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— SPECIAL ISSUE —

Brexit and Beyond: Transforming Mobility and Immobility

Majella Kilkey*, Aneta Piekut**, Louise Ryan***

This Guest Editorial introduces a special issue entitled Brexit and Beyond: Transforming Mobility and Immobility. The unfolding story of Brexit provided the backdrop to a series of events, organised in 2018 and 2019, which were the result of a collaboration between migration researchers in Warsaw and the UK, funded by the Noble Foundation's Programme on Modern Poland. The largest event – held in association with IMISCOE – was an international conference, arising from which we invited authors to contribute papers to this special issue on the implications of Brexit for the mobility and immobility of EU citizens, particularly – but not exclusively – from Central and Eastern Europe, living in the UK. As we outline in this Editorial, collectively, the papers comprising the special issue address three key themes: everyday implications and 'living with Brexit'; renegotiating the 'intentional unpredictability' status and settling down; and planning the future and the return to countries of origin. In addition, we include an interview with Professor Nira Yuval-Davis, based on the substance of her closing plenary at the conference – racialisation and bordering. Her insightful analysis remains salient to the current situation – in June 2020, as the UK enters the final months of the Brexit transition period – in the unexpected midst of a global pandemic and an imminent recession.

Keywords: Brexit, migration, mobility, bordering, EU

Introduction

Brexit is a notable political landmark in the UK's more generalised 'hostile environment', bringing far-reaching implications for the lives of over 3 million European Union (EU) citizens living there,¹ including for their experiences of mobility and immobility. Conceptualised variously as an 'unsettling event' (Kilkey and Ryan 2020) and as a 'wicked problem' (King 2020), it is unsurprising, then, that a vast amount of research has

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emerged focusing on Brexit's implications for the international economy and trade, political relations and societies at large. At the time of writing this Introduction (June 2020), according to a Google Scholar search for 'Brexit', 179 000 scholarly works (articles, books, working papers etc.) have been written – most of which were published in the last four years since the Brexit referendum on 23 June 2016.² One in every five of these outputs is related to the topic of migration (36 700 search results for: Brexit + 'migration OR immigration OR emigration').

This special issue addresses the question of the implications of Brexit for the UK's EU-citizen population, with a special focus, although not exclusively, on Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants. The process of making decisions about staying/leaving/returning is multi-layered and shaped by various personal circumstances, which are interwoven with local contexts and impacted on by the new migration-policy regime (Kilkey and Ryan 2020). As such, the collection of papers provides insights into the different aspects of Brexit's implications for the immobility/mobility axis – emotional responses, coping strategies in the context of uncertainty, everyday relations with neighbours and co-workers, everyday bordering, reflections on future life plans and possible return to the countries of origin.

Migration and transformations

International migration is inextricably linked to complex and varied processes of societal change (Castles 2010). Different, if not all, spheres of social life change in response to or as a result of people moving and living across national borders (Grabowska and Garapich 2016). Our initial interest in studying how migration transforms societies started with Poland. Although it was named as a 'country with no exit' until 1989 (Stola 2010), it could easily be named 'a country of emigrants' as, despite long periods when international mobility was restricted, Poland is among the 20 countries globally with the largest diaspora populations (approximately 4.4 million Polish citizens lived abroad in 2019, while 38 million resided in the country).³

This interest led us to developing a networking project entitled *Modern Poland: Migration and Transformations* (October 2017–September 2019),⁴ funded by the Noble Foundation under their Programme on Modern Poland scheme. Bringing together leading scholars from the University of Warsaw and the University of Sheffield, our project used the lens of migration to examine key dynamics in modern Polish society and the transnational field to explore the interconnections between Poland and Britain. The unfolding consequences of Brexit for Polish and other EU citizens formed an important backdrop to our programme of events.

Over the two-year life of the project, we undertook a range of activities, including a series of visiting lectures and master classes in both Sheffield and Warsaw, and a summer school on advanced research methods in migration – held in Warsaw in partnership with POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews and bringing together students from the UK and Poland over one week in September 2018. Additionally, in collaboration with IMISCOE, we organised a very successful conference in Sheffield in Spring 2019. Under the title *Transforming Mobility and Immobility: Brexit and Beyond*, the conference brought together leading scholars from Poland, the UK and elsewhere to present cutting-edge research on migration.⁵

The conference closing plenary was presented by **Professor Nira Yuval-Davis** and was based on her recent book, *Bordering* (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2019). The substance of the lecture is discussed in this special issue, in an interview with **Professor Louise Ryan** entitled *Talking about Bordering*, in which Yuval-Davis revisits her corpus of work over more than 40 years in order to explain the evolution of her thinking on racialisation and bordering. The interview helps to situate Brexit within the political and economic context which has been unfolding over several decades. Conducted in the summer of 2019, the interview captures the mood of that moment in British politics, as a minority Conservative government, led by the beleaguered Prime Minister, battled to get the Brexit deal through parliament. Of course, things have changed since then in several

significant ways but the insightful analysis of Nira Yuval-Davis remains salient to the current situation, in June 2020, as Britain battles a pandemic, an imminent economic recession and the transition period towards Brexit.

Arising from the conference we invited authors to contribute papers to this special issue on the implications of Brexit for the mobility and immobility of EU citizens living in the UK. We now introduce these papers and the themes which they raise.

Implications of Brexit on mobility and immobility

The migration-policy implications of Brexit and migrants' individual-level decisions to stay, leave, renegotiate their lives and plan for the future have increasingly been a focus of recent research (see, for example, Botterill, McCollum and Tyrell 2019; Duda-Mikulin 2019; Gawlewicz and Sotkasiira 2020; Guma and Jones 2019; Kilkey 2017; Lulle, King, Dvorakova and Szkudlarek 2019; McGhee, Moreh and Vlachantoni 2017; Ranta and Nancheva 2019). While, at first, debates on the implications of Brexit were dominated by the feeling of 'shock' and disruption brought into the lives of EU citizens, the expectation of a 'Brexodus' has not materialised (Kilkey and Ryan 2020). Below we discuss the contributions to this special issue, which relate to three broad topics: (1) everyday implications and 'living with Brexit'; (2) renegotiating the 'intentional unpredictability' status and settling down; and (3) planning the future and the return to countries of origin.

Living with Brexit

There is, by now, a large volume of literature documenting the emotional and affective impact of the Brexit referendum result and its aftermath on EU citizen-migrants in the UK. The implications for these latter's sense of belonging has been a dominant theme and forms the point of departure for the paper by **Rosa Mas Giralt**. Drawing from analysis of a large volume of testimonies of EU27 citizens in the UK published in a book and blog and Twitter accounts by the not-for-profit and non-political initiative *In Limbo Project*, Mas Giralt proposes the concept of *unbelonging* to capture how dynamics of social bonding and membership are disrupted and unravelled over time. The data point to two processes driving unbelonging in the context of Brexit – the acquisition of 'migrantness' and the non-recognition of contributions and efforts made to belong – which occur across private, legal and communal spheres.

The contribution by **Elena Genova and Elisabetta Zontini** demonstrates how the prolonged Brexit negotiations have created a *state of in-betweenness* for migrants from Italy and Bulgaria – who are living in prolonged uncertainty – and how they cope with it. The authors apply Van Gennep's ([1909] 1960) original concept of liminality, with later modifications by Turner (1967) and Thomassen (2014), as a lens through which to examine the reactions of Italian and Bulgarian citizens in the UK to the Brexit referendum and Britain's protracted exit from the EU. In so doing, the authors show how these migrants are experiencing a liminal state, as they navigate the transition between the old certainty of freedom of movement and the potentially uncertain future associated with a restrictive post-Brexit migrant social status. Moreover, the authors note that, while liminality entails a complex blend of uncertainty and ambiguity, it can also be potentially liberating, offering the possibility of reinvention.

Genova and Zontini find that those migrants who have been resident in the UK the longest feel the most betrayed by Brexit and who also, at the same time, have the most entanglements in British society – such as children in school – which may make it more difficult for them to move on elsewhere. These observations are echoed by the results of another paper in this special issue – written by **Barbara Jancewicz, Weronika Kloc-Nowak and Dominika Pszczółkowska**. Drawing on a survey with 472 Polish residents in the UK, they investigated whether Brexit could be the key push factor shaping Polish migrants' decisions to leave. Despite the fact that

some Polish migrants felt that they were well settled and had long-term plans to remain in the UK, almost 60 per cent – according to the survey – could no longer tell how long they would now stay. As Jancewicz *et al.* explain, Brexit had a *polarising effect* on migrants in the UK: some developed settlement plans (e.g. through applying for citizenship) while, for others, Brexit added ‘another layer of uncertainty’ to their previously vulnerable situation.

