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The UK's Brexit podcasts: the temporal affordances of podcasting in a time of crisis

ABSTRACT: It is sometimes said we live in an age characterised by crisis. Taking Brexit as an example of a recent crisis moment, we explore the role of the UK's political podcasts. Brexit was the subject of a huge amount of conventional media coverage in the UK and elsewhere, including radio, TV and short podcast series. But here we focus on two hugely popular, long-running, single-issue podcasts: *Brexitcast* and *Remainiacs*, which emerged when podcasting was exploding as a popular form and became an unexpected audience hit. They reported on Brexit with far less efficiency than conventional media, taking up hundreds of hours of media time. Much of this time is spent on speculation, humour and domestic trivia. In this chapter we explore how these are used to dramatise and make sense of Brexit as a chaotic process that moves both too fast and too slow. In exploiting the temporal affordances of podcasting, these series carnivalise (Bakhtin, 1970) the sacred space of international politics and help to strip it of some of its power. No wonder this genre of political podcasting has endured post-Brexit, becoming a popular phenomenon in the UK.

KEYWORDS: politics; temporality; podcast intimacy; informality; affect .

A time of crisis and the emergence of the popular politics podcast phenomenon in the UK

Brexit, or the exit of the UK from the European Union, is regularly considered to be a crisis event in European politics (Hall, 2022; Anderson & Wilson, 2018). The vote to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum made apparent the previously latent differences of attitude towards European identity and freedom of movement, among other things – within UK society and within families. Nesting inside this overarching Brexit crisis were multiple crises: Prime Ministerial resignations, sudden elections and the unlawful suspension of parliament, among other events, as the UK government tried and repeatedly failed to negotiate the terms of the country's exit from the EU (Bowcott, Quinn & Carrell, 2019; Szucko, 2022). Of course, Brexit was the subject of much conventional news coverage. But we are focusing on two podcasts that dissected and responded to Brexit: the hugely popular *Brexitcast* (from the

BBC) and *Remainiacs* (by independent production company, Podmasters). These two shows were launched in 2017, at the start of negotiations on the form of the UK's withdrawal from the EU and a time when podcasts were rapidly taking off as a popular media form and as we will argue, Brexit as a political and social crisis found in podcasts an ideal medium of expression.

Although they were not the first political news podcasts (*Brexitcast* followed the successful *Electioncast*, for example), these Brexit shows were unusual in focusing on a single issue for such a long period. They ran for around three years, before rebranding as general politics podcasts *Newscast* and *Oh God, What Now?* respectively. Their popularity with audiences took many by surprise and it has paved the way for a hugely popular genre of the politics-themed conversational podcast. They are now joined by *The Rest is Politics*, *Electoral Dysfunction*, *Political Currency* and *The News Agents*, among others. Audiences for these podcasts are large and growing in the UK. They tend to sit around the top of podcast charts (Makari, 2023; Collins, 2023; Maher, 2024) and even sell out arena-sized venues for their live shows (Bootle, 2024). In the UK's 2024 general election, downloads increased by over fifty percent, leading some to call this the first podcast election (Maher, 2024).

When asked to explain the success of their podcasts, producers' reasons tend to fall under two main themes – intellectual and emotional. Into the former fall claims about the popularity of media that can devote more time to greater depth of coverage, and a sustained discussion between different political viewpoints (Hartley & Coleman, 2024). Into the latter, the belief that these podcasts respond to listeners' strong emotions about the contemporary state of politics and society as permanently in crisis, in ways that conventional news coverage does not. In an edition of a podcast about podcasting titled *Oh God, What Now: Screaming into the void, together* (Shepherd, 2023), Andrew Harrison, a regular on *Remainiacs/Oh God, What Now* says, «people came for the Brexit, but they stayed for the panel… all these people for whom they had become like their gang; their sort of emotional support group». *Brexitcast*'s show notes also often refer to the regular contributors as «the gang». Such relationship building may account for high levels of trust in podcasts (Hartley & Coleman, 2024). Both of these explanations for the popularity of Brexit podcasts and their successor politics podcasts are based on their extended duration – they have more time than other media formats to discuss in depth, to develop relationships in studio and with their publics. In this chapter we argue that these temporal affordances of podcasting as a journalistic medium are manifold. Not only do they give more time to present information or ideas, they are used to dramatise or play out the lived experience of crisis time, to anticipate possible futures and to play with chaos and order, in ways that might help to construct our understanding of what is sometimes called a state of perpetual crisis or a permacrisis (Zuleeg, Emmanouilidis & Borges de Castro, 2021).

