

Race Across the Channel: Challenging Racism Denial in France and the UK

Dr Reza Zia-Ebrahimi (Department of History), Rokhaya Diallo and Grace Ly (Activists and Co-creators of Kiffe ta race), with contributions from Professor Nicola Rollock and filmmaker Rajesh Thind



Kiffe ta race !

“France and the United Kingdom hold a central place in the history of slavery, colonialism, and in the development of racial domination systems as we know them today. They are both postcolonial societies where coloniality and colonial power relations persist, which is what gives these countries their racial structure.”

Reza Zia Ebrahimi

LE DÉNI, FRENCH TOUCH DU RACISME ? #112

PROJECT SUMMARY

Race Across the Channel is a transnational collaboration that explores how political and media elites in France and the UK construct narratives that deny, invert, or demonise antiracist activism and scholarship. Led by Dr Reza Zia-Ebrahimi (King’s College London) in partnership with French activists and podcast hosts Rokhaya Diallo and Grace Ly, the project used public dialogue, podcasting and online media to bring academic and activist perspectives into productive conversation.

As co-hosts of the widely acclaimed *Kiffe ta race* podcast—France’s first podcast dedicated to race—Diallo and Ly brought their experience of resisting racism denial in the French context to King’s as part of an Activist-in-Residence scheme. Together, the team created three podcast episodes focused on the dynamics of racism denial, featuring high-profile guests including Professor Nicola Rollock (King’s) and director Rajesh Thind (Channel 4’s *Defiance*).

The project challenged common tropes—such as “racism is worse in the US” or “antiracism is divisive”—by placing UK and French contexts in dialogue. It also included social media training for Reza to amplify the digital impact of his work and laid the groundwork for a bilingual website featuring translated and transcribed versions of the podcasts.

HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

The collaboration emerged from informal contact between Dr Reza Zia-Ebrahimi and the team behind *Kiffe ta race*, Rokhaya Diallo and Grace Ly. Reza had long been interested in the similarities and differences between how race and racism are understood in France and the UK, and the opportunity to bring this comparison to life arose when the Activist-in-Residence scheme opened for applications.

At the heart of the project was a shared concern about how antiracist work is routinely discredited by political and media elites. Across both countries, activists and scholars face tactics of denial (“racism is not as bad as claimed”), inversion (“antiracists are the real racists”), and demonisation (“you are radical,” “you are separatists”). These patterns, while shaped by distinct national histories, often reinforce one another across borders.

Recognising the lack of meaningful comparative dialogue on this issue, the group came together to co-create a programme of podcast conversations and public engagement that could speak to audiences on both sides of the Channel.



Love your race

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Season 5, Ep. 112 • Thursday, May 30, 2024

#112 Denial, the French touch of racism?

"Denial is a discourse whose aim is the negation, trivialization or justification of racism, often accompanied by an accusation of radicalism, extremism or even separatism and an inversion of the burden of racism," according to Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, historian and guest of this episode recorded in London as part of the "Race across the Channel" project, developed in partnership with the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at King's College London.

Is the racism unfolding in France the same as in England? What are the similarities and disparities between our two post-colonial societies, which have played decisive roles in the history of global domination?

Rokhaya Diallo and Grace Ly explore this from both sides of the Channel, alongside Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, author of "Antisemitism & Islamophobia: A Crossed History."

WHAT HAPPENED?

The project centred on the production of three podcast episodes exploring the denial of racism and the discursive strategies used to discredit antiracist work. Each episode brought together different voices and perspectives. Guests included Professor Nicola Rollock, whose research and lived experience provided a vital bridge between academic insight and personal testimony, and filmmaker Rajesh Thind, whose Channel 4 documentary *Defiance* offered a creative lens on racial justice in Britain.