While the above-mentioned papers examined the reactions to Brexit among adult migrants, **Daniela Sime**, **Marta Moskal** and **Naomi Tyrrell** focus on how young people aged 12 to 18, who were born in Central and Eastern European EU countries but now live in the United Kingdom, are imagining their future in a Britain outside of the EU. The Brexit debates and the associated anti-immigrant hostility had a particular impact on this cohort of young people as it occurred during their formative adolescent years and has the potential to significantly undermine their sense of belonging in the UK. Starting with a similar question on the implications of Brexit for inter-ethnic relations, the paper by **Alina Rzepnikowska** turns the reader’s attention to the impact of Brexit on everyday social lives and to whether *conviviality* – a mode of living and interacting together in a multicultural society – could offer the possibility of building up resilience to everyday racism and anti-migrant discourses in the context of Brexit. In her research, she returned to some participants from her previous study (2012/2013) and interviewed them again in the aftermath to the EU referendum. Narratives from Rzepnikowska’s participants – all Polish women – demonstrate how conviviality cannot be considered without taking into account class and socio-economic positioning in the local communities. For some Polish women living in more deprived areas, Brexit resulted in the construction of more imaginary boundaries between the local British population and migrants, disrupting their sense of belonging. Conversely, other women’s narratives provided testimonials of increasing embeddedness in their local communities, which provide safe spaces in the context of Brexit in the form of ‘habitual interactions of care between neighbours’.

The end of liquid migration?

In the context of the economic crisis, rising anti-immigrant hostility and Brexit, papers by **Genova and Zontini** and by **Jancewicz *et al.*** challenge the applicability of earlier, perhaps more optimistic, concepts such as ‘Eurostars’ and ‘liquid migration’ to explain the current, complex and diverse experiences of EU migrants in the UK. While the notion of ‘intentional unpredictability’ dominated in migration studies on so-called migrants from A8 countries (EU Accession of 2004) in Britain, the results of the study by Jancewicz and her colleagues suggest that these frameworks may no longer be fully applicable. Migrants from CEE or any other EU country are no longer ‘new’ migrants from accession member-states – 16 years after Poland joined the EU, Poles who migrated to the UK have grown older, started families and developed careers and many ‘anchorage points’ (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018). In other words, the passage of time means that this is by now a very different population, with changed perspectives on their lives in the UK (Kilkey and Ryan 2020). Specifically, the narratives of participants in the study by **Rzepnikowska** illustrate the transition from more-fluid and originally often planned as temporary migrations to more-settled and locally rooted lives across the lifecourse of migrants in the UK.

The dominant construction of intra-EU migrants, particularly those from the new member-states, as ‘transmigrants’ or ‘liquid migrants’ has provoked much interest in how Brexit would impact on EU citizen-migrants’ migratory behaviour. Despite Brexit having been seen as an ‘unsettling event’ (Kilkey and Ryan 2020) or ‘rupture’ (Owen 2018), pushing many migrants to reconsider their mobility/immobility plans, studies in this special issue indicate that Brexit has not resulted in the mass re-migration of EU nationals. Integration, settling down and concurrent decision-making about staying or leaving are complex, interrelated processes which depend on a multiplicity of factors. As shown by **Jancewicz *et al.***’s study, Brexit was not mentioned as a main

factor dissuading Polish migrants from remaining in the UK; instead, respondents' labour market situation was key. Brexit was less a push factor for those with stable jobs and medium-level qualifications which were acquired and recognised in the UK. While most past research has focused on migrants' *intentions* in the wake of Brexit, the paper by **Luka Klimavičiūtė, Violetta Parutis, Dovilė Jonavičienė, Mateusz Karolak and Iga Wermińska-Wiśnicka** takes the discussion a step further by examining their actual decisions within the three years following the Brexit referendum. Focusing on young migrants (19–36 years) as the archetypal 'transmigrants', the authors undertook 76 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Lithuanians and Poles who decided to continue living in the UK, as well as those who, since June 2016, had decided to return to their countries of origin. The findings suggest that Brexit was not a major influence on decisions to return or remain. Among those who had decided to stay following the referendum, a mix of professional, family and emotional investment in the UK deterred them from leaving, particularly when uncertainty prevailed around what their future rights would be if they were to return again to the UK. Interestingly, this finding applied to both high- and low-skilled participants. Moreover, the transmigrants' dual frame of reference prevailed and, despite Brexit, life and opportunities in the UK – particularly for their own economic and professional security and success, as well as for that of their children – were evaluated as more positive than those available back home.

Challenging 'rational economic man' approaches to understanding migrants' decision-making, **Mas Giral** highlights how the experience of unbelonging influences views on remaining, returning or re-migrating. Echoing the findings of other studies – including that of **Rzepnikowska** in this issue – she points to the need to acknowledge the heterogeneity of EU citizen-migrants, including when it comes to understanding responses to Brexit, with factors such as socio-economic positioning, age and lifecycle stage being important mediators of migrants' plans and their capacity to realise them. Indeed, Brexit responses are not uniform; the settlement/temporarily axis is further complicated by later waves of migration to the UK from Southern Europe which took place following the 2008 economic crisis. **Genova and Zontini's** paper, based on rich qualitative interviews with Bulgarians as 'new' and Italians as 'old' European migrants, points to the inadequacy of these rather simple categories to explain the range of migratory experiences. For example, while several of their Italian participants were long-term residents in Britain, others were recently arrived so-called 'crisis migrants'. As the authors show, these diverse migratory experiences were associated with quite different reactions to Brexit, highlighting the salience of temporality in migration research.

Brexit and beyond – the return?

The final event in our Noble Programme-funded project was a panel which we organised at the Polish Sociological Association Conference in Wrocław in September 2019 entitled: *Migration within, to and from Central and Eastern Europe in the Shadow of Brexit*. Invited scholars and stakeholders⁶ considered what future lies 'in the shadow' of Brexit for migrants in various European countries. Some research included in this special issue also explores the future plans of EU migrants and the possibility of return migration to their countries of origin. Based on data derived from an online survey with over 1 000 respondents as well as from focus groups and family case studies, **Sime et al.** aimed to understand how Brexit impacts on the future imaginaries of young migrants. They argue that the Brexit process can be regarded as disruptive to their future imaginaries and can thus impact on their identity development and leave them uncertain about the direction and location of their lives in the years ahead.

The question of return is especially difficult for migrants who were brought up in the UK. Although many of the young people in **Sime et al.'s** study felt settled in the UK, anti-immigrant sentiment and experiences of xenophobic bullying could also undermine their sense of being accepted or welcomed. Moreover, the young participants had quite complex relationships to their parents' countries of origin. Despite frequent visits, many

felt it would be difficult to settle (or settle back) into life in their country of origin. However, as with **Genova and Zontini**, temporality was also a factor. Those who had migrated more recently or at an older age were the most likely to imagine returning to live in the country of origin. Overall, across the sample, the authors found the participants' imagined futures rarely involved return to the country of birth but often featured ideas of moving on to other destinations.

Likewise, in the study by **Klimavičiūtė et al.**, for those who had decided to return following the referendum, Brexit was more of a trigger rather than the over-riding factor. The authors conceive the returnees as mainly temporary migrants who had fulfilled their migration projects and were ready to return home. Brexit simply provided the stimulus to enact a long-standing plan to return, which was often framed around a desire to raise children in the home country. As with those who had remained, however, return was rarely seen as definitive and most returnees kept open the possibility of further migration in the future. This approach of 'keeping options open' is highlighted by **Klimavičiūtė and her colleagues** as a defining feature of the 'transmigration' or 'liquid migration' which they conceive as characterising post-2004 intra-EU migrants' attitudes. As the authors acknowledge, however, this may be more specifically a characteristic of *young* post-2004 intra-EU migrants.

Conclusion

While, collectively, the papers in this special issue focus on the implications of Brexit for migrants' mobility and immobility, **Mas Giralt's** research also considers the broader social consequences. In her paper, she develops an understanding of the consequences of unbelonging, beyond the migrants' themselves, by drawing on Askin's (2016) notion of 'emotional citizenry' – the 'intersubjective relationships of security, solidarity and reciprocity' which extend beyond the formal rights associated with EU citizenship. A highly cautionary note offered by **Mas Giralt** – and one with which it seems fitting to conclude – is that the erosion of 'emotional citizenry' caused by the processes driving unbelonging will have fundamental implications for wider community relations between 'majority' and 'minority' members, relations which cannot be ameliorated by formal citizenship rights alone. As King (2020: 12) observes 'true to the essence of Brexit as a wicked problem (...) [M]any pressing problems are on the table to be resolved and lasting legacies will endure for decades, if not longer'.

Notes

¹ Brexit also has implications for an estimated 1.22 million UK citizens who live in another EU country (Sturge 2016).

² Not all work is indexed with a publication year. Of those which are, 90 per cent were published in 2016 and later.

³ See: <https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatesgraphs.asp?3g3> (accessed: 6 July 2020).

⁴ The PI was Professor Louise Ryan, then at the University of Sheffield; other members of the Sheffield team were Professor Majella Kilkey, Dr Aneta Piekut, Dr Laura Foley and PhD student Indra Mangule. The Polish team included Professor Paweł Kaczmarczyk, Dr Michał Garapich, Dr Weronika Kloc-Nowak and Dr Anita Brzozowska, Centre for Migration Research, University of Warsaw, and Professor Izabela Grabowska, SWPS University, Warsaw.