The affordances of podcasting: taking up time

Unlike their broadcast radio counterparts, political podcasters enjoy a great freedom in the duration and frequency of their programmes. *Brexitcast* ran at around 30 minutes (but durations varied greatly, the shortest being just 2 minutes and the longest 50) for just under three years (139 episodes) and *Remainiacs* 45-60 minutes for more than three years (150 episodes and 2 «bonus» podcasts). Episodes were released weekly on the whole, but they also sometimes took a break for a summer holiday or Christmas, and more often the teams produced extra episodes, which they both referred to as «emergency» podcasts, when unexpected Brexit-related news was announced. Complete listening figures for the shows are not published, but *Remainiacs* had more than ten thousand downloads in the days following its first episode release (Hale, 2022), both series often appeared near the top of the podcast charts on various platforms, and by the end of 2019, the BBC had reported 18 million downloads and plays of *Brexitcast* (Radio Today, 2019). Both podcasts staged live shows in front of an audience, and *Brexitcast* was broadcast on radio and had a spin-off TV show. Both were active on social media. Some broadcast radio talk[1] formats are long too. On UK national stations BBC Radio 5 Live or LBC for example, there are daily programmes on current affairs but they tend to involve live interactivity with the audience (phone-ins) and they change topic frequently. These Brexit podcasts then were still unusual in devoting so much media time to a single issue.

Both series followed a conversational podcast or chatcast format. They were live or as-live interactions between a group of regular contributors and invited guests, in contrast to edited and mixed «features» style or narrative podcasts. The tone of both *Brexitcast* and *Remainiacs* is largely informal with many of the features of everyday «mundane» conversation (Hutchby, 1991). At the same time, this is a standardised and fairly tightly managed interactional structure that draws on broadcast speech radio traditions of the live studio discussion or round-table. It is, like broadcast speech, a hybrid or intermediate form, switching between formal and informal, improvised and scripted «institutional» talk (Hutchby, 1991).

However, where news and current affairs speech radio would traditionally invite in, or play in recorded excerpts from, key players in the unfolding events of Brexit, the «gang» of contributors here tend to use oral storytelling techniques from everyday conversation, acting out imagined conversations to dramatise, narrativise and make sense of Brexit and its multiple crises, and position the imagined listener in relation to post-Brexit futures. This is a much

[1] In British English, particularly at the BBC, a distinction is often made between talk radio and speech or "built speech" formats. The former is largely improvised and associated with the phone-in. The latter includes documentaries, drama, entertainment and factual and news programmes with more structured, planned and scripted elements.

less disciplined and time-efficient mode of delivering information about Brexit, yet it effectively performs some important functions, through the use of far more humour – satire, hyperbole, bathos, teasing and self-deprecation – than would be normal in a conventional broadcast politics programme. In the following sections, we will unpack how these Brexit podcasts deployed this informal and improvised humorous talk to dramatise Brexit as unprecented and even chaotic crisis-time, to dramatise also the feelings of living through such a time, and then how it is also used to restore order and reframe Brexit times as familiar and predictable after all.

Reflecting the temporal qualities of Brexit: hyperbolic metaphor in Remainiacs

Sometimes the speakers in both podcasts use aggrandising language to dramatise the events of Brexit, including using the word «emergency» for extra episodes, though this may be understood ironically. In the final episode of *Brexitcast*, which commentates live the countdown to the moment when the UK leaves the EU on 30 January 2020, podcast team members are posted outside key symbolic locations as they would be in broadcast news coverage: the EU parliament in Brussels, the UK Prime Minister's residence at 10 Downing Street and Parliament Square in London. Speakers describe the evening as «profound» and «a historic moment». However, as is common in the series, reverential and historicising discourse is swiftly undercut with humour and bathos during extended conversational exchanges – more of which below.

