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Living with Brexit: Families, relationships and the temporalities of everyday personal life in 'Brexit Britain'

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Abstract

Drawing upon ethnographic research with families as they navigate a year in 'Brexit Britain', this article explores how people live with Brexit, examining the effect of Brexit politics on everyday personal life, particularly relationships with family. In order to examine how macro-political events and timescapes interact with the quotidian, the article explores interactions between 'Brexit time' (including key political moments as well as periods of slowed political activity) and 'personal time' (including the day-to-day rhythms of everyday life and more special occasions). The temporal interactions between Brexit and people's daily lives, whether through the constant low-level simmering presence of the issue, the impactful moments when Brexit 'boils over' into family life, or a more profound relationship with the substance of Brexit politics, offer a lens through which we can understand how politics and other socio-economic events of (inter) national significance are lived in the context of everyday personal lives. The resonance of this analysis applies beyond Brexit and contributes to political sociology more broadly as well as to sociologies of everyday personal life.

Keywords

Brexit, everyday life, family, personal life, temporality

Introduction

What does it mean to live with Brexit? Brexit has ebbed and flowed through British political life since the 2015 General Election, won by the Conservative Party on a manifesto that committed to holding an in/out referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union. Often dominating UK news media, Brexit has found its way into everyday conversations, particularly during moments of high drama: leadership changes in

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political parties, pivotal General Elections and constitutional machinations like the parliamentary prorogation in 2019. Brexit's effects started long before Britain officially left the EU in January 2020, and, as S. M. Hall (2022) demonstrates, Brexit was an important feature of everyday life in Britain during this 'waiting' phase. Even when media attention shifted to other events, such as those surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit continued to exist, simmering beneath the surface of public and personal life, before resurfacing again.

Despite the long-term political presence of Brexit we know little about everyday life in relation to 'Brexit Britain'. Much social science analyses of Brexit have focused on the macro political-economic consequences of Brexit, on mapping 'public opinion' (Claval, 2019; Curtice, 2018) or making sense of the Leave vote using survey analysis (Antonucci et al., 2017; Chan et al., 2020; Hobolt, 2016). Research that qualitatively explores the micro realities of Brexit asks questions about Brexit's effect on EU migrants and their families (Benson, 2020; Benson & Lewis, 2019; Brahic & Lallement, 2020; Guma & Jones, 2019), the relationship between voting decisions and social media (N. A. Hall, 2022) and the experience of Brexit in particular places or communities (Mckenzie, 2017; Neal et al., 2021). This article contributes to the growing body of work acknowledging the effects of Brexit on everyday life, focusing on the temporalities of how Brexit is lived within people's personal lives. The article takes the sociology of Brexit to new places – centring the overlapping constellations of domestic, leisure, work and online spaces and thinking explicitly about the effects of political events on interpersonal relationships, illuminating how political times, events and eras interact with personal events, routines and relationships.

According to Neal and Murji, the everyday is where 'the social gets made and unmade' (2015, p. 813). Bringing concepts from the sociology of personal life into conversation with politics, the article examines how the macro and micro interact in everyday life, exploring how systematic phenomena, such as parliamentary politics, infiltrate micro elements of day-to-day life and how micro interactions, resistances and tactics reshape how the macro is lived. For Back, studying everyday life 'makes sociologists think about society not as a set of structural arrangements but as a dynamic entity that has a rhythm and a temporality. As a result, everyday life helps the seasons of society come into view' (2015, p. 820). To understand how the 'seasons' of 'Brexit time' butt up against those of personal and family life, sociological approaches to the rhythms of personal lives offer insights into the temporal dynamics of politics. A focus on personal life, as discussed by May and Nordqvist (2019) and Smart (2007) emphasises the importance of the everyday but places relationships at the centre of analysis. Following Smart's definition of personal life as 'cumulative (through memory, history and the passage of time)' and traceable as it 'flows through systems of education, or work, or elsewhere' (2007, p. 29) we find the concept of personal life useful for understanding how the ebbs and flows of political episodes such as Brexit interact with those of everyday life. Analytically centring relationships enables an understanding of relational biographies and histories that underpin the living of everyday life. Exploring how people live their lives amidst the ongoing political turmoil of Brexit, how it is woven into the fabric of everyday routines as well as impacting on less mundane moments in personal lives like family or life events can help us to understand the social consequences and meanings of the temporalities of Brexit, and politics more broadly.

In many ways Brexit is a unique political event – the divisive nature of the in/out referendum and the emotive nature of media coverage (Charteris-Black, 2019) have brought to light a particular set of tensions. Similarly, there are novelties to the temporalities of Brexit – the prolonged period of 'waiting for Brexit' (S. M. Hall, 2022) and the protracted post-referendum wranglings over the nature of the departure agreement. However, there are also aspects of people's experiences of 'Brexit Britain' that resonate with other socio-political events globally; recent populist political crises in the US, Austria, Italy and Brazil all share similar aftershocks. Additionally, seminal political-historical moments such as the 1970s US Watergate scandal, the recent rejection of constitutional reform in Chile and the 2017–18 Spanish constitutional crisis shared a similar sense of witnessing a pivotal moment in a nation's history. Indeed, there have been other periods where the mood of a nation feels overcome by the material consequences of disruptive political events – the 1984–85 UK miners strikes being an example raised by many participants in our study.

