

I came to Barcelona from the UK with the over-inflated and exotic view that I would be more politically stimulated here, that politics in my home country (this was pre-Brexit) was dull and business-like, that ordinary people there didn't discuss politics whereas across the shore in *Europe* they did. Yes, I know that technically we are European and that it's ridiculous to speak of the geographical continent, or Union that we were a part of at that time, as something 'other'. But welcome to British exceptionalism, I've had to do a lot of deprogramming, and you can see where it's taken us...

I cringe at some of my naivety - ok, arrogance - when I look back at me coming here and those first months trying to set up my new life. I've come to understand that there is a specific latent confidence that extends to arrogance in Brits/Northern Europeans/Anglosphere speakers that is unrivalled when it comes to emigrating. I may proudly wear my Greek colours to distinguish me from that undesirable tag of plain British, an oregano Brit, if you will, spraying this mixed identity onto every first encounter, but that still hasn't saved me.

I cannot speak for my fellow Northern Europeans, neither my transatlantic Anglo cousins, nor those Anglos on the other side of the world that still have Queen Elizabeth II as Head of State so as to maintain a colonialist status quo on seized aboriginal and Māori lands. So I will speak from that ground zero Anglo identity, a UK national, from England and more precisely, London: that once Apex predator of oppressors. I'm a woman, granted, but we all know by now that white femininity is a weaponised force.

People from these parts of the world come here and have some of the highest accessibility to the job market with unrivalled entitlement to live and work (especially within the Union) yet struggle with the basics. Many take huge gambles to come here without even realising it is a gamble in the first place; fuck up and have to go home tail between legs and a few grand poorer. Many people never make inroads into being real residents and instead stay on the fringes. Why?

Let me start backwards: we underprepare. We pack our things and post tentative questions on a few 'expat' Barcelona facebook groups prior to departure and that's about it. That is basically the entire research and planning process that goes into most Anglo guiri moves here. Some of these guiris, especially from Europe, may do a little better, they are often multilingual with a solid level of Spanish and move on to dabble in Catalan. The Anglos on the other hand have never been confronted with needing to know another language and don't even manage to continue the logic of their planning to predict that they may need to learn some of the local tongue in advance. This world-is-our-oyster view is unique to this subset of guiris of which I am a part and it is a little repugnant. We worry less about job prospects because we feel if there are any, we should be entitled to them, we worry not about communication because who doesn't speak English? There's no prior feeling that integration might depend on us assimilating instead of the host country accommodating or tolerating us. Many may feel ownership of Spain because their Gramps has a time-share in Tenerife. Many haven't experienced othering in their lifetime. The privilege jumps out.

I fell into this trap, hard. I was saved by my straight-talking best friend, *Lluc, who happens to be Catalan and is a central reason I'm even here. My under-preparedness and overall nonchalance was not created by any malice and I was not actually even aware of it at all but my friend told me quite simply that it displayed a lack of respect and an entitlement that betrayed my ignorance and imperialistic tendencies. The diagnosis was correct and the alarm sounded in my ears. I was being dismissive and I hadn't even noticed.

One of the areas I'd neglected, among many, was underestimating working permissions. From what I'd heard, being born in the 90s as a Blair baby in a corner of a neoliberal, global village, as I now know it, borders were fragments of the past along with stamps in passports. How romantic! I knew the UK was part of the EU and 'free movement' was a central plank of the criticism espoused by the euro-sceptic brigade back home so I literally thought you turn up and presumed would have to fill out a form online and that would be it. Embarrassingly enough I sort of approached it as if I were going to live in a neighbouring city. That being said, it's not supposed to be *that* difficult.. enter the doomed marriage between aforementioned guiri under-preparedness and the Spanish state.

When I was in the UK I'd bristle at the pig headed Brits speaking with lofty disdain about those heaving bureaucracies in France, Spain and Italy. The relish with which they mocked these apparently outdated systems and people on the public sector payroll who had long been dead. I have always believed this to be lies, viciousness that masks the fact that these were kinder societies with strong public institutions, and that efficiency and profit are not the only virtues. I now realise, as with most stereotypes or generalisations, it's a bit of that, and some of the other.