One episode featured Reza himself as the interviewee—a rare shift in roles that proved transformational. The discussion, rooted in personal experience rather than formal research, was downloaded over 21,000 times and viewed more than 4,500 times on YouTube. It quickly became the most successful episode in *Kiffe ta race's* history, drawing over 500 comments and 4,000 likes. Listeners responded not just to the content but to the vulnerability and honesty of the conversation, which gave voice to emotions and ideas that often remain unspoken in academic forums.

Alongside recording, the team initiated a programme of knowledge exchange. Grace Ly led a tailored social media and digital communication training session for Reza, helping him develop the skills needed to translate research into accessible, engaging content. Topics included video editing, framing online messaging, and growing a digital audience. This capacity-building element not only expanded the project's impact but also marked a turning point in Reza's approach to public engagement.

While the original aim was to record five podcasts, time pressures and funding constraints led the team to prioritise quality over quantity. Plans for a public event had to be shelved due to delays in internal budget approvals. Nevertheless, the team remained committed to accessibility and bilingualism: all podcast episodes are being translated and transcribed in both English and French, and a dedicated website is being developed to house the content and share reflections on the collaboration.



WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

Race Across the Channel had significant reach and personal resonance. By co-producing podcast episodes with high-profile guests and ensuring bilingual accessibility, the project successfully engaged a wide public audience across both France and the UK. The episode featuring Reza Zia-Ebrahimi became the most listened-to in *Kiffe ta race*'s five-year history, with over 25,000 combined streams and views and hundreds of audience comments highlighting its emotional depth and clarity.

The project also had a lasting impact on the participants themselves. For Reza, stepping into the role of interviewee enabled him to share emerging ideas shaped by personal experience—material not yet ready for academic publication but powerfully resonant with listeners. The overwhelmingly positive response showed that academic expertise, when shared openly and accessibly, can break through to new audiences and foster shared understanding.

A further legacy of the project lies in its capacity-building work. Through one-to-one training with Grace Ly, Reza developed new skills in podcasting, video editing and social media communication. This training was transformative, equipping him to amplify his research and increase its visibility online. As he noted, the experience reshaped how he understood the role of the scholar—lucy-ellen.bateman@kcl.ac.uk not just as an analyst, but as a public communicator and activist.

Finally, the collaboration deepened cross-border solidarity between activists and scholars working in different national contexts. It revealed both convergences and key divergences in how racism operates in France and the UK, and underscored the value of comparative, transnational approaches to antiracist work. These insights are already informing future plans for research, digital outputs and public-facing engagement.

THE TEAM'S TOP TIPS FOR IMPACT

1. Take social media seriously

If you want your research to reach beyond the academy, you need to meet people where they are—and that often means online. Invest time in learning how to communicate clearly and visually across digital platforms. It's not just about visibility, but about accessibility and relevance.

2. Build in flexibility and plan early

Balancing academic workloads with collaboration and production timelines can be tough. Plan ahead, agree on clear deliverables, and leave room for adaptation. Unexpected opportunities and constraints will emerge—having a flexible but well-structured plan helps you stay responsive.

3. Create space for personal voice

Sometimes, the most powerful impact comes from stepping outside the strict boundaries of research. Sharing lived experience, emotional truth or emerging reflections—even if they're not yet "publishable"—can connect with audiences in profound ways. Don't underestimate the value of vulnerability in public scholarship.

FURTHER READING

1. Rokhaya Diallo Official Website

Explore Rokhaya's full body of work, including articles, books, films, podcasts, and media appearances. This is an excellent central hub for accessing her multilingual publications and public commentary on race, gender, and justice in France and beyond: <https://www.rokhayadiallo.com/>

2. Kiffe ta race – Instagram

Follow the official Kiffe ta race account for episode updates, quotes, guest features, and conversations on race, identity, and activism in France. This platform extends the podcast's reach and impact through visual storytelling and community engagement: <https://www.instagram.com/kiffetarace/>

This project was funded by an AHRC Impact Acceleration Account hosted by the Faculty of Arts & Humanities at King's College London, and supported by the Faculty's Impact & Knowledge Exchange team

For further information:
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Or visit: www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/research/impact