⁵ Ten Polish colleagues were able to attend this event due to the generous financial support of the Noble Foundation. Thanks to funding from IMISCOE, we expanded the programme to a two-day international conference.


⁶ The session was chaired by Professor Paweł Kaczmarczyk, Director of the Centre for Migration Research, University of Warsaw. The panel speakers were: Olga Chrebor, Mayor of Wrocław's plenipotentiary for Residents of Ukrainian Descent; Professor Krzysztof Jaskułowski, SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities; Maciej Mandelt, an activist at the NOMADA Association; Professor Majella Kilkey, University of Sheffield; and Professor Louise Ryan, then at the University of Sheffield.


Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Talking about Bordering

Prof. Nira Yuval-Davis* interviewed by Prof. Louise Ryan**
15 July 2019

*In the summer of 2019 as the UK was in the midst of heated Brexit debates and Theresa May's minority government clung on to power, Professor Louise Ryan interviewed Professor Nira Yuval-Davis about her recent book *Bordering* (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2019). Although things have changed in some significant ways since that interview, for example Boris Johnson has now replaced Theresa May as Prime Minister, and won a landslide election victory in December, 2019, and the controversial Brexit Bill was passed by the British Parliament, many of the issues about borders and bordering remain extremely relevant today. The current pandemic has not only revealed Britain's dependence on migrant workers, especially in health and social care, but also exposed health inequalities among migrants and ethnic minorities. As the post-Brexit immigration landscape begins to emerge, the analysis of Nira Yuval Davis remains as pertinent as ever.*

Louise Ryan (LR): Perhaps we can start this interview by talking about the situation that Britain is in now – in the summer of 2019 – and about who could have predicted that we would end up in the kind of mess we are in? In terms of what is going on at the moment – particularly in relation to immigration and to the whole multicultural project, the social cohesion project – what do you think are the key challenges facing us today, in twenty-first-century Britain?

Nira Yuval-Davis (NYD): I think before we talk about challenges, we have to understand the root causes of this mess that we're in, which I have been calling in my writing 'the double crisis of global neoliberalism of governability and governmentality'. I started to write about it in 2012, because it started to become very explicit after the crisis of 2008, where the bankers got away with causing the crisis and all austerity projects started, among other reasons, to pay for a bail-out of the bankers. It became very clear that, with global neo-liberalisation, governments could no longer represent the interests of their citizens, because they have to work to accommodate the interests of the multinationals and corporations, both in order to attract them to stay

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in the country as employers and also because the whole differentiation between public and private spheres has become completely entangled.

This is why the banks were bailed out, in order for the general economy not to collapse. It meant that the government could no longer represent the interests of its citizens. There was also a shift in that, with the privatisation of the welfare state, Parliament had less space for decision-making, while the government executives had to work more autonomously with all this transnational and supranational – also the EU, not just the private sphere. So also around Brexit, the whole fight between the Parliament and the government is very much an illustrative example of some of these resulting tensions.

The crisis of governmentality followed when citizens understood that governments do not represent their interests, whatever political party they are. What happened in Greece is a very extreme example. Even if they very much wanted to represent the interests of the citizens, there are so many constraints that they could not overcome. Therefore, people started to believe that it doesn't matter what they vote and so they developed hostility to what they call 'the political class'. Of course, the lives of people have become much more precarious with the austerity programme, so what we see is a bottom-up response, the rise of nativist kinds of extreme-right movements, either secular or religious, all over the world, in the Global South as well as the North. It actually started in the Global South with the so-called structural adjustment programmes which opened up the post-colonial states to be 'devoured' by neo-liberal corporations in the name of globalisation but then of course it was the turn of the northern states. So the rise of nativist authoritarian movements has been a kind of a bottom-up response.

What I call 'everyday bordering', which replaced multiculturalism as the main technology for controlling diversity and discourses on diversity in society, has come as a top-down response, both to the crisis of governmentability and to the crisis of governmentality. It aims to show that: 'Yes, maybe we are not in control, we cannot represent your interests but we will try and keep you safe' and, in response to nativist sentiments, that: 'We will make sure that all (the very shrinking pool of) public resources that exist will be distributed only among those who "belong"'.

The whole nativist project is about this differentiation between belonging and not belonging rather than ethnic origin. This is why, in the new extreme-right movements, you have ethnic variety and it is very much a form of an assimilatory project.

Therefore, what has happened as a result of all this is a transformation of the notion of citizenship. There is a new kind of citizenship duty, which is to become unpaid and untrained border guards and to check if everybody around you and definitely your tenants, your students, your employees, your clients, your patients, are entitled to share in these kinds of public resources (or private resources, even, in the case of tenants).¹ And so, at the same time, everybody, especially the racialised minorities as well as the migrants, becomes suspected illegal or at least illegitimate border-crossers, but all of us have also become these border guards in that, if we fail in this new citizenship duty, we can be criminalised and end up in jail.

Ironically, if the trained and paid border guards do not identify the illegal border-crossers, they do not end up in jail; however, landlords who fail to identify the forged passports of their tenants can, according to the latest Immigration Act, end up in jail. This is also very divisive. We saw in Brexit how much, among the racialised minorities, the settled people who have citizen status and those who have not, have been so much at loggerheads. But it affects even more intimate relationships, such as when you have raids by immigration officers, for example. In the case of restaurants of specific racialised minorities (and very often it is a result of biased immigration legislation which disallows the bringing over of trained chefs of specific ethnic cuisines), the cook can be an irregular migrant who is also the father-in-law of the owner of the restaurant. So everyday

bordering divides families as well as dividing communities and society as a whole. The project of social cohesion – which always was in some way faulty because it assumed that only the migrants should adjust to the wider community rather than viewing it as a mutual process – is now becoming virtually impossible.

LR: So, there is a lot to pick up on there, Nira. But one of the things you mentioned, there, was about the whole austerity agenda. As you know, there are economists who have said right from the beginning that austerity was unnecessary and that it was a politically motivated agenda. In fact, back in 2008, before the Conservatives came to power in Britain, some members of that party, such as George Osborne, already identified austerity as a strategy to cut public spending. To what extent would you agree with that critique?

NYD: I would agree 100 per cent. I attended, last weekend, a Labour Party social forum and it was amazingly good. There were several economists, including Varoufakis, who analysed exactly what you have just said and we know that, if people do not earn money, they cannot buy products so, in many ways, austerity is a self-defeating project if the aim is to improve people's economic situation in the long run – and I'm not even mentioning here the neglect and decay of all the public infrastructure and services under the austerity policies. There is collusion between the Tory project and those people whose interest is to exert control. People joke that Donald Trump was elected in the United States because the corporate owners and managers got fed up with relying on mediators like George Osborne and David Cameron and went directly to be in government but that also has its own problems.

It is quite clear that one should not expect anything else, any kind of political project, of any party which represents, at least in bold terms, the underlying ideology of the Tories, which has always colluded with global neoliberalism. Of course New Labour also did that but the Tories supported it for the interests of a particular elite.

LR: So, to what extent do you make a connection between the whole austerity agenda and the results of the Brexit referendum in 2016?

NYD: Well, the austerity agenda only exacerbated the overall feeling of the precarity of more and more members of post-industrial society because, of course, austerity was not the point of departure. The point of departure really relates to much larger processes, not only of the neo-liberalisation of the market but also of the 'microchip revolution' and, as in any kind of revolution, a lot of people found themselves dislocated. So, Ulrich Beck talked about the risk society but, of course, austerity just exacerbated it because, before that, the Thatcherite project had promised a new form of security with a letting go of the old forms of security.

In the 1980s, I remember hearing discussions in various places – like in the hair salon – in which women were saying: 'We can now buy shares of companies, we can now own the energy companies, we can now buy our council house'. So, people felt these new forms of security. But with austerity, even these compensatory mechanisms have been taken away and, of course, people felt adrift and it's very easy to look for a scapegoat; that has been the role of the migrant. But if we do not know what we are going to do, whether we are going to have enough to eat and where we are going to live, if we cannot stay with our family or even establish a family, what is going to happen, and so on, what can we hold onto? In this situation, primordial identities can take on a new salience, be they religious or secular. Because these are something that nobody can take away from you.

So, in precarious times, identity can become more important to people. It can provide a sense of stability in uncertain times. So this is why, after intensive market research, the Brexiteers came up with this slogan: 'We will take back control'. This was a very conscious and very effective means of constructing the Brexit project. Of course, what we see now is the opposite, but people are still very much captivated by this kind of nostalgia for the Empire, nostalgia for the days in which they felt secure and they feel that they would regain it if there

would just be ‘us’ around. Even though the notion of ‘us’ has always been contested, there is this promise that things will be OK and somebody like Boris Johnson is very good at playing to this audience.