In *Remainiacs*, the temporal dimensions of Brexit are dramatised using negative hyperbolic metaphors that frame Brexit as chaotic and disastrous. For example, in episode 77 alone (18 October 2018), Brexit is likened to a black hole, a cliff edge, dungeons, Hell, being in a fire, a Kafkaesque nightmare, and the experience of living through Brexit in the UK is likened to being in a tumble drier:

> The closer you get to a black hole in space, the more that distant events seem to accelerate, happening faster and faster until they all appear to be taking place at the same time, collapsing on top of one another in a violation of causality. None of this matters to you though, because you're being torn to pieces by powerful forces you don't really understand, could never control, and should probably have left well alone. Hello and welcome to another edition of *Remainiacs*. [laughter] A podcast about Brexit. (Andrew Harrison, opening monologue, *Remainiacs* ep. 77)

> How was it from watching this stuff from a distance? Does it lend any kind of clarity? Because we're obviously... we're basically in

> the tumble dryer that is Brexit and you're watching it from California. (Andrew Harrison asks Nina Schick to comment on recent UK events, *Remainiacs* ep. 77)

What these metaphors for Brexit have in common is they describe very visceral effects on the imagined body of too much happening, too fast, in a series of events over which the subject has no control (heading towards a cliff edge, being sucked into a black hole), and at the same time, in apparent contradiction, too little happens, so that one is stuck (in a dungeon, in Hell, in a Kafkaesque nightmare). Or in the case of the tumble drier, the two ideas meet, as one is presumably invited to imagine constant movement, unable to find one's feet, yet travelling nowhere. Movement towards Brexit is therefore presented as something that happens to us, as the result of an inescapable and chaotic force, rather than an orderly and deliberate mastery of time, turning on its head the relationship with Brexit-time that the government might wish to present.

As Bakthin (1970: 315-316) explains, the grotesque that nourishes laughter is rarely gratuitous. It generally arises from changes inflicted on the social body and which are seen as unfair. The above metaphors all imply suffering of the literal, individual body too. In the same episode, Andrew Harrison introduces regular contributor Ian Dunt:

> Also with us is Ian Dunt, Editor of politics.co.uk and a man who after the events of this week consists of 70% Bisodol, 20% grey market antidepressants and 10% nicotine. [laughter] Hello Ian welcome back to the show. [laughter] How are your nerves this week, it's getting a bit real isn't it?

The joke is that Dunt is made up entirely of self-administered remedies for indigestion, depression and anxiety, in other words, the effects of chronic stress on the body. It relies on both exaggeration for its humour and the aptness of the idea that Brexit time is characterised by moments of change that can occur seemingly at random and to which Dunt might need to respond, but far more of the time is spent waiting for events, over which he has no control, yet perhaps feels responsibilised as a citizen. Brexit, after all, was so often referred to as «the will of the people» (Petkar, 2019).

Though there will undoubtedly have been many people in the UK unworried and even uninterested in Brexit, members of the general public interviewed in Manchester by Sarah Hall (2022: 206) described Brexit in not dissimilar ways as «a whirlwind», «a shitstorm» but also as a «quagmire» and a «waste of time». The hyperbolic metaphors of *Remainiacs* then might be said to express very aptly the experience of living through Brexit time for many listeners. Though Brexit felt eventful, it was the decisions of a small number of

political actors that created the pace and magnitude of events, while most people were excluded from this sphere of political action, and left to wait to find out whether and when the government would, to use its own slogan, «get Brexit done» and what kind of a Brexit it would be (Anderson & Wilson, 2018; Hall, 2022). If exaggeration and amplification seem appropriate here, it is because of the dramatic, historical, and international significance of Brexit and its many twists and turns. Yet the epic style of *Remainiacs* is only used in an approach governed by doubt and humour, in a picaresque, self-conscious, even parodic manner. The hyperbolic metaphors in *Remainiacs* introduce an element of the ridiculous by the extent of their exaggeration, which invites laughter (heard in the recordings) that eventually relieves the tension they build up. The defusing effects of humour are also utilised in *Brexitcast*, but through bathos rather than hyperbole.

Bathetic metaphor: Relocating Brexit in the familiar, domestic past in Brexitcast

We mentioned the final episode of *Brexitcast*, streamed live on the 30 January 2020, during the countdown to the final withdrawal of the UK from the EU at midnight, Brussels time (11pm UK time). Regular member of the podcast, Adam Fleming indulges in a very brief reflection on the significance of the moment, only to undermine that sentiment immediately with a reference to a cosy radio comedy panel show called *Just a Minute*, which has been on air since 1967. The moment where the UK leaves the European Union becomes «something else happening». Fellow regular Laura Kuenssberg, the BBC's Political Editor at the time, is at Downing Street, where a clock in red, white and blue lights is projected onto the outside of number 10, counting down to Brexit:

> Adam Fleming: «Well, everyone, it's a really big night, a historic moment. It's episode 2 of *Brexitcast* does Brexit-themed *Just a Minute*. No, just kidding. There's something else happening as well. The actual Brexit.»
> Paul Mason: «And Katya, Laura, where are you?»
> Laura Kuenssberg: «I'm in Downing Street doing just er 8 minutes and 9 seconds. Oh 8 minutes and five seconds, 8 minutes and three seconds to go.»
> Adam Fleming: «What does the big clock look like on the on the building?»
> Laura Kuenssberg: «Well there are dancing around blue, white and red lights and then the clock looks like a sort of… It's kind of like the face you would have seen on what would have been quite a groovy alarm clock in about 1993.»
> Chris Mason: «I've still got one of those. [laughter]»

10 Downing Street is an address with an aura of power, standing in for the office of the elected head of state. The Brexit clock is an attempt to perhaps to strengthen the auratic power of Brexit as a historic event, by projecting it onto that iconic house frontage and at the same time claim Brexit for the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson and construct him as a figure with a (future) historical legacy. But Kuenssberg refuses to reproduce this move, and likens it to a humble domestic item, one that is both old-fashioned and trying and failing to be cool («groovy») and Mason takes up the analogy. Both move the public spectacle of Brexit symbolically into the space of the home and relocate the idea of an uncertain post-Brexit future in the familiar recent past. Later in the same programme Adam Fleming in Brussels describes another moment of potentially powerful symbolism with a domestic metaphor, as the UK flag is taken down from the European Council building:

> Two people came out from reception, took the flagpole, folded up the British flag, basically like you would fold up your duvet cover after you've just taken it out of the tumble dryer and then took it off.

Such humorous analogies between formal and public Brexit rituals and the humble and domestic are the profane that might serve to strip the moment of Brexit of some of its power (Bakhtin, 1970). Their incongruity gives rise to laughter that defuses the tension that the few conventional aspects of reportage or commentary have built up. In *Remainiacs*, the hyperbole constructs Brexit as an uninterpretable and chaotic process that destroys what has been constructed in the past. The mocking use of bathos in *Brexitcast* reverses this threat, retreating into a time before Brexit.

The *Brexitcast* regulars turn the mockery on themselves too, through a lot of self-deprecating humour, such as their frequent reference to political analysis as «geekery», a joke about Alex Forsyth being seated too many rows back at the press conference to see anything, or Adam Fleming not having access to many sources (both episode 1). There are also many references to the domestic – what they ate for lunch, having coffee on the train or their accommodation, as in this excerpt at the start of episode 1:

> Chris Mason: «I'm Chris Mason in Westminster.»
> Adam Fleming: «I'm Adam Fleming, BBC Brussels Reporter in day one of the new job.»
> Alex Forsyth: «And I'm Alex Forsyth, usually in Westminster, but the pleasure of being in Brussels and in the first press conference with David Davis and Michel Barnier.»
> Chris Mason: «Adam, are you still living out the suitcase then?»

> Adam Fleming: «No, I actually unpacked last night in the flat I'm going to be living in for my first month here. And it's a very nice flat, but there is one terrible design flaw – the plugs are in all the wrong places. Specifically, there is no plug by the bed. So as you know, I'm a late night tweet consumer, so not having to be not being able to plug my phone in by the bed».

While contributing to the «carnivalisation» of the situation (Bakthin, 1970), the inclusion of certain domestic details of the journalists encourages a sense of intimacy, by reminding us of their embodiment and of their personal connection to the story (Lindgren, 2023), which is a «new job». At the same time of course, it also establishes them as experts, in greater proximity (in time and space) to power than most of their listeners – their hotel rooms are in Brussels, they are present at key press conferences. Still, we are reminded that Brexit time for political journalists is also a time of waiting and uncertainty. This conversational work helps to differentiate them from traditional journalistic discourse, which is depersonalised and formulaic, limited in time. Spending so much time on the minutiae of everyday life in their speech they project the idea that their audience also has the time to listen to their domestic chat, forming a «communication contract» (Charaudeau, 2011) or «enunciation device» (Fauré & Smati, 2016: 99)[2] that establishes a sense of symbolic closeness between the podcast «gang», and between them and their listeners. The domestic and self-deprecating humour also operate to defuse the tension around Brexit these same episodes have built up through their coverage. In fact both *Brexitcast* and *Remainiacs* use other devices found in everyday conversation to defuse tension and reinstate a sense of order.