Drawing upon longitudinal ethnographic research following UK families for one tumultuous year (between July 2019 and January 2020) in 'Brexit Britain', this article explores how the seasons of Brexit interact with those of everyday personal lives over time. Following a literature review and methodological discussion, the article demonstrates how Brexit can simmer in the background of everyday life, affecting the rhythms of relationships, emotions and practices, mapping onto other life events, and boiling over as it collides with everyday routines during critical moments of both Brexit and family time.

Brexit, politics and everyday life

Though much of the social scientific analysis of Brexit focuses on macro trends, some fine-grained work has looked behind key Brexit 'headlines', exploring how it has been experienced. Benson and Lewis (2019) point to the experiences of UK migrants living in the EU – disrupting taken-for-granted ideas about what a migrant is and exploring everyday experiences of racism. Bono and Stoffelen (2022) consider the layers of border-work on the Gibraltar–Spain border, looking beyond the site as a particular sticking point in Brexit negotiations to explore lived experiences. Neal et al. (2021) trouble assumptions about the geopolitics of Brexit, demonstrating the intricacies of diversity and change in rural Britain.

Sociological, anthropological and geographical studies have also qualitatively addressed the situated, everyday lives of Leave voters within the wider socio-economic context. Koch's (2017) study of the everyday lives of residents of a Southeast English council estate and Mckenzie's (2017) exploration of working class Leave voters both identify the Leave vote as a wider protest against public spending cuts and long-term class inequality. Bromley-Davenport et al. (2019) highlight the significance of nostalgia in the context of economic marginalisation amongst working class white male Leave voters in Sunderland. Focusing on the role of race and racism in the referendum, Rogaly (2020) discusses the urban 'left behind' and Patel and Connelly (2019) identify subtle racism in the narratives of Leave voters in Salford. These works demonstrate the significance of the context of people's everyday life for their voting decisions and orientations towards Brexit.

Others have explored how Brexit has become part of the fabric of everyday life in the UK. Anderson and Wilson (2018) call to geographers to 'stay with' Brexit to explore how it has affected people's everyday lives. S. M. Hall (2022) does just this, emphasising how the idea of Brexit had existed as an everyday relational and embodied experience, long before it became a piece of legislation with material consequences. This emphasis on the prosaic nature of waiting and the temporalities of Brexit as it ebbs and flows through everyday life provides a platform for constructing a sociology of Brexit that accounts for personal life. Godin and Sigona (2022) explore intergenerational relationships and personal narratives of citizenship, offering welcome attention to family ties, as does Zambelli's (2020) work on mixed-race couples' feelings of belonging in the 'shadow' of Brexit. Balthazar's (2017) work on how domestic objects can be imbued with nationalism offers a unique insight into how Brexit atmospheres infiltrate home materialities. These works indicate the role of Brexit in everyday life, yet there is still limited understanding of how Brexit affects people's personal lives and relationships (Davies, 2022), particularly how politics interacts with the rhythms and routines of personal lives over time.

Temporal rhythms of everyday personal life

Sociological approaches to personal life (May & Nordqvist, 2019; Smart, 2007) provide a framework for understanding how periods of dormancy and heightened moments of activity in 'Brexit time' interact with the temporal rhythms of everyday family life, special moments of 'quality' family time and other life course events. Bringing frames from sociologies of personal life and family relationships to analyses of Brexit conceives the disruptions of Brexit as interacting with long-term 'sticky' relational forms that are tenacious, affecting our sense of self and influencing our lives even when experienced as ambivalent or negative ties (Davies, 2019, 2022; Smart, 2007).

Southerton (2003) identifies pinch points in the rhythms of everyday life that are experienced as harriedness, where time is 'squeezed'. These moments map onto Morgan's (2011) conceptualisations of family practices – everyday routines and mundane practices that constitute and give meaning to familial ties. Family practices are constituted in practical, symbolic and imaginary facets of time. They are part of the habituated taken-for-granted rhythms of family life, interacting with normative ideas about what 'family time' ought to look like. The normative weight of 'quality time' in shaping family ties is also extrapolated by Mason (2004) in her discussion of the importance placed on 'the visit' in transnational families and by Mason and Muir (2013), who highlight the meanings and significance of Christmas as symbolic family time. Gillis (1997) theorises the role of normativity in the experience of 'family time' as a gap between the idealised imagined families we live by, who share perfect quality family time on occasions such as Christmas, and the messy realities of the families we live with. Conceptualising the symbolic importance of 'family time' helps us to understand what is at stake when such events are affected by politics. In addition to everyday routines and 'special' occasions, it is also important to acknowledge how personal events, like marriage, divorce, bereavement and illness, shape how we experience and orientate ourselves towards politics, particularly in a situation like Brexit which has lingered on for so long. Smart (2007) sets out the

concept of personal life as different from that of life course, emphasising that personal life is never static but that, rather than moving steadily in one direction, it is characterised by a series of interacting fluctuations like divorce, bereavement, birth, house moves and illnesses. For Smart these moments are deeply relational, influenced by the relationships in which we are embedded, including those with imagined idealised families. Set against these fluctuations, sociologies of personal life also help us to understand how relationships continue and Brownlie's conceptualisation of 'being there' as 'an attitude (an unreflexive, taken-for-granted outlook)' (2014, p. 131) helpfully emphasises the low-level background continuity as care that characterises many family relationships and explains how families can 'stick together' across political difference (Davies, 2022).