LR: It is interesting and contradictory, the role of George Osborne in all of this, because he was the architect of the austerity agenda as Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer and yet he is completely anti-Brexit and, through his new job as the editor of *The Evening Standard* newspaper, he is absolutely using every opportunity to oppose Brexit. It’s like he had this austerity agenda but completely failed to understand how it would boom-erang back on him with the result of the Brexit referendum.

NYD: The thing is, the EU itself is a bit of a contradictory project because, on the one hand, it is a project of global neo-liberalisation – which Osborne is very much a part of – but, at the same time, the EU has also been the forum where there has been some kind of recognition of workers’ rights and civil rights and the whole notion of human rights (which the government now want to abolish in the UK). Yesterday, in the Labour Party social forum, somebody described what is happening now, as the Tories bleat about Brexit, as not a choice between ‘deal’ or ‘no deal’ but a deal with the EU or a deal with Trump’s USA and all the deregulations and removal of protective rights that this would involve.

The whole idea behind Brexit was to undermine workers’ rights so that Britain would be very attractive as a kind of sweat shop, without workers’ rights, and for investments with high technology and so on. This is very difficult for people to grasp, but I think this is what is happening – it’s a kind of split within the neoliberal class as well as, of course, the rest of us who are opposing neo-liberalism.

LR: It’s interesting, because it shows that, even amongst that right-wing Tory cluster, they’re not even in agreement themselves as to what they actually want. Hence, all this political in-fighting is going on. The Tory Party seems to be at war with itself.

NYD: Yes, within capitalism there are competing agendas and competing projects. Of course, Osborne, on a personal level, was ousted from power after the referendum but, unlike David Cameron, Osborne was given this tool, editor of a newspaper, which has enabled him to vent revenge on all those who beat him up. So we also need to understand Brexit as a result of internal rivalry within the Tory Party. Now Boris Johnson... did you see how in the first days of his selection² he adopted some Churchillian body gestures – the way he held his head, hands behind his back and so on. Apparently, we need somebody who is like Churchill because ‘It’s a national crisis’. But many of us would argue that ‘This is not a war, this is self-inflicted harm’.

LR: Indeed. It is again the whole nostalgia thing and Boris Johnson is very much playing into that by evoking images of past greatness.

NYD: But at the same time, very cleverly, he also said ‘Hey, my great-grandmother was Turkish, I am not associated with the racism’. But he can also play the posh, Etonian private-school boy. He can play ‘I was mayor of London’, so this is why he can create this kind of, at least temporary, wide appeal.

LR: Until he actually has to deliver something and then it all begins to fall apart. God, it’s so depressing. So we think Boris is a shoe-in, do we? He’s definitely going to win this leadership race.³

NYD: As well as Brexit itself, we also have to think about the other, related, immigration issues. Who could ever have imagined that the Windrush⁴ scandal would occur? I was, in the 1980s, part of a group called WING

– the Women, Immigration and Nationality Group. With the new Nationality Act of 1981, we campaigned for people to register here as British because otherwise, if they come from a particular Caribbean and other post-colonial places, which do not approve of double citizenship, they would automatically become citizens of these countries and lose their British-subject status.

We said, ‘If you don’t do it, if you go to visit your family or whatever for a few months you might not be allowed back into Britain’. But we couldn’t imagine that their livelihoods would be taken away, that they would not be given NHS treatment, being sometimes detained and even deported. We can never really imagine beyond particular twists of what we know. We need a lever in order to see things completely differently.

LR: Yes. It’s interesting because, at the moment, my colleagues and I at the University of Sheffield are doing this research project on ageing⁵ and one of the groups we include are older African Caribbean migrants and these are people in their 80s and 90s. In fact, tomorrow I’m doing a walking interview with somebody from that age group. From what our participants have told us, it seems almost random – those who found out that they needed to change their passports in the 1980s to secure their status in this country and those who did not hear that information.

So some of them said ‘Some people came to our church and the pastor gave them the pulpit and they said to us, “You must change your immigration status, this is happening”’. The people we interviewed, so far, had all changed their passports, but they recognised that it was often just a matter of luck, a moment in time, that somebody came to speak to them and said, ‘You must do this’, and if you missed out on those kinds of informal information channels, well that was unlucky. Some people did just fall through the cracks in that information process. Of course, that happened in the 1980s, long before social media and the internet. So, information was often word-of-mouth.

I’ve heard it said by some people that, if this Windrush scandal had happened the year before the Brexit referendum, probably a significant proportion of people would have voted against Brexit, because they would have realised that this is what can happen, even to those who take their immigration status for granted.

NYD: That is comforting to think about [laughing]. Maybe fewer Black people would have voted for Brexit, but I don’t necessarily think that fewer white people would.

LR: No, but maybe that would have been enough to swing the referendum results in certain areas but anyway, these are the benefits of hindsight...

Maybe we can switch now and talk more specifically about your book – *Bordering* (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2019). In the book you talk about the ways in which everyday bordering is coming to play such a central role. How do you think that has changed from previous eras? Because I can remember in the 1990s, when I was working as a student in London, there were quite often Home Office raids, especially of restaurants and bars and places like that, to check the passports of staff. Now it’s changed in its magnitude, so what do you think is different about this everyday bordering now?

NYD: It’s interesting to think about the nature of that change. I’ve just been part of a wonderful group associated with the British Academy of Social Science, working on a report about the contribution of British social sciences to the understanding of issues such as racism and migration. We decided to focus it on the ‘hostile environment’.⁶ The main kind of thesis that we all shared of the hostile environment is that it’s not new. As we just talked about the Windrush – I mean it started much earlier and the first guy who brought the Windrush in was the MP Enoch Powell, who then later delivered the infamous Rivers of Blood speech.⁷ However, while this is not new, some things have changed.

I think one of the major changes has been in the construction of nationality and immigration law. The 1981 Act has been crucial here because of the shift from post-Imperial and the Commonwealth, although even then there was a process in which the right of people from the ex-Empire to come and settle and get full citizenship rights has been gradually eroded.

Then we have the shift towards Europe. So, suddenly Britain becomes a 'normal' nation state because, prior to that, there were all these different categories of people from the Commonwealth with different kinds of status, including overseas British citizenship – this very paradoxical citizenship that did not even give you the right to come to Britain, except in the case of the Falklands. After the Falklands war⁸ of course, the residents were granted real British citizenship just so that it would not look too ludicrous, defending the Falklands as part of the British state while its inhabitants were not allowed free movement in it.

Then we see that Britain became an ambivalent part of Fortress Europe, so there is still a border with continental Europe but also free movement to and from Europe for British and other European citizens. Then, of course as Balibar (2009) had predicted, with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Bloc, there is confusion about what are the boundaries of 'Europe'. Prior to that time, following WWII and the Cold War, the borders of Europe seemed to be naturalised around the boundaries of Western Europe and NATO. Also, in terms of hegemonic imaginaries, 'Europe' was constructed as encompassing Protestant and Catholic Christianity – with the exception of Greece, which was Orthodox but as it was the cradle of Western civilisation, so Greece was the exception that proves the rule.

Then we see the expansion of the project of Europe and you see there that the Catholic and Protestant Central and Eastern European countries have become absorbed into the European project in a way that leaves orthodox Christians very much lagging behind. Nonetheless, so-called 'Europe' is very secular and, of course, the whole notion of Turkey not being allowed to join the EU is of great significance here as well.

But we see then that the racialisation has moved and diversified, not only from those who came from what was known as NCWP (New Commonwealth Countries and Pakistan) and who, before 1981, at least had certain rights of settlement in the UK but from people outside the original British Empire – whether from Eastern Europe or parts of the Middle East, which has been under British mandate but not under British Rule but also could have been from another part of the Ottoman Empire. This was one kind of major shift.

The other shift in the post-cold-war era related to the whole notion of refugees in the Geneva Convention which, after WWII, was very much built around the image of refugees from the Soviet Bloc. Then, suddenly, both in terms of numbers as well as origins and causes for escape, the whole nature of asylum-seekers started to change. So although a 'hostile environment' has been there from the beginning, its nature changes, as does the discourse. Probably the first hegemonic engagement of mainstream politics with this new kind of racialisation took place in the elections campaign of the Tories, headed by Michael Howard,⁹ and the big advertising boards calling people to secretly collude and admit that they share this fear of migrants. The slogan was: 'Are you thinking what I'm thinking?' Then Howard failed to win an election because he was thought to be too racist. But years later, we hear Theresa May, as Home Secretary, actually explicitly using the term 'hostile environment'. This is already part of the response to the double crisis of governability and governmentality that I mentioned at the beginning of this interview. Then we have the 2014 Immigration Act and the 2016 Immigration Act; multiculturalist policies that started to be transformed already towards the end of the reign of New Labour¹⁰ become submerged in the technology of everyday bordering.