Commentating, speculating and trying out different futures

In both podcasts, the regular contributors and their guests concern themselves a great deal with rules, procedures and constitutional questions, which quell presumed anxiety over the unprecedented and apparently chaotic nature of Brexit, resituate «historic» Brexit within UK and European continuity, and offer a means to speculate over what might be happening behind closed doors. During these speculations, contributors often reframe disagreement or apparently poor negotiating strategy as pragmatic or a practice that follows past precedent. For example, in episode 1 of *Brexitcast* (19 June 2017) several jour-

[2] An enunciation device rests first of all on a double image presented by the enunciator: his own, in relation to what he assumes about what he is saying, and the image he proposes of his addressee. The relationship between these two interlocutionary instances is constructed precisely within and through the discourse produced.

nalists from different media organisations have been asked to speculate on how negotiations between the UK and the EU might go, and a montage of their recorded answers is played in. Chris Mason suggests he is «intrigued» (though he sounds worried) by the fact that several of these journalists have speculated talks will break down almost as soon as they have begun, when either the EU or UK representative walks out. A walkout sounds chaotic, unprecedented – a crisis. Yet Adam Fleming reframes this immediately as a conventional negotiating strategy in Brussels, the reference to issuing a document or meeting at «a big table» gently ridiculing the practices of the political class, that demonstrates his own insider knowledge of these tactics at the same time:

> Adam Fleming: «So we're fine.»
> Chris Mason: «Is it? Is it? I mean, it's difficult, isn't it? Because who knows what's gonna happen in the future? But I was intrigued by the number of journalists in that little montage there who were anticipating some sort of walkout. And I'm thinking, is that a sort of journalistic hope? Because it would be dramatic, and it would make for great headlines. Or do we think that's going to happen?»
> Adam Fleming: «I think they're just realistic. They're in Brussels, there's a lot of brinkmanship, it's a tool people use for negotiating as much as issuing a document or having a meeting with the big table is a tool.»

In episode 77 of *Remainiacs* there is much discussion of the uncertain timeline for Brexit, and hope of overturning it through a second referendum. They are waiting for news on a deal between Brussels and the UK, which they say might be imminent, or then again might take ten years. There may be a much-feared «no-deal Brexit», and they report on the government's own published notices about the resulting disruption to transport, insurance, banking, and food supplies. Within this chaotic and anxiogenic political landscape, Ian Dunt characterises Prime Minister Teresa May's behaviour as entirely irrational:

> Theresa May went to the Commons you suddenly think «Oh, you're making it harder now!» and in fact making a statement to the Commons at all was a frankly insane thing for her to have done.

But as he then speculates at length about what would happen if there were indeed a no-deal Brexit, he speaks in the voice of the government, the Speaker of the House of Commons, and elected members of parliament (MPs): rehearsing what they might say, testing out how infrequently used aspects of the unwritten constitution might help stop the country leaving the EU without any deal:

> Just imagine that in sort of January, February the government is trying to push through a no deal. According to the law now on January 27th, they make a neutral motion to the Commons going «there is going to be no deal». What that motion will really say is «a debate has been held on this.» […] It opens the door for a very confident speaker, and they'd have to be a very confident speaker, ideally a speaker who was about to step down anyway, as he is going to in the summer, to go, «Well, the wording of this motion is less important than the intention of this motion. And therefore, I think that it is amendable.» And if it is amendable you could have MPs saying to the government «you must go back to the drawing board». (*Remainiacs* ep 77)

This ventriloquism (Cooren, 2012) occurs frequently in both series. It is a form of polyphony – the incorporation of more than one voice, which is common in journalism (Głaz & Trofymczuk, 2020) – but here it's of a particular type, drawn from everyday conversational storytelling. The informal use of «goes» or «is like» to mean «says» or «said» is used as the narrative switches from one person to another, or indeed to whole groups of people. This contrasts with the kind of polyphonic techniques typical of broadcast coverage of politics, where short clips of politicians might be played or opposing sides brought in for a studio debate, as a means to explore the story and offer balance. Political decisions around Brexit were mainly taking place behind closed doors, leaving journalists and the general public with a dearth of information about what was being said and indeed what might happen. The extended and relatively free format of these two podcasts makes them inefficient in terms of the delivery of the latest information or facts about Brexit. However, it is used to give extensive space to these oral polyphonic techniques that dramatise Brexit politics, both real and hypothetical.