The ebbs and flows of Brexit can therefore be understood as set against the longevity of personal life with its own temporalities – everyday time, special occasions, calendar time and biographical events, as well as comprising relationships with their own histories. Sociologies of personal life have been criticised for overstating reflexivity at the expense of institutional notions of 'family' (Gilding, 2010) and of understating structure (May, 2023). By examining how it interacts with Brexit, we place personal life in a wider political context. Sociologies of Brexit have paid good attention to how structural factors and inequalities affect people's experiences of Brexit – how opinions and experiences of Brexit differ by age, class, migration status, race and geography as well as by whether they identify as Leave/Remain. By shifting the analytical focus to personal life and 'following' people's lives over time rather than focusing on particular groups or on comparing 'types' of experience, the analysis presented here provides a different entry point into thinking about Brexit as lived in the everyday. Our fine-grained and, crucially, longitudinal ethnographic work enabled us to trace these interactions as they occurred in real time for our participants.

Researching Brexit as lived over time

To explore these interactions between personal life and politics over time we employed a networked, ethnographic and longitudinal research design. We 'followed' 12 families for around a year each between July 2019 and January 2021, tracing how Brexit difficulties were lived. The timeline in Figure 1 summarises the key events that occurred in 'Brexit time' during our fieldwork, used to inform our analysis of the data.

We drew upon a toolkit of qualitative methods including biographical interviews, 'hanging out' with families for short periods of time to observe interactions and daily life, self-videoed television-watching observations in the style of the UK Channel Four television programme *Gogglebox* to grasp a sense of how Brexit media infiltrate domestic life and sparks conversation, as well as research diaries, which took various forms including 'day-in-the-life' accounts and longer, narrative journals. Participants selected which methods they participated in. Many also kept in touch with us via email, text and online messaging. Initial participants put us in touch with significant others. Halfway through the project, in March 2020, the first Covid-19 pandemic lockdown was instituted in the UK. We adapted our methods to the online world, replacing face-to-face 'hanging out' observations with online interviews and drawing more heavily on diary methods, alongside more regular engagements with participants through email, SMS and WhatsApp.

24/07/2019	Boris Johnson becomes Prime Minister
10/09/2019	Prorogation of Parliament commences
24/09/2019	Prorogation ruled unlawful
28/10/2019	Extension to British Withdrawal process from EU granted
29/10/2019	General Election called
12/12/2019	General Election returns Conservative Majority
20/12/2019	Withdrawal Bill passed
31/01/2020	Brexit Day – UK leaves the EU, entering a transition period
23/03/2020	Boris Johnson orders 1st COVID Lockdown, legally enforced on 26/03/2020.
25/05/2020	Dominic Cummings Scandal: 'Barnard Castle' Press Conference
28/05/2020	UK anti-racism protests begin in wake of the murder of George Floyd in the USA
09/09/2020	Internal Market Bill introduced to Parliament, threatening Northern Ireland Protocol
05/11/2020	2nd COVID lockdown ordered
08/12/2020	UK Government withdraws parts of Internal Market Bill undermining protocol.
24/12/2020	EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement reached.
31/12/2020	Transition period ends.

Figure 1. Timeline of Brexit key events.

We recruited 12 original participants through adverts on Facebook neighbourhood groups, leaflets and 'hanging out' in community centres and cafes. We purposefully avoided recruitment through overtly political groups because we wanted to avoid only attracting people with a particular interest in politics and were aware of the classed nature of political engagement (Jarness et al., 2019). We planned to go door-to-door in a variety of areas, a method that has been used before to encourage a wider range of participants, including those who feel more ambivalent about the research topic (Davies, 2011, 2022). Unfortunately, Covid-19 lockdowns occurred in the middle of our recruitment process which meant we could rely only on online methods, curtailing our planned extra steps to reach Leave voters. To some extent, the networked nature of our research design mitigated the effects of this as we were put in touch with family members who had different relationships with politics and were not aware of our original sampling efforts. The resulting sample comprised 26 individuals from 12 families (with between one and three members taking part in the research from each family), who we kept contact with over the course of at least a year. Fifteen of the participants were female and 11 male, with ages ranging from 22 to 76. Nineteen of the participants were from the North of England, one from Scotland, one from Wales, one from Jersey, and the remainder from the South of England. Most participants self-identified as White British (21), with two identifying as British South Asian, one as Black British Caribbean, one as Mixed Race and one as White Other. Two of the participants self-identified as EU Nationals. Six participants said that they were 'Leavers', in support of the UK leaving the EU, and 20 said they were 'Remainers'.