In the research project I was working on, we made a film entitled *Everyday Borders* which you can download from the website (<https://vimeo.com/126315982>). We toured the country with the film, together with the various migrants and human rights organisations which campaign on this issue. In the meeting organised at the House of Commons, one of the speakers, an Independent Baronesses in the House of Lords, said in the discussion that she has never encountered such a cruel law as the 2016 Immigration Act. Of course, the major

difference between the 2016 and 2014 Acts, is that the latter criminalised the unprofessional, unpaid and untrained citizen border guards and extended this to all the areas of society which those who ‘do not belong’ should not be part of.

Both Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump and others say very explicitly that left and right are not relevant any more – the major condition is between globalism and patriotism. So, Theresa May’s hostile environment was around this project of patriotism – which, of course, then gave naturalisation and valorisation of the Brexit discourse. This is what actually happened.

LR: But it’s that contradiction again, isn’t it? It is about patriotism, it’s about these slogans of ‘taking back control’, ‘making Britain great again’, but all of that is predicated upon these deals with America or these deals with China. It’s completely contradictory at its core.

NYD: Or deals with Europe.

LR: Yes.

NYD: People think that they are out of control if Britain is part of a European customs union and this kind of thing but, being outside a customs union and having to negotiate, for years, a deal with major exporters and importers, gives Britain much less control than before. This is not about logic.

LR: The Chancellor, Philip Hammond, was saying yesterday or the day before that, if Britain leaves without a deal, it will actually give more control to France because all of those checks at Calais, about what is imported, how slow it will be, imports and exports would be held up with all these checks. So, under a ‘no deal’ one would actually give more control to France, rather than ‘taking back control’ over Britain’s ability to trade freely.

NYD: This is just one example. Another example is the whole project of the ‘UK’. Is that going to be undermined in terms of Northern Ireland, in terms of Scotland? Although the whole Brexit logic is about ‘taking back control’, within the European project the whole de-territorialisation of borders, at least within the EU, was a possible project, given the use of technology. But now, within the nationalist discourse of Brexit, you have the re-territorialisation of borders. So, I mean, talk about contradictions! Yes.

LR: The whole Northern Ireland issue is fascinating. It didn’t really feature in the debates around Brexit in the lead-up to the referendum, but actually it was a crucial argument that the Remainers could have made, if they had galvanised around the Northern Ireland border issue and the importance of the peace process. The fact that most of the political leaders were English and they didn’t even think about Northern Ireland it quite revealing. It was a huge missed opportunity in terms of the referendum campaign, quite apart from the moral argument about the peace process.

NYD: You know, very shortly after the referendum, I was invited to speak both in Dublin, at the Academy there, and in Belfast about this subject and the people in Dublin were much more worried than the people in Belfast. People in Belfast then still didn’t understand the implications of Brexit while, in Dublin, because Britain is between them and the rest of Europe, they were very worried about it.

LR: People in Ireland are obsessed with Brexit. When you go to Ireland there is more on the news about Brexit there than here in Britain, which is hard to imagine, since it's almost wall-to-wall coverage here all the time. But in Ireland people are really worried. It's interesting in terms of the Northern Irish border because, at the moment, it is literally an invisible border and it threatens to become what it used to be in the past. I remember the first time, because I grew up in the South of Ireland, the first time I went to the North it really felt like going to another country. We went on a school trip and it was like, 'Oh my God, we are going to this strange place called Northern Ireland', which was scary and there were soldiers and tanks and I remember seeing soldiers walking down the street with guns. I had never seen soldiers with guns before, on the street among the shoppers.

NYD: I was very struck by that as well, when I first visited Belfast. Because when I went into the Palestinian occupied territories, where there are guns, there are no shoppers, there were soldiers and it was kind of mutually exclusive. But in Northern Ireland it was altogether different. I recently read this amazing book called *Milkman* (Burns 2018). It got the Booker Prize 2018. The best book about Northern Ireland which describes this reality, but it's a great book in many other ways as well and I really recommend it.

LR: OK, *Milkman*. I must look out for that. Maintaining this invisible, frictionless border on the island of Ireland is vital to the continued peace process and the success of the Good Friday Agreement.¹¹ With all the many criticisms of Tony Blair, all the justifiable criticisms of Tony Blair, the Good Friday Agreement was one of his main successes and all of that is threatened to be undermined now because of Brexit.

NYD: I used to know Mo Mowlam.¹²

LR: Yes. She was wonderful.

NYD: She was wonderful. I met her first because, as an MP, she made contact with feminist academics and invited us to various meetings. I remember that, after the first time she tried to help political prisoners in Northern Ireland and got a lot of attacks from the popular press, I emailed her to congratulate her and she wrote back to me that 'Whatever they say, however they respond, I am so determined, I will keep on doing it'. She has been more or less kind of...

LR: ...forgotten. Yes, that's true. There was a whole team of them leading on the peace process but Mo was really wonderful.

NYD: Then she was removed from her job because she was too radical.

LR: But then she became very ill didn't she? And she died young, unfortunately.

NYD: I wonder how much the stress and the humiliation of being removed, after doing all this amazing work, affected her. She was one of those heroines who should not be forgotten.

LR: That is true, absolutely. But let's go back to talk more about your book *Bordering*.

NYD: A very important part of the book, in addition to the discussion and illustration of everyday borderings, is what we call 'grey zones' and 'limbo spaces', in which more and more people around the world – before,

during and after they cross borders – find themselves for life. This permanent paralysis and being deprived of human rights. As Zygmunt Bauman called them, ‘human waste’ because the world is apparently ‘sociologically full’. Saskia Sassen talked about ‘expulsions’ of all these unwanted people. In the book, we were looking at the whole debate about how people are not accorded any kind of humanity; therefore, the fact that they die in their thousands, either in the Mediterranean Sea or in the desert, does not count because they don’t ‘belong’ anywhere or they have been rejected from the places where they do belong. Giorgio Agamben called them ‘bare lives’.

But we should not collude with this construction of these people only in terms of their construction by others. We should continue to see them as agents with their own attachments, belongings and identities, with their own decision-making faculties, however constrained and Kafkaesque the reality in which they live. The work we did in ‘the Jungle’¹³ in Calais, very clearly showed how much agency, activity, initiative and imagination as well as attachments the people staying there had. Of course, even for those who eventually make it into Britain, their problems are not over yet. ... I volunteered in Hackney Migrant Centre as a cook and my fellow cook there waited 27 years in order to have settled migrant status! That shows you that the ‘hostile environment’ did not start recently but over 27 years ago.

And of course you have all these people having to queue at the Home Office and never knowing if, at the end of the queue, they are going to be told to come again or if they’re going to be detained or ... be taken into custody and immediately deported. So they are deprived of a human right, which nobody talks about, but I think it’s absolutely basic – that is, the right to be able to plan a future. ‘The Jungle’ in Calais was destroyed and the people were not allowed to live there. Now, in Italy, it is a criminal offence to try and help to pick up drowning people, the basic human right to life.

In the book we also talked about Dover as a post-border town, as a ‘grey zone’. Now we also want to expand our work to look at the North West of England and the post-industrial towns because there is a continuum between the ‘limbo spaces’ and the ‘grey zones’ in which those people live who are actually not allowed anything – because they have no citizenship rights – and the people who might have citizenship rights but do not have any resources to apply for them.

While we are seeing the current crisis in terms of those who belong and those who do not, what is happening to those who do not belong can become completely invisible, so this is also a very important part of our book. We talk about the border as a ‘firewall’. By that we mean something which is neither entirely open nor closed but which allows easy passage to some while blocking many others.

LR: So, in the book you use the concept of ‘situated intersectionality’ to interpret what is going on. Can you say a bit more about how you use that concept?

NYD: This is the methodology that we use. I have been developing this methodology for a long time, very much following the epistemological approach of Patricia Hill Collins. Unlike others who say ‘There is no truth’ – a kind of relativism – Hill Collins says that we can only approach the truth if we encompass as many differently positioned views, situated gazes, as possible. There is this metaphor of the elephant and the blind people. The blind people were asked to describe what is an elephant. One touched its tail, one the ear, one the trunk etc. They all described what an elephant is very differently. They were not wrong but they had access only to a partial truth. Like we all always do.

So, in the book we applied the situated intersectionality methodology, using different ‘bordering scapes’ as case studies. We encompassed the different situated gazes which produced different understandings of what bordering and borders are. Even when we interviewed border guards, the official immigration border guards, of course they are not homogenous, they have intersectional identities. For example, the women border guards

we interviewed mocked the male border guards who thought up these ‘go home’ vans.¹⁴ The women saw these very much as empty macho gesturing. The women guards showed us the small visiting cards which they use when they go to different places, supposedly to build community relations but then to see if somebody is frightened and runs away when they arrive and they give this intelligence to their colleagues, who raid the business afterwards. They say this is so much more effective. So you have the situated gendering there. But all of them saw the law as a dichotomy – everything is either legal or illegal. All the immigration officials we talked to enjoyed living in London and its multiculturalism and saw themselves as not racist. But they said ‘The law is the law’. From the situated gaze of the restaurant owner, for example, who they raid, the situation is much more complex. They often raid at the height of business hours, like Friday night, so the border guards think they’re doing their role, they are enforcing the law. But of course, the restaurant owners see these raids as acts of malicious vandalism, causing the business to be destroyed after it had been built up for years and years, as who wants to dine in a restaurant which is subject to a massive police raid?