Conclusion

These podcasts were produced at a time of political instability in the UK, when Brexit and post-Brexit futures were being decided. Waiting to find out what the future might hold in this way is a form of subjugation to the authority and power of the state (Olson, 2015: 522) that may be felt as a tension in the body and mind at the fast pace of news events and the slow progress of meaningful change. In this time, many found political news stressful yet were unable to tear themselves away, a phenomenon sometimes called doomscrolling on social media. It seems hard to understand why podcasts that delivered more of the same, week in, week out, would be such a success. These two podcasts have their differences in style and content, but they both worked to represent and restructure the audience's experience of Brexit time to make it perhaps

somewhat easier to live with. Understanding more about the techniques they used to do this can help us understand something about the role popular politics podcasting might have in the future of journalism.

Though they do recount detailed explanations of laws, processes and practices, these podcasts can't be said to disseminate that information in an especially time-efficient way, and much of their coverage is speculative. Instead, they spend podcasting time on relationship-building with each other and their audience and on representing and responding to the lived experience of crisis times. *Remainiacs* theatralises the visceral effects of waiting for Brexit, exaggerating them for humorous effect before offering reassuring analysis. In *Brexitcast*, meanwhile, reassurance is offered through domestic analogies and the use of irony and self-deprecation to naturalize Brexit-era instability. Though it does not always linger on it, this downplaying of Brexit in its own way still presupposes likely anxiety about political crisis among its audience.

Both podcasts exhaustively document each stage of the negotiations, events in parliament, news coverage of Brexit and possible Brexit and post-Brexit futures. In a way these podcasts seem to fulfil the function of restless activity that we need to undertake when we are both unable to act and unable to relax. The *Remainiacs* website tagged the series «the no-bullshit Brexit podcast for people who won't just *shut up* and get over Brexit». The only activity available, while those in power decide Brexit, appears to be to talk. *Brexitcast* promises to follow the «twists and turns» of negotiations «behind the scenes» and «goss» or insider gossip from those close to power (episode web texts 14 Dec 2017, 20 Dec 2018, 4 April 2019). Podcast talk is perhaps the equivalent of restless pacing, while waiting for the results of an operation on a loved one. But the restless talk of these podcasts that filled up that huge amount of time it took for Brexit negotiations to happen does more than this. Shared laughter and intimate information in these podcasts suggest a claim to closeness, works towards a sense listeners are spending time in their company – a sense that takes time to establish.

Remainiacs, produced by a non-broadcast media company, is free to be an avowedly pro-Remain podcast, and derives much of its humour from the hyper-dramatisation of Brexit as a crisis and a catastophe. The BBC, as a broadcaster, is required to be impartial on news and matters of political controversy (Ofcom, 2021). Its mockery is gentler, and it works the other techniques of politics podcasting much more intensively: the performance of informality, self-deprecating humour and teasing, undercutting the seriousness of Brexit and their own work as political journalists. Humour, ventriloquism and the carnivalesque help to circumvent censorship and protect people from punishment by the powerful (Bakhtin, 1970). Shared laughter also serves as social glue. These two series make of the podcast space a kind of public square where a group exhortation to derision takes place, and shapes the collective.

Despite the apparent informality and improvised nature of talk in both shows, they both also conform to some of the central values of journalism.

Ventriloquism helps them not only express sentiments connected to experiencing the crisis, creating drama and humour, but performs the journalistic function of objectivity and balance, bringing in different perspectives or opinions, even in the avowedly anti-Brexit *Remainiacs*, putting them into contestation, evidencing opinions and thus authorising the commentator's narrative as a definitive, rather than personal account (Rautajoki & Hyvärinen, 2021). The self-mockery of *Brexitcast* is both a sign of complicity with the community of the audience and a way to take up a stance of disengagement towards Brexit politics, which might stand in for objectivity.

Both podcasts undermine politicians' power, by mocking the official processes as chaotic (*Remainiacs*) and difficult to comprehend or ridiculous (both series). In ridiculing Brexit and its powerful actors, they repeatedly puncture the sacred dignity of Brexit as the historic moment of Conservative Party politicians, rendering it knowable (retreating into the home and into a time before Brexit) and laughable. In both cases, the deliberations and decisions made by the nation state, invested as they are with a sacred aura, are «carnivalised» (Bakthin, 1970). By humorously relativising political facts and reality, they are symbolically dethroned, profaned and denied.

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