The dataset comprises 42 interviews (11 of the participants took part in more than one interview), three of which were interviews with couples who identified themselves as heterosexual. Five participants took part in 'Gogglebox' observations: a mother–daughter pair, a husband-and-wife pair and a single man. Thirteen diaries covering periods from two weeks to a year were provided to us by participants. Over the course of the project, we took the opportunity to ask participants to provide us with 'single diary entries' on potentially significant days. Eleven participants provided single-day diaries for Election Day in December 2019, dubbed 'The Brexit Election' (see Coppola, 2019; Sky News, 2019), and nine were provided for 'Brexit Day', the day the UK officially left the EU on 31 January 2020. There were 188 SMS texts/WhatsApp/Facebook messages and emails also incorporated into the dataset (with permission) if they referenced anything related to Brexit, public political issues or relationships. Finally, field notes from 'hanging out' and reflections on encounters with participants form part of the dataset. All data were coded in NVivo according to key themes – codes were derived from the research questions, literature and some arose during the analysis itself. Codes pertained to relationships (descriptive codes about when key relationships were mentioned, as well as codes to identify arguments) as well as Brexit-related themes (migration, racism), memories of key moments (referendum day) and biographical codes (childhood political memories). These codes were applied to all forms of data and then put into conversation with case study analysis where data pertaining to individual family groups were analysed together to derive an understanding of different perspectives and provide biographical context. We also created a timeline of our data where key events in our participants' lives were mapped onto a spreadsheet against key events in

Brexit time (see Figure 1). This created a sense of how the temporalities of Brexit time and personal lives intersected.

Our elongated engagement with participants allowed us to temporally trace the ebbs and flows of Brexit's impact on everyday family relationships. Our use of ethnographic encounters enabled us to capture elements of the mundane, everyday, material and relational lives of our participants that may have been difficult for them to narrate in an interview-only research design. Of course, our presence in the participants' lives will have prompted them to consider Brexit – they were aware of the aims of the project, an unavoidable issue with ethnographic research of this nature. We also reflected on how our own political and classed identities as middle class academic 'Remainers' affected our research relationships and we have written in detail about these issues elsewhere (Davies & Carter, 2021). However, the nature of our engagement with our participants meant we could understand their lives in multidimensional ways, stretching beyond Brexit. Participants checked in with us about a range of issues in their lives, including how they were getting on in lockdown. Over time we teased out understandings of everyday lives that were not only shaped by the Brexit-focus of the project and our range of methods were designed to moderate the effects of the research topic. The combination of methods also helped us combine narratives with practices in our analysis. Though the Covid-19 lockdown meant that we generated less observational material through 'Gogglebox' observations and 'hanging out' than we had planned, as well as limiting our attempts to recruit more 'Leavers', the dataset provides rich insights into how people live with Brexit in their everyday personal lives.

Living with Brexit in the context of migration and everyday racism

A large body of existing work documents how everyday life for EU migrants and their families has been affected by Brexit. Studies such as those by Kilkey and Ryan (2021), Benson (2020) and Guma and Jones (2019) indicate how the legal ramifications of Brexit have affected migrants' relationships and personal lives. Godin and Sigoni (2022), Brahic and Lallement (2020) and Zambelli (2020) also attend to the strains these decisions place on family relationships. Our sample contained one family who faced similar issues – Basil and Beth, a married couple aged 41 and 33 who lived in the North of England with their toddler. Basil is a mixed-race French citizen who had been living in the UK for 15 years. Throughout their year-long involvement in the project the issue of whether Basil should apply for settled status loomed large. In Basil's first interview he described not wanting to apply on principle. However, as the year went on and Brexit uncertainty increased, Basil started to view settled status as perhaps providing a semblance of legal stability, though it was not easy for him to overcome his underlying distrust of the government to complete the application. Basil's decision-making process caused arguments with Beth, who struggled to understand his wish to delay; echoing Zambelli's (2020) work on the challenges faced by mixed-race couples who found themselves differently affected by Brexit. Our longitudinal engagement with Basil and Beth helped us to understand the temporalities of the stress experienced by EU migrants around the legal ramifications of Brexit, showing how political events changed personal orientations towards citizenship.

Our data also provide further evidence for how such strains were lived in the quotidian. Beth, in a joint interview with Basil, described a major argument about applying for settled status which took place in the kitchen whilst they were cooking dinner – a site of so many mundane family practices and routines. The everyday effects of this Brexit stress were also visible in Basil and Beth's changes in their perceptions of their mundane humour practices. Having originally been keen to participate in a 'Gogglebox' observation by watching their favourite political satire television show, the couple ultimately decided not to participate in this method. Brexit had stopped being funny – there was too much at stake and they no longer watched political comedy shows. The seriousness of Brexit also affected Basil's feelings of belonging – Beth had bought him a funny T-shirt featuring a spoof character 'Mr Yorkshire', as part of an in-joke shared by the couple about Basil's Yorkshire pronunciations. Basil, however, stopped wanting to wear the T-shirt – his relationship with Yorkshire had stopped being a laughing matter.

Existing studies also indicate that Brexit is implicated in wider experiences of everyday racism for people of colour living in the UK and beyond. The increase in everyday racism following Brexit has been well documented (Abranches et al., 2021; Rzepnikowska, 2019; Virdee & McGeever, 2018). Benson and Lewis demonstrate how Brexit, rather than making Britain newly racist, was yet another expression of the logics of colonialism and racism that have always been part of life: 'an unwelcome amplification of longer-standing structural and institutional discrimination and everyday racism' (2019, p. 2213). Our non-white participants told us of everyday instances that corroborate these findings, for example, Brexit-talk laced with implicit racism coming up at work. For these participants, the penetration of Brexit into their everyday lives can compound the racism, racist microaggressions and anti-immigration discrimination that are already part of everyday life for some, making Brexit less 'liveable' (Back, 2015).

