a wide variety of topics – democracy, corruption, the rule of law, unionism, sovereignty and colonialism, to enumerate just a few. Those issues are discussed within various contexts – UK politics and EU politics more broadly, but also in reference to particular countries, both inside and outside the EU (e.g. Episode 39 focussing on Poland). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Brexit is a key theme as well, with some episodes dedicated to particular aspects of this phenomenon (such as the prorogation of Parliament, in Episode 32). It engages with a range of guests, from experts such as economist Ann Pettifor, Professor Mary Kaldor and historian Timothy Snyder, to politicians such as Clive Lewis and Lloyd Russell-Moyle and journalists like Stephen Bush and Paul Mason. Those voices are in conversation with Another Europe Is Possible members, such as the regular podcast hosts Zoe Williams and Luke Cooper, but also other activists such as Ana Oppenheim and Michael Chessum.

The podcast, as it claims in its first episode, was created to add a progressive left perspective to current political debates. Nevertheless, even if set from a particular political position, it is highly balanced and critical, accommodating for a variety of perspectives and striving for practical and policy solutions on some of the dilemmas of our time. One such controversial topic that is at the top of the agenda in British politics, affecting international relations, is the freedom of movement enjoyed by European Economic Area (EEA) citizens. Another Europe Is Possible campaigns to maintain and ideally extend freedom of movement. This proposal, adopted in a composite motion, was voted on unanimously at this year's Labour Party Conference. Freedom of movement is discussed from a critical perspective in several podcast episodes, but I will focus on two, which discuss this topic with different angles, formats and guests. Episode 7, 'Is Brexit racist?', which comprises of two parts, a one-to-one interview with Omar Khan, director of Runnymede Trust, followed by 'Ideas box', a short presentation of new research on Brexit by Dr Brendan McGeever from Birkbeck University and conversation amongst Luke Cooper, Zoe Williams and Dr McGeever detailing his research. Episode 37, 'Priyamvada Gopal on a decolonised Europe' is a discussion with the Cambridge scholar and AEIP's Cooper and Williams, complementing the previous episode and adding another perspective.

Both episodes consider several issues which are overlooked in discussions on freedom of movement. In current UK media and political debates, freedom of movement is usually presented either as something that needs to be stopped or controlled ('ending freedom of movement once and for all' is a frequent phrase heard in Brexit debates) or something that needs to be continued, celebrated and cherished – promoted, yet not necessarily questioned.

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Therefore, the debate centres on whether to keep the 'status quo' of freedom of movement or to 'control immigration' by ending it. In the Another Europe podcast, freedom of movement is something that needs to be critically discussed, before advocating for preferred policies. The question thus becomes rather about how freedom of movement can be expanded, how can it address the legacies of colonialism and how can it benefit those who previously have not enjoyed this right. It is considered more from the perspective of lived experiences rather than a legal right, illustrating how it is not as accessible to everyone as the theory may suggest.

Episode 7 asks how migrants, but also ordinary UK citizens can experience the positive impacts of freedom of movement in more meaningful ways. The central idea is that freedom of movement is an equal right in theory, but unequal in practice. First, it's limited to a relatively small group of people who can enjoy this right. Omar Khan highlights the role of immigration as a topic during the Leave campaign in 2016, pointing out how arguments against freedom of movement were employed to persuade ethnic minority voters. Khan comments that some non-EU migrants who could vote were sceptical towards what is often described as 'fortress Europe', because 'they didn't benefit from the European Union in the sense of free movement'. The episode does not mention it, but freedom of movement has been unequal for EU citizens themselves, even from a legal point of view – for instance, Romanian and Bulgarian workers have only had full rights to work in the UK from 2014, seven years after the two countries joined the EU. The discussion then moves on questioning how freedom of movement has impacted British people and once again raises some crucial questions, in particular around the experiences of ethnic minorities. Khan explains why 'a Black [British] person is not going to take a job in Hungary today', or at least is less likely to do so than a white British counterpart. In the context of Brexit and the increase in reported hate crime after the referendum vote, the experiences of British people of colour in the EU show that for some this has been a continuation of 'business as usual' (Benson and Lewis, 2019).

The second part of the podcast continues on the experiences of British people who are less likely to exercise their right to freedom of movement. Dr McGeever presents his recent article which analyses the two contradictory narratives of the 2016 Leave campaign: an 'imperial expansionist fantasy' and an 'insular project of island retreat'. He is particularly critical of the concept of the 'white working class', explaining how the working class is 'inherently multi-ethnic' and that it is its non-white members, particularly women, who are most negatively affected by austerity policies and the impacts of Brexit, including the rise in reported hate crime. He questions the assumptions of Brexit commentators who have in mind a 'racialised conception of the working class, as a white working class that does not speak to the economic and social and lived realities of what working class life is like.'

These lived experiences of freedom of movement sit in a wider context of colonial legacies, which are examined at length by Dr Priyamvada Gopal in Episode 37, who presents ideas from her most recent book on anticolonial resistance. She unpacks the limitations of freedom of movement, situating this concept within a picture of what a 'decolonialised Europe' would look like. This episode engages with the question of why the EU has some of the most relaxed borders within, but some of the strongest borders externally. Dr Gopal notes that 'it is kind of ironic that the same entity which has free movement within itself is viciously racialised and violent in policing that border that's not Europe, that is outside Europe'. She encourages a critical examination of the current 'selective free movement' and argues for working class solidarity beyond national borders, alongside a more careful examination of 'defining' Europe. Another idea debated in this episode is separating some aspects of citizenship from the nation state, through considering how certain rights can be connected to residence or labour, such as the right to vote for migrants.

Dr Gopal argues that we should not shut down difficult discussions, such as debates on freedom of movement, and focus on solutions to address current injustices. Indeed, at the core of Another Europe podcasts are practical policy suggestions which are debated by various guests. In these two episodes, 'citizenship', 'the left behind', 'the working class', and the concept of 'migration', terms that some of us employ uncritically, are questioned, challenged and then discussed in the context of policy solutions. Scrapping the 'hostile environment' policy, ending indefinite detention and dropping the 'tens of thousands' migration target are amongst some of the possible policies that are debated in these episodes. Overall, although the guests often have different angles on freedom of movement, they agree on the need to return to a more critical local-level discourse on migration, or a 'multi-ethnic anti-racist localised class politics', as McGeever puts it in Episode 7. On topics where UK voters are divided (such as freedom of movement), the Another Europe podcast provides a much-needed space for critical reflection and nuanced discussion. Listening

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to these podcasts, one questions whether a less divided UK society would have been possible if we had such conversations in mainstream media before the 2016 Brexit referendum. Perhaps it's not too late to bring this evidence based and informed conversation on migration beyond a podcast and open up to wider audiences.

About the author:

Alexandra Bulat is a PhD Candidate at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), University College London (UCL). She has been a citizens' rights activist since 2017 and currently works as Chair of Young Europeans at the3million. Her PhD research looks at attitudes towards EU migrants in the context of Brexit, comparing British, Romanian and Polish views in two English local authority areas, Newham and Tendring. Her research has been published in the *National Institute Economic Review* and a variety of research blogs, such as *LSE Brexit*.