So, in order to understand it, you need to look at both sides. And more than that, one of the reasons why there are so many irregular workers in Bangladeshi restaurants, for example, is because the law gives special visas to demanded jobs, including chefs – but ethnic chefs are considered to be just ‘fast food’. They don’t earn enough, they’re not allowed into the country, so therefore, as a result of immigration policies, there are not enough chefs in successful Bangladeshi businesses. Thus, if the latter don’t want to close down, they rely very often on relatives or others who do know the cuisine. So, yes, this is the law but, as social scientists, we know that law is a human creation and reflective of particular political and ideological projects. So this is an example of why the situated intersectional methodology was so important in order to understand what happened. If we had interviewed just the border guards or if we had interviewed just the irregular migrants, we wouldn’t understand the whole picture, like the blind people and the elephant.

LR: On that point, it is clear that this book has really grown out of your body of work over many decades. I remember, as a student, reading *Racialised Boundaries* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992), which you co-wrote with Floya Anthias. How do you see your work having evolved over the last 25 years or so?

NYD: Well, it evolved in a very organic way, I think. It very much started when I looked at the gendering and racialisation of national projects. I started thinking about the Zionist Project, looking especially at the roles of women as national reproducers and in the military, because I grew up in Israel, so this was one trajectory. I therefore extended it to examine other nationalist projects and other settler societies. But the other trajectory was discovering the wonderful news that Floya Anthias, who was a friend, was a colleague with me in Greenwich University and we were both members of a Sex and Class socialist feminist group. Both of us were interested in also examining race and ethnicity, not just sex and class. But we were met then with yawns and ‘Yes, it’s interesting but that’s not what’s important’. Productive anger can be quite important, so both of us decided to start working together and that’s how our work on the project of *Racialised Boundaries* started.

Our article together in *Feminist Review* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983) was the first time we developed our intersectional approach. In *Racialised Boundaries*, beyond further developing this theme, we also looked in more detailed ways at nationalist projects. I continued by studying borders as well as boundaries and the relationship between them, looking at borders as one of the signifiers of boundaries in terms of racialisation. My book *Gender and Nation* (Yuval Davis 1997) brought together these two trajectories.

But I also became involved in Women Against Fundamentalism. This was important not only because it was ... and continues to be an amazing group of feminists who were all rebelling against our communities as well the sexism and racism of the state and hegemonic society. But it also reinforced my approach to transversal solidarity politics – that while you have to defend all victims of human rights abuse on various racial, religious,

ethnic and national conflicts, it should not be an uncritical solidarity. Your long-term allies are those who share your values. A lot of sections on the left, the anti-Imperialist left, thought that ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’. I think they started to realise that this attitude is too simplistic when it came to groups like Isis but I think, until then, it’s been quite a problematic blind spot for many people on the left. This was another development out of which I started to work on what I considered to be the most comprehensive framing of my theoretical approach with the book, *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestation* (Yuval-Davis 2011). So I wasn’t working any more only on nationalism or racism but also started to work on issues of citizenship. I also continued, of course, with religion and cosmopolitanism and also developed an approach to the feminist politics of care, as a feminist political project of belonging. So, for me, this was very much the overall kind of framing.

Then I was approached to take part in the EUBORDERSCAPES project – which I, of course, accepted, as borders and boundaries always interested me and, of course, bordering is the other side of belonging. As part of this large project, I led the work package of nine international partners on everyday bordering. The 2019 Polity book *Bordering* is the result of the work with my two wonderful senior research fellows, Georgie Wemyss and Kathryn Cassidy, based on the fieldwork in Britain. We also published special issues and so on, which used the methodology of situated intersectionality on a comparative basis across the wider project. Part of the situated intersectionality methodology is also encompassing what Lesley McCall calls two alternative intersectionality methodological approaches – the *intra*-categorical and the *inter*-categorical approach.

You need both, because the inter-categorical approach compares the same variable between different places or scales or temporal locations. This is very important to what some have called pluriversalism. It’s not relativism or universalism but pluriversalism, so that you can encompass the meaning of gender or race, for example, in these different locations without giving a privileged authority to one location over the other, nor separating them to have validity only in one specific location, as relativism does. But for us, the pluriversal epistemology was not sufficient because, even within the same place and time, people are differently situated and their differential understanding of the meaning of gender or race as well as anything else also needs to be encompassed. For example, we guest-edited a special issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, on a comparative study of discourses on Roma and bordering (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2017). In it we published a paper which compares these discourses in four countries and, in each of them, in four different temporal points, in newspapers with various ideological approaches in order to be able to illustrate how you need to encompass all of these different situated gazes to understand the issues in an intersectional way.

LR: What I found fascinating, listening to that overview of how your work has evolved, is the way in which your very sophisticated and, in many ways, quite high-brow philosophical work sits with a very grass-roots activism and I think that is a very unusual thing for academics to be able to combine.

NYD: For me it was mutually nurturing, all the time. It was very important, because a high-brow, detached, sterile kind of debate which doesn’t have any kind of relevance to people’s struggles, is no good. On the other hand, the anti-intellectualism of many activists creates such gross simplification and distortion and can easily slide into what I consider to be reactionary politics. My pet hate is what I call ‘identity politics’ because, although it has played an important historical role in mobilising a different kind of struggle, it shares with multiculturalist policies the homogenising and reifying of groupings. Identity politics also risk equating groups and social categories, as well as collapsing individuals and groups as interchangeable in terms of representation and therefore covering-up internal power struggles within groups and organisations. We see this now in anti-Semitism and the Labour Party,¹⁵ which really annoys me and I try to write and do things within groups. Because of course I am an anti-Zionist Israeli Jew and the dominant identity politics which we see so strongly, for

example, around the question of anti-Semitism and the Labour Party, defines all Jews as Zionist and Israel as a collective self, so anyone who criticises Israel is considered an anti-Semite and the Jews among us are considered ‘self-hating’ Jews.

It is not that my Jewishness is irrelevant to my own personal politics. My drive to become politically active started when I understood that my family was murdered by the Nazis and their local helpers in Lithuania, and then growing up and understanding the meaning of the military government against the Palestinian citizens of Israel and then after 1967 in the Occupied Territories.¹⁶ So there are contradictions because the Jews tend to see themselves as victims of racism and yet they are also perpetuating racism against the Palestinians.

There is no essentialist construction of ‘the victim’ or ‘the racist’ and anyone can become one or the other or both. So if you don’t interrelate these two levels, it can be very misleading and very reactionary. Luckily, in *Women Against Fundamentalism* – and now we have this *Journal of Feminist Dissent* – I found this wonderful group of activist feminists from many different origins – a few of them are academics but many of them are not – who share my kind of politics, so this has been great.

As I mentioned earlier, I am now working with a group of social scientists on a report on racism and migration, and the hostile environment, for the Academy of Social Sciences. Although academics, the members of the group are not doing this work for their University’s Research Excellence Framework¹⁷ or any other kind of career-related motive but because they think it’s important and they are committed. I’m not on my own; it’s wonderful to meet all these kinds of people.

LR: I would love to hear more on your views about what is happening in the Labour Party at the moment, so that would be really interesting. Before that, just in terms of your career, you said you started off at Thames Polytechnic – which then became the University of Greenwich – and then you went to the University of East London. Somebody of your calibre, with the kinds of publications you’ve had, you could have gone anywhere, but you very much stayed in the ‘new university’ sector.¹⁸

NYD: Being on the Sociology sub-panel in the RAE (Research Assessment Exercise)¹⁹ and then in the REF (Research Excellence Framework) I was virtually the only one from a so-called ‘new university’. Realising it made me become fully conscious of the implications of this and it then became a conscious political struggle for me, because I could see how my colleagues (and many of them are friends and I like them and their general politics a lot) take for granted the resources that are available to people in ‘old universities’. These resources are not available to us in ‘new universities’. When Floya Anthias and I wrote *Racialised Boundaries* (1992), we were teaching 15 or 16 hours, five courses a week, writing was considered to be a weird hobby and only when Thames Poly became the University of Greenwich did we start to get research money. People came and said ‘Oh, you were right, this is part of the job, not just teaching...’ and now, of course, what is happening with the REF and with the ‘old universities’ Russell Group – the possibility of sustaining a centre of excellence within the new universities sector – is virtually going to go down the drain. It’s horrible, the impact of the neo-liberalisation of universities.

LR: Yes, the neo-liberalisation of the university sector in the UK is a crazy situation. Just a couple of final questions, Nira, because we’ve been talking for a long time. If you’re happy to talk about what is happening with the Labour Party, I would really be fascinated to hear your views.