Everyday life with Brexit

Our data indicate that, whilst Brexit has not been such a direct threat to a 'liveable life' for our white, non-migrant participants, Brexit is still lived with as the temporalities of Brexit politics infiltrate everyday lives and relationships. Our analysis revealed varying levels of *intensity* with which Brexit is experienced. Whilst previous research has pointed to classed and aged responses to Brexit politics (Bell & Gardiner, 2019; Mckenzie, 2017; Norris, 2018) or the different ways that Brexit is experienced by Remainers and Leavers (Tyler et al., 2022), the intensities with which Brexit is experienced cannot be fully explained in terms of structural relationships with Brexit politics. The presence of Brexit ebbs and flows through people's lives, coming into contact in different ways depending on circumstances in both (inter)national politics and personal life. Our data suggest that, while experiences are inevitably classed, gendered and raced, the intensity that Brexit is felt in personal life also shifts according to the goings on in both Brexit and personal time. It is helpful to organise the analysis in this way for several reasons. First, focusing on different intensities of Brexit experience encourages analytical attention on small and mundane ways that Brexit can seep into everyday lives. Existing research on everyday life and politics focuses on microaggressions or everyday political acts in public space (e.g. Cousins, 2019; Neal et al., 2013) and does not attend to the homespace and personal

relationships. Second, by organising the analysis in terms of intensity, the temporalities of Brexit come into view, offering a new way of looking at how Brexit is lived, towards an analysis of how its effects might change over time depending on a variety of different personal experiences and their interaction with macro events.

Living with Brexit as it simmers in the background of everyday rhythms and routines

Our data contain details of various mundane activities where, whilst Brexit might not have been dominating the news headlines or triggering major personal disagreements, it still simmered beneath the surface of day-to-day life, largely contained but with the potential to boil over if left unattended. Sometimes everyday routines would be fleetingly disrupted, a reminder of Brexit's simmering presence. In other cases, this simmering was felt as a constant background to other aspects of daily life. Reminder moments were particularly prominent in diaries. Participants wrote about instances including driving on the motorway and seeing 'the customs paper shit on the overhead electronic signs'; cooking and cleaning when the radio started to broadcast Brexit news, prompting 'groans and a tea break'; helping family members with household maintenance and the conversation turning to the 'Brexit election'. Everyday life for these participants, with their established patterns and routines, continued largely undisturbed – yet Brexit was still there as a simmering presence, absorbed into the rhythms of everyday life.

Brexit in routine family life. One example of this absorption into everyday life comes from Brian's diary, a white British man in his seventies, who voted Leave. Brian was living with his wife Christine (also a Leave voter) and his son, Lee, who voted Remain. This had caused tensions between Brian and Lee in the past as Lee did not understand his father's voting decision. Another important figure in Brian's life with different political opinions was his long-time 'best mate', Jonesy – a Remain voter, and Labour Party supporter, whom he met most weeks for a drink at a local pub.

In Brian's diary entry on 30 October 2019, the day after the General Election had been called, he detailed a series of events that started in the pub with Jonesy and continued into the following day at home with Lee:

> Last night Jonesy said he reckoned Corbyn had always *really* wanted out [of the EU]. I was surprised but didn't say anything as I've never followed Corbyn's musings very closely. Worth mentioning to Lee to get his view. Is there any credibility in this? Is Jonesy not a clog-wearing Labour supporter after all but a closet Tory?
>
> Teatime
>
> Asked Lee if he thought that Corbyn secretly wanted Brexit. Reply – 'absolutely no chance.' I said polls and commentators were hinting at a Tory win. Lee said that further into the future there would probably be a desire to re-join. I felt that this was incredibly unlikely.
>
> Lee didn't come down to watch Autumnwatch. (original emphasis)

Brexit simmers in Brian's personal everyday life, carrying over from leisure to home space, friendships to family relationships. Brexit does not cause a major rupture or argument this time, but the wider politics of Brexit – including debates about the position of prominent politicians and predictions derived from large-scale opinion polling – sours their family practice of coming together to watch *Autumnwatch* (a UK television programme comprising a live broadcast of seasonal wildlife and much-loved for its 'cosy' vibe). Following Morgan (2011), we understand that watching *Autumnwatch* together was part of how Brian, Christine and Lee 'do' family, the routine of watching television together as family activity that constitutes and maintains their relationship, forming part of the rhythm of their teatime routine. Not coming together in this instance was one of the only strategies available to Lee to avoid getting into an argument with his parents. It is also interesting that Brexit politics disrupts the viewing of a programme that is very much situated in the natural world and the temporal rhythms of the shift in seasons; a sphere of life one might assume to be entirely separate from politics can still become tangled up with politics at the level of everyday life. Brexit's impact on the mundane here is not dramatic, rather it is simmering away, holding the potential to boil over and make a mess.

Exhaustion and Brexit fatigue. Another way that this background Brexit simmering affected the everyday lives of our participants was when Brexit became a burden to manage alongside the grind of everyday life. This resonates with Southerton's (2003) analysis of 'harriedness'. We saw in diaries, WhatsApp exchanges and interview narratives that absorbing new information about Brexit often became another task to juggle at busy 'pinch points' in the day, such as when listening to the radio whilst preparing breakfast or when trying to catch up on work in the evening. As well as making fleeting appearances at these pinch points, Brexit also affected people in more chronic ways. The challenge of keeping up with a shifting news cycle and feelings of ongoing worry about an uncertain political future added another layer to existing strains of work, housework and care.