I'm told that things have deteriorated further since I got my little green paper back in 2016. Nowadays getting the NIE requires turning over all your relevant paperwork and promising your first born to one of the gestores that book up all the appointments and then sell you one in a provincial office an hour from Barcelona for the pretty price of an average English teacher's weekly salary. Thank god the UK ended free movement with the EU because the system is currently too seamless and accessible. Thank goodness for capitalism finding cute novel ways to sell the access to our rights back to us.

When I was here, you could get an appointment online if you were ready and waiting at 07.59 am for a fresh release of Glastonbury tickets, oh wait I mean NIE appointments. Smashing refresh until they had all disappeared by 08.15. But I did secure my golden ticket and I had an appointment in Sant Marti for 3 weeks time and I just needed to make sure I was prepared. I had been lucky enough to secure a job pending my NIE so was eager to get it all done on the day. Apparently not possible, my broken Spanish coupled with the grumpiness of the clerk meant that for a reason not entirely clear to me I could not get my NIE. I needed to come back. I felt a little worried, I had arrived in Barcelona on Monday 4th January and had booked my NIE appointment by the Wednesday. The fact that the appointment wasn't until the end of January had already made me come over a little queasy, I hadn't been expecting these 'obstacles' and I needed to work. Lluç was certain I had screwed something up and was reluctant to baby me since our previous conversation made it clear I needed a little less entitlement and a little more struggle. So I 'corrected' my paperwork, booked another appointment again in 3 weeks time, in February, brought a pre-contract from my future employer along with me and nada. By now I was distraught; it had been 7 weeks that I'd been here and still no tax number and no ability to enter the job market when I already had a position. I started to curse the territory I had landed in, I felt rejected and helpless, if it was so damn hard to live here, if you don't want me, I'll go home. Hello little Miss Fragile. What was the passcode? What was the trick? Lluç, although convinced I had not done something right finally offered to step in, lending his native language and support as a local to my plight.

"We'll go tomorrow 10am." he announced. I looked at him stricken "But Lluç, we have to get an appointment and it's always in 3 weeks" I wailed back. He rubbished that and said we

would just go and talk to them. I had a terrible feeling. I mean I know back home or even here a few months ago I would have strode into any office and felt confident and welcome to ask for help or get matters sorted, but I had changed. There was a rule book I couldn't read, processes I didn't understand, an invisible hand moving the goalposts and I was outside looking in not knowing when I would be able to enter. I also felt that bad behaviour could preclude my residency and turning up at an office unannounced sounded like very bad behaviour to me.

That next morning we went down to Sant Marti. Lluç strode up to the first gatekeeper while I scuttled behind and cowered in shame next to him. I'm not entitled to be here I kept thinking, I don't have access! After he described our situation to the receptionist she waved us through. I was flabbergasted, I'd just got into what had seemed to me an impenetrable fortress. I must say that most others who attempted to gain access to the building without appointment were not permitted, although they also didn't have a Catalan chaperone, Upper DiagonalTM and all.

Our names were called to the clerk who decides whether we're in or out. I was sweating, I'd made sure to wear my glasses instead of contacts in order to soften my image and make sure I was geeky enough. Lluç started communicating gently, soft but firm, a little charm, a lot of understanding, and as she glanced disapprovingly at me he made sure to apologise on behalf of me; he too was disappointed in having to deal with this today he reassured her. I was a problem that they both needed to join forces to sort out. She made an attempt to decline my application again and Lluç raised the intensity. The language codes became more complex, the chess match entered a heightened state, if he accidentally stepped into patronising territory this would be game over. In the end she relented, we were instructed to pay the necessary 10e fee across the way at the police station and come back and collect the paper. I couldn't believe it. On the 6th March 2016 I was finally no longer at the mercy of the clerks at the extranjeros office, it had only taken the sponsorship and representation of a well connected local to get in.