NYD: When everybody joined the Labour Party with Jeremy Corbyn, I did not, not only because I have never been part of any kind of establishment party but also because of what I told you about the tradition of the left, of ‘the enemy of the enemy is my friend’. I was critical of Corbyn on that level, although my son became

‘Corbynised’ and was all the time telling me what I’m missing in terms of all the important work that was being done there, which the media is completely distorting. After the recent European elections, however, I decided to join the Labour Party, when everybody had started to leave it. The reason was not just because I felt compelled to become an active part of the whole debate on anti-Semitism, although I have written about it – even outside the party – but because I felt that it is very important to hold on to Labour’s social justice agenda, because Brexit has become a new form of divisive identity politics.

To hold on to that, I thought I should join in order to support it and, almost by chance, I was told about this Labour Social Forum last weekend. It has been wonderful. They speak my language, they analysed the situation in a very sophisticated way, while trying to make realistic proposals for what they are going to do once they have the power. To what extent they will be able to do it, who knows.

After spending all my life on the margins, it will be good to be part of an organisation such as the Labour Party which actually has the power to implement any policies. Of course, whether or not they can, I don’t know, but I have decided it’s time to look at it, to try. I’m always game to try anything once at least, but I cannot say any more than that.

LR: So just finally, we talked quite a bit about Theresa May and the ‘hostile environment’, but of course Theresa May herself fell victim to a very hostile environment in Parliament, particularly through February and March 2019 and all that period. To what extent do you think she fell victim to a very sexist and even misogynist parliamentary system? Did you feel any sympathy for her, Nira?

NYD: In a way, yes, although her politics and her role in promoting and developing the ‘hostile environment’ are unforgiveable. Obviously, she is a courageous woman but so was Margaret Thatcher. I grew up in Israel with Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher, Indira Gandhi. Strong women but were they feminists? Theresa May is not a feminist. I have always been outspoken against the UN Resolution 1325, which says you have to involve more women in order to enhance peace processes. Which women? The women I mentioned just now are anything but peace-loving. This is where the whole question of transversal politics and solidarities based on shared values, rather than on ‘identity politics’, is so important. So, I don’t see Theresa May as my political ally, even though she is a woman. I can see that she faced a lot of difficulties, most probably as a result of sexism, and sexism in parliament needs urgently to be fought against, but she also went back again and again with that problematic, on many grounds, Brexit Deal²⁰ and did not listen to others in parliament.

LR: Well, thanks so much for your time, Nira; it has been so thought-provoking. I think we can end there.

Notes

¹ Nira refers here to the immigration law (2016), which penalises landlords if they rent a property to tenants who do not have the right to live in the UK (see <https://www.gov.uk/landlord-immigration-check>) or requires universities to check the right to study and to monitor the attendance of Tier-4 visa-holders (international students subject to immigration control).

² During the summer of 2019, when this interview took place, Boris Johnson had been selected as a candidate for leader of the Conservative Party, to replace Theresa May.

³ When the interview took place in July 2019, the Tory leadership election was going on and, while Boris Johnson was the firm favourite to win, he had not yet been formally elected.

⁴ This occurred in 2018 when it emerged that long-term British residents, mainly of Caribbean origin, were being targeted by immigration officials as ‘over-stayers’ because they did not have British citizenship. Although most had arrived in the 1950s and 1960s, as British subjects, their status had changed over time as their countries of origin gained independence from Britain.

⁵ This is the Sustainable Care Project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council – <http://migrationresearch.group.shef.ac.uk/care-in-and-out-of-place-towards-sustainability-and-wellbeing-in-mobile-and-diverse-contexts> (accessed: 30 January 2020).

⁶ The Hostile Environment was an immigration strategy of the British Home Office and is especially associated with Theresa May during her tenure as Home Secretary. For more details see <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/27/hostile-environment-anatomy-of-a-policy-disaster?> (accessed: 30 January 2020).

⁷ In 1968, Enoch Powell delivered the notorious Rivers of Blood speech in which he warned that immigrants, especially Black migrants, were a threat to peace and security in British society. It was all the more ironic given that Powell had been among those politicians who initially encouraged ‘Windrush’ immigration to Britain from the Caribbean.

⁸ In 1982 Britain and Argentina entered a conflict over the disputed status of the Falkland Islands.

⁹ Leader of the Conservative Party from November 2003 to December 2005.

¹⁰ New Labour lost the general election in 2010 and was replaced by a Tory/Liberal Democrat Coalition led by David Cameron.

¹¹ Signed on 10 April 1998; in effect since 2 December 1999.

¹² Mo Mowlam was a Labour MP and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland during the delicate peace-process negotiations.

¹³ Colloquial term for a camp near the port of Calais, in France, sheltering migrants waiting to cross the English Channel.

¹⁴ This was an initiative by the Home Office in 2013 under the hostile environment strategy, which involved vans driving around the country telling so-called illegal migrants ‘to go home’ or risk detention. It was widely judged ineffectual and the initiative was scrapped.

¹⁵ For a discussion see <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/dec/03/corbyn-apologises-for-antisemitism-in-labour-party> (accessed: 30 January 2020).

¹⁶ This refers to the so-called Six Days War between Israel and neighbouring countries in June 1967.

¹⁷ The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is an audit of all research output in UK universities which then informs the allocation of resources.

¹⁸ The term ‘new universities’, sometimes called post-1992 universities, refers to all the old polytechnics which became universities in 1992. These are widely regarded as less research-intensive and hence have less research resourcing than the more ‘elite’ Russell Group universities.


¹⁹ The RAE was a research assessment scheme prior to the REF (1986–2008).

²⁰ This refers to Theresa May presenting the same EU withdrawal bill to Parliament on three occasions. Each time it was defeated by MPs.

Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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The Emotional Geographies of Migration and Brexit: Tales of *Unbelonging*

Rosa Mas Giralt* 

This article focuses on the emotionality of belonging among European Union (EU) citizens in the context of the United Kingdom's (UK) 2016 referendum and its result in favour of the UK leaving the EU, commonly referred to as Brexit. Drawing from testimonies of EU27 citizens in the UK (mainly mid- to long-term residents) published in a book and on blog and Twitter accounts by the not-for-profit and non-political initiative, the 'In Limbo Project', it explores a range of emotions which characterise the affective impact of Brexit and how they underpin two key processes disrupting the sense of belonging of EU citizens: the acquisition of 'migrantness' and the non-recognition of the contributions and efforts made to belong. The resulting narratives are characterised by senses of 'unbelonging', where processes of social bonding and membership are disrupted and 'undone'. These processes are characterised by a lack of intersubjective recognition in the private, legal and communal spheres, with ambivalent impacts on EU citizens' longer-term plans to stay or to leave and wider implications for community relations in a post-Brexit society.

Keywords: emotions, unbelonging, recognition, EU citizens, Brexit

Introduction

When studying processes of migrant incorporation from an emotional perspective, belonging has emerged as one of the dominant lenses through which to explore the personal and social dynamics which characterise migrants' ability to develop a sense of affiliation to their receiving society, often in combination with existing bonds to their countries of origin (Anthias 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006). This scholarship illuminates aspects of migrant incorporation processes by considering not only migrants' individual sense of belonging but also the politics of belonging which mediate the social, cultural and political context which enables or impedes migrants' belonging to the receiving society (Mee and Wright 2009). Furthermore, existing research has highlighted that 'formal recognition' in the form of rights to reside and work as well as other legal entitlements are essential in underpinning claims to political belonging (Ervine 2008) and producing the sense of security necessary for the development of a sense of belonging to the receiving society (e.g. Alexander, Edwards and Temple 2007).

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In the context of the United Kingdom's 2016 referendum and its result in favour of the UK leaving the European Union (EU), commonly referred to as Brexit, a growing scholarship is tracing the dynamics of belonging among EU/EEA citizens living in the country, who face a great deal of uncertainty regarding their future residence and employment rights (e.g. Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle, Moroşanu and King 2018; Lulle, King, Dvorakova and Szkudlarek 2019; Ranta and Nancheva 2019). These studies highlight the negative reactions of many EU/EEA citizens to pre- and post-referendum events and the ongoing processes of 'othering' and 'unsettling' resulting not only from the potential loss of rights but also from increased hostility – and even occurrences of physical or verbal abuse – against EU/EEA citizens (and other migrants). As Guma and Dafydd Jones (2019) have noted, the formal membership (e.g. the right to reside and work) afforded to EU/EEA citizens in the UK by the freedom of movement framework implied integration 'by default' and a European citizen status unlike that of migrants from third countries – at least legally – although this privileged situation has not been the same for *all* (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2012; Lulle *et al.* 2018; Ranta and Nancheva 2019). However, the events leading up to and around Brexit can be considered to have 'visibilised' a particular version of the politics of belonging in the UK, transforming EU/EEA citizens into *immigrants* and questioning their 'right to belong'. The resulting ongoing processes of 'othering' have, in turn, impacted on their sense of belonging to their locality and the receiving society (Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019).