Examples of this came through the 'Gogglebox' data provided by Ingrid. Ingrid, 45, is a white British woman who voted Remain. She is a single mum to her teenage daughter, Lily, and her mother, Irene (who was in her seventies and voted to remain), lives nearby. Ingrid recorded six 'Gogglebox' videos between 15 and 40 minutes long. However, despite having decided to set up the camera and record herself watching the news, around a third of the video time consisted of Ingrid asleep on the sofa.

Subsequent interviews and hanging out with Ingrid made it clear how much she was juggling in her life. Besides caring responsibilities for her daughter, her mum had recently developed a back problem and required more help, and a restructure at work had meant Ingrid was reapplying for her job. At this point in Brexit time, between the 14 and 20 September, the parliamentary prorogation drama was unfolding. Through the 'Gogglebox' sessions, we can see some of this juggling lived out on the sofa, the homespace becoming a crux point where the pressures of caring, work and politics coalesce. In an early clip, Ingrid is watching the news but with a laptop perched on her knees to keep up with work responsibilities. In another clip, Ingrid and Lily are on the sofa, watching the news together, with Lily resting her head on her mother's shoulder, Ingrid draping a blanket

over them both. In other sessions Ingrid is asleep under a blanket as the news plays on the television in the background.

Here, Brexit again represents something that is bubbling underneath everyday life, this time perceived as adding to the everyday pressures of work and caring. Twamley et al. (2023) make a similar observation about what they term the 'Covid work' expended by parents during the Covid-19 pandemic to keep up to date with government advice whilst also juggling home-schooling, work and caring responsibilities. The imperative to 'keep up' with politics is classed (Jarness et al., 2019) and Ingrid was certainly a person who felt that engaging in politics was important. Other participants in the sample were less politically engaged (not all had voted in the referendum), but the nature of Brexit politics at the time of the study meant that it dominated news media at certain times with stories of complex negotiations and peculiar legal wranglings. As such, all participants, even the 'less-engaged', mentioned feeling that keeping up with the fast-moving nature of Brexit politics was challenging, though we recognise that the nature of taking part in our study may have compelled participants to comment on this.

That Ingrid regularly fell asleep is indicative of the social nature of tiredness which Widerberg (2006) explains is part of the embodied effect of the classed and gendered organisation of work and family temporalities. It is impossible to ascertain how much of this tiredness is directly attributable to Brexit fatigue – but that is the point. For Ingrid, Brexit is entangled with other stresses in her personal life and the overriding feeling is one of exhaustion. Our different streams of data – video, hanging out and interviewing –augmented each other, allowing for a fuller analysis of the interaction of pressures in Ingrid's personal life.

Both Brian and Ingrid's examples demonstrate the interrelatedness of facets of personal life in how Brexit simmered in the background of everyday life. Brexit's effects, felt across relationships with friends and family, during leisure and work activities and in public and home spaces, highlight the permeability of these contexts. These data also show how macro and micro temporalities interact in the everyday. In both examples the fleeting and chronic ways that Brexit simmered in the background influenced our participants' everyday interactions, routines and activities, disrupting or souring everyday routines without seriously damaging relationships or rendering life unliveable. In the following section, we examine what happened when Brexit did 'boil over', affecting activities and relationships in more dramatic ways, with longer-term consequences.

Living with Brexit as it boils over, colliding with personal life

This collision of Brexit with personal life tended to happen when big moments in Brexit time (such as referendum result day, parliamentary prorogation or the 2019 General Election) disrupted everyday life, or when important moments in family time, particularly special occasions – birthday or Christmas celebrations possessing 'normative weight' (Mason, 2004) – were ruined by the presence of Brexit. When Brexit boils over in these cases, the effects on personal relationships are often more long-lasting and damaging – causing permanent damage or making a mess that requires significant effort to rectify.

Georgina, a white British Remain voter in her thirties, provided an interview account of her Auntie's 70th birthday party, which took place in October 2018 – around the time

of an EU summit that largely focused on intense negotiations regarding the UK's withdrawal agreement – where lots of family members had made a special effort to come together and celebrate the occasion. Despite looking forward to the party and wanting to seek the opinion of her uncle about Brexit, Georgina's evening was ultimately ruined by Brexit in ways that had enduring implications for her relationships. As Georgina recounts:

> What it was is that my uncle. . . I wanted to ask him his take on Brexit because he's got a house out in Spain. And I'd just done a 24-hour shift and my mum was bringing me a four-pack of lager and her bloody man, Larry [mother's long-term boyfriend), who'd already pissed me off about Brexit. Anyway, I finally collared my uncle in the corner. Larry, who'd been drinking my beer, no please or thank you and he knew they were my beers. . . so Larry dives into the conversation, you know, 'we're Great Britain, we'll be absolutely fine' and all that. And so Uncle Geoff's, 'oh I'll tell you what I think'. And then mum just pipes up going, 'well, I voted Leave and I would do again'. It was the first time I'd heard. . . she'd always been very sensitive with me and it was just heart-breaking for me to hear that. Well the page got turned in a way as far as my mum was concerned in the heart. . . And I was upset for. . . you know, I sent some apologies, texts and stuff, but. . . I could see how it all unfolded the way it did but then wasn't able to sort of just say. . . you know, it was horrible really.

Brexit collides with Georgina's 'special' family occasion, boiling over in unexpectedly upsetting ways. Georgina's narration about a party spiralling into 'heart-break' hints at prolonged relational difficulties that feed into the situation, with Georgina calling her mother's boyfriend Larry 'her bloody man'. Larry's intrusion renders Georgina unable to contain the Brexit conversation she wanted to have with her uncle, and Brexit cascaded into an outburst from Georgina's mother that Georgina finds deeply affecting, a page turned, with the potential for enduring effects. Significantly, it is a mundane feature that acts as a catalyst in the deterioration of the situation – Larry had been drinking Georgina's beers, a transgression of party etiquette, that gets thoroughly entangled with political resentments.

It is helpful here to conceive of this occasion as representing a 'liminal hotspot', described by Greco and Stenner (2017) as a situation where at least 'two forms-of-process overlap temporally and spatially . . . *interfere* with one another and you find yourself caught up in the noise between their different demands' (p. 154, original emphasis). Here, the demands of 'special' family time collide with weighty political circumstances. In situations where the paradox of demands 'cannot easily be escaped using existing resources' (2017, p. 155) a long-term 'pattern shift . . . based on new normativities' (p. 155) may materialise. This is the case with Georgina – her relationship with her mother took on a new pattern after this incident. Georgina repeatedly references the event in explaining the change – in a research diary and in a further interview conducted in January 2021. In a text she sent to us at the tail-end of our fieldwork, again in January 2021, Georgina confirmed the relational pattern shift:

> On the surface we just carried on as normal I suppose but I felt so disappointed, cautious, betrayed, upset and frustrated – which must have had some effect most likely in frequency of seeing each other and censoring myself/keeping or steering conversations to light/neutral topics. I really don't

want it to define my relationship with her so, whilst it is the elephant in the room for me, yes, for the most part, I've just firmly made it a no-go area in my verbal dealings with her.

By the time of the party (October 2018), many people in our sample had already ascertained how family and friends had voted and spoke of avoiding the topic of conversation, though they still found Brexit coming up at certain moments, particularly when it was on the news a lot. Georgina is unusual in that the party was one of the first instances where she had openly talked about Brexit with family members, but her strategy of remaining silent to keep the peace was commonly used and is reminiscent of Lee's decision to avoid *Autumnwatch* in the example above.

In the next example, we again see a collision of Brexit time and family time, but in another direction – a mundane family practice becoming extraordinary because of the exacerbating effect of a big event on the Brexit timeline.

Debbie, a white British woman in her forties who voted to remain, and Hazel, her mother-in-law, a white British woman in her sixties who voted to leave, participated in the study. Both talked about how, pre-Brexit, their family would discuss politics whenever they met up. Whilst these conversations did not always go smoothly-sometimes a bit too much said at a dinner table, needing time in another room to calm down-views were always freely shared. However, this shifted on Brexit Vote Result Day in June 2016. Hazel helped Debbie with taking her children to school. In their interviews, when asked about their memories of the referendum result, both Debbie and Hazel gave an account of the 'school run' that day. Debbie recollects:

> [Hazel] was very quiet. I could barely talk to her. Yeah, I literally could barely talk to her. It was quite difficult. And no, she didn't celebrate, she was respectful. She knew how strongly I felt. So yeah, she was. . . no, she recognised it would not be a good approach. . . I remember going to the playground at school and there was just people literally in tears. We all just went to the park afterwards and just sat there and went, 'gosh, this is just awful'.

In her interview, Hazel gave this account:

> Sort of a tense atmosphere in the morning, and I didn't actually say anything to Debbie about it at all. And she didn't mention it. . . I was delighted. . . I didn't want to rub salt into the wounds. . . I thought, if I say anything, it's only going to make her feel worse, and she would have known that I was feeling happy about the result. . . we didn't mention anything. But we both took the kids to school. . . and I saw her commiserating, lots of people were crying, and I thought, what's that about, why are they crying?

Here a critical moment in the wider politics of the nation forcefully impacted upon a family practice, rendering the usually mundane activity important and memorable. The effect of Brexit, beginning with awkwardness and unspoken emotions on the school run, has had a long-term effect on Debbie and Hazel's relationship and their ways of interacting. In both Hazel's and Debbie's interviews, they attest to how the family no longer discuss politics together, focusing their conversations on the common-ground of the grandchildren, and utilising silence, as with Georgina and her mum, to keep the peace.

Both examples show a pivotal collision between the temporalities of the political and the personal, whether they be 'special' family occasions or mundane family practices. These collisions occur because of the nature of the relationships that precede them (Georgina's difficult relationship with Larry, for example, or Hazel and Debbie's previous openness about their political views) fundamentally shaping the quality of the relationships that follow, as well as future practices of living politics. These examples have demonstrated how political events can collide with the rhythms of everyday personal life with intense and long-lasting implications for family relationships.