This article contributes to the growing scholarship on the emotionality of belonging by exploring the varied emotions and emotional processes which may be leading to the disruption of belonging among EU/EEA citizens in the context of Brexit. Studies on belonging often accept its emotional nature without explicitly questioning 'what belonging feels like' or 'how it "works" as an emotional attachment' (Wood and Waite 2011: 201), thus obscuring the role of these emotions in processes of migrant incorporation or in migrants' decisions to remain, return or re-migrate. Understandings of the emotionality of belonging build on Probyn's (1996) influential conceptualisation of belonging as both a sense of 'being in place' and a process of becoming ('longing to be in place'). Subsequent geographical literature has also foregrounded belonging as 'a dynamic emotional attachment that relates people to the material and social worlds that they inhabit and experience' (Wood and Waite 2011: 201). From this perspective, Brexit and its concomitant circumstances can be seen to be undermining (and even reverting) the emotional attachments and intersubjective bonds of EU/EEA citizens to their social locations, places of residence and the UK more widely. This article proposes the concept of *unbelonging* to capture these dynamics, which are characterised by two key processes: the acquisition of 'migrant-ness' and the non-recognition of the contributions and efforts made to belong. It is argued that this intersubjective non-recognition takes place across private, legal and communal spheres, revealing the erosion of dimensions of 'emotional citizenry' (Askins 2016) which further compound EU/EEA citizens' loss of formal rights.

The article starts by considering the growing scholarship on Brexit and belonging as well as the wider context of the emotional geographies of belonging. It then introduces the small-scale research project on which it is based, which explored EU/EEA citizens' emotional responses to the result of the 2016 referendum and its aftermath, through the public testimonies of EU27 citizens (mainly mid- to long-term residents) who participated in the *In Limbo Project* (ILP), particularly its published book of testimonies (Remigi, Martin and Sykes 2017), its blog (In Limbo Project 2019) and its Twitter feed (In Limbo Project 2018–2019). Next, it focuses on the findings by considering the emotions which characterise the affective impact of Brexit and how these underpin senses of *unbelonging*, where processes of social bonding and membership to localities and the wider imagined national community are disrupted and 'undone'. The article closes with some concluding reflections.

Brexit and the emotional geographies of belonging

As mentioned in the introduction, there is a significant and growing scholarship on the emotional geographies of belonging of EU/EEA citizens living in the UK in the period leading to and after the 2016 Brexit referendum (e.g. Botterill and Hancock 2019; Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle *et al.* 2018, 2019; McCarthy 2019; Ranta and Nancheva 2019; Tyrrell, Sime, Kelly and McMellon 2019). This scholarship is starting to illuminate aspects of belonging related both to the ongoing erosion of the formal rights and membership of EU/EEA citizens in the UK (D'Angelo and Kofman 2018; Kilkey 2017) and to their lived experiences of exclusion, discrimination and racism (e.g. Rzepnikowska 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2018) in the context of Brexit. It is also highlighting the ways in which these processes have not affected all EU/EEA citizens in the same way, visualising differences between countries of origin, particularly between those from older EU member states and those coming from the newer Central and Eastern European ones (Fox *et al.* 2012; Lulle *et al.* 2019), as well as within particular national groups (McCarthy 2019). Importantly, existing research brings to the fore the perspectives of EU/EEA citizens who were silenced in the referendum due to their disenfranchisement in the vote (unless they were residents of the UK or Gibraltar and held British, Irish or a Commonwealth citizenship) and are facing ongoing uncertainty about their future legal status in a post-Brexit Britain (Botterill *et al.* 2019).

Most studies report on EU/EEA citizens' negative, and often strong, emotional responses to the result of the referendum vote in 2016, including, *inter alia*, sadness, rejection, shock, anger and panic and confirming, as Guma and Dafydd Jones (2019: 5) have suggested, the significant 'affective impact' of Brexit (e.g. Botterill *et al.* 2019; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle *et al.* 2018; Ranta and Nancheva 2019). For instance, Lulle *et al.*'s (2018: 9) study conducted in London with Irish, Italian and Romanian young adults in late 2015 and after the referendum in 2016, highlights that participants described the referendum outcome 'as a "punch", a "hit", an "earthquake", or a "shock"'. These emotional, physically felt responses speak of an emotional toll but also of the shattering of the sense of security of many EU/EEA citizens in the UK, leading instead to 'a rupture of their everyday life' (Botterill and Hancock 2019: 5) and to unsettlement (Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle *et al.* 2019; Ranta and Nancheva 2019; Zontini and Però 2020).

To fully grasp the factors underpinning EU/EEA citizens' sense of unsettlement, existing studies have also foregrounded the importance of paying attention to the longer history of 'hostility and ambiguity over rights and entitlements' of EU/EEA nationals (and other migrants) in the UK in the period leading to the 2016 referendum (Botterill *et al.* 2019: 1) as well as to the ongoing uncertainty of the post-referendum period (Kilkey and Ryan 2020; Lulle *et al.* 2018). Guma and Dafydd Jones (2019: 3) have highlighted that the questioning of the rights of EU/EEA citizens, including the right to belong to the UK, started well before the referendum. They argue that this process has manifested itself on three different levels (Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019: 3): at the discursive level in public debates around the so-called 'benefits and health tourism' of EU/EEA citizens (and wider migrant groups), with the particular stigmatisation and racialisation of 'Eastern Europeans' who have often not benefited from the alleged privileges granted by a 'white, European and legal' status (Fox *et al.* 2012); at the policy level, through reforms and successive changes in immigration legislation aimed at restricting the rights of EU/EEA citizens to access public services, as part and parcel of creating a general 'hostile environment' toward migrants in the UK; and, at the everyday level, through practices that have hindered these citizens' access to welfare and other public services and undermined their mobility rights (Burrell and Schweyher 2019). The 2016 referendum and its unsolved aftermath have consolidated and furthered these ongoing processes of 'othering', leading Ranta and Nancheva (2019: 4) to argue that the 'essence [of Brexit] has been repositioning EU nationals in the UK not as (EU) citizens but as migrants' (in line with other scholars, e.g. D'Angelo and Kofman 2018; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle *et al.* 2018).

Processes of ‘othering’ have been accompanied by an increase in incidents of physical or verbal abuse towards EU/EEA citizens (particularly from Central and Eastern Europe), which intensified after the referendum (Rzepnikowska 2019; Virdee and McGeever 2018). Guma and Dafydd Jones (2019), in their study conducted with 42 EU nationals from Central European countries and Portugal living in Wales in the immediate period before and after the referendum, found that many participants reported a range of incidents such as verbal abuse, physical violence or vandalism which had been experienced by themselves or their relatives, particularly after the referendum. In fact, Botterill *et al.* (2019: 2) have highlighted ‘how Brexit has intensified already existing racial and class hierarchies between migrants and citizens in U.K. communities’. They note Virdee and McGeever’s (2018: 1808 cited in Botterill *et al.* 2019: 2) observation that violence was perpetrated against both white European migrants and black and ethnic minority citizens, implying that ‘long-standing racial hierarchies were reinvoked indiscriminately, irrespective of citizenship or migration status’. A recent poll indicated that racist incidents and discrimination have continued to grow since the 2016 referendum, with 72 per cent of respondents from ethnic minorities now reporting such incidents, compared to 58 per cent in January 2016 (Booth 2019).

Thus, EU/EEA citizens have been found to be facing increased symbolic and literal hostility which has greatly contributed to the loss of a sense of safety and security in the UK (Botterill *et al.* 2019; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Zontini and Però 2020). This has been further compounded by the uncertainty surrounding their future status in the country, with threats to the rights and entitlements associated with EU citizenship (D’Angelo and Kofman 2018; Duda-Mikulin 2020; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle *et al.* 2019). Lulle *et al.* (2019), in their study with 35 nationals from Latvia, Poland and Slovakia living and working in the London area in the period before and after the referendum, found that EU/EEA citizens may be unequally positioned to deal with the new conditions resulting from Brexit, those with higher economic and social capital being better placed to deal with any new residence requirements. Furthermore, new migration restrictions, differential rights of residence and the end of freedom of movement are likely to have far-reaching gendered and classed consequences for the rights of EU/EEA nationals and their families (D’Angelo and Kofman 2018; Duda-Mikulin 2020; Kilkey 2017).

However, scholars are also documenting the ways in which, after the initial emotional shock of the result of the 2016 referendum and the ongoing uncertainty over their status in the UK, many EU/EEA citizens are adopting pragmatic strategies to try to regain some control and plan for their next steps (e.g. Botterill and Hancock 2019; Kilkey and Ryan 2020; Lulle *et al.* 2018; McCarthy 2019). Lulle *et al.* (2018), for instance, found different potential strategies among their young participants, such as using ‘tactics of belonging’ (i.e. formalising their status in the UK) or further potential mobility, either returning or onward migrating to another EU country. Botterill and Hancock (2019: 5), in their study with Polish nationals living in Scotland, recorded the potential for onward migration too, this time as a reactive emotional response to political disenfranchisement; however, they also identified shifts of the sense of belonging to alternative spatial scales. For their participants, local, Scottish and European scales of belonging became more significant in the face of the nationalist rhetoric of the Leave Campaign