Conclusion: Personal-political temporalities

This article demonstrates how Brexit affected people's everyday lives, routines and relationships. These understandings of life in 'Brexit Britain' have only been possible because of the nature of our study. Our longitudinal vantage point enabled us to stay with our participants to trace the after-effects of events such as 'Brexit day' or a relative's birthday party on our participants' relationships. By keeping in touch with our participants as method we were able to observe the constant drip of pressures, including those caused by Brexit, in their already hectic lives, communicated to us through WhatsApp, Facebook or SMS messages, and interviews or diaries. By taking a networked approach to building our sample we were able to compare events and conversations from different vantage points and highlight the work expended in dealing with the effect of Brexit on relationships. This has highlighted the importance of noticing and listening to the small mundane elements of everyday life, showing how this eye for the quotidian has exposed how seemingly trivial details – from *Autumnwatch* to cans of beer – are central to the living of Brexit.

By exploring some of the ways that Brexit temporalities interact with various temporal registers of personal life (including special occasions and mundane routines) the article shows how macro-political events interact with micro-personal lives. Our sample, though skewed towards 'Remainers', contains examples of how people's lives were affected by Brexit in various ways regardless of how they voted. The complexities of Brexit politics meant that, by the time we were working with families, everyone in our sample had experienced Brexit negatively, even if aspects of Brexit politics affected them differently. Brian, for example, along with other Leave voting participants, had been happy with the result of the referendum and some participants even wrote to us to tell us how they had celebrated Britain's official departure in January 2020 with champagne. Even so, these participants faced frustrations at what they found to be a slow, confusing political process and experienced challenges managing political differences in their personal relationships. All our participants had at least one family member who had voted differently from them – a pattern reflected in previous interview-based research about political differences and personal relationships (Davies, 2022). This meant that it did not make sense to attempt a comparison of different experiences according to voting behaviour or levels of disagreement in personal networks. Indeed, rather than seek to identify typologies, our ethnographic data were better suited to an in-depth analysis of the tangling of politics with personal life over time. Our conceptualisation of 'living with Brexit' in terms of personal life enabled us to observe how Brexit becomes tangled up

with everyday life in domestic, work and leisure spaces whilst prioritising intimate relationships, particularly with family but also with friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Our work has highlighted the importance of envisioning politics as set against the ups and downs of long-term 'sticky' relationships (Davies, 2019; Smart, 2007). This marks a new way of thinking about how politics affects people's lives, taking the sociologies of Brexit, and of high-profile political events more broadly, in a new direction. We have demonstrated the importance of attending to everyday personal life in the study of politics and have emphasised the analytical merit of conceiving of the interactions between political and personal timescapes; demonstrating how these might come into contact and why such contact may be characterised by different intensity levels. This multidimensional approach to analysing political events can be meaningfully applied beyond the context of Brexit, offering a way of thinking about how divisive, high-octane political events and moments interact with everyday personal lives.

This article also contributes to sociologies of everyday life, using the example of Brexit to empirically develop the central idea in this field that the everyday is a sight where macro phenomena are lived, enacted and created (Neal & Murji, 2015); showing how this happens in practice. We have done this by emphasising interactions between different temporalities in both personal and political life. Brexit has been experienced as ebbing and flowing through public life with moments of intense scrutiny and high drama as well as periods of 'waiting' (S. M. Hall, 2022) or inactivity. Personal life can similarly be experienced on multiple temporal registers, including the rhythms and routines of everyday life, the 'special occasions' carrying the weight of normative expectation, as well as significant life course moments and disruptions such as marriage, divorce, sickness, birth and redundancy. This article has demonstrated how the macro is enacted in the everyday through interactions between these timescapes.

We have conceptualised Brexit as a constant presence, simmering beneath the temporalities of personal life in both fleeting and chronic ways, and we have shown how the burden of keeping up with parliamentary developments is heightened during pinch points in Brexit time when conversations in the pub might turn to Brexit more frequently or new political developments prove challenging to understand. These macro-political pinch points interact with those in personal lives, such as when Ingrid had to reapply for her job. We have demonstrated that collisions between the macro and the personal can be understood as 'liminal hotspots' (Greco & Stenner, 2017); times where two forms of process overlap and interfere with each other, and where individuals, and in this context families, find themselves caught between two demands: between political citizenship and Brexit, and family relationships, obligations and care demands. The effect of liminal hotspots on family relationships ranges in intensity – from the minimally liminal, where the fleeting paradox between competing demands can be managed or minimised by established family practices, through to more serious and permanent consequences, where the collision between personal life and Brexit cannot be resolved easily or quickly. Some of these everyday effects of Brexit may have long-lasting consequences. Our data indicate how people adapted to the presence of Brexit in their personal lives. It is possible that the shock of Brexit and its potential to 'spoil' experiences has necessitated the honing of new skills for navigating political difference. However, it is important not to overstate the uniqueness of Brexit here – other political events in other times and national

contexts may have required similar skills and our participants all brought previous experiences of other political times to bear when living with Brexit. Our data support existing research indicating how Brexit affects personal lives more profoundly for migrant families and for people of colour, adding to these literatures by emphasising the presence of Brexit in everyday routines and interactions over time. Our analysis of the intensities of the experience of Brexit moves the discussion beyond the analysis of classed and aged opinions about Brexit, to focus instead on how people with different orientations towards Brexit politics live with and experience macro-political shocks such as this in their everyday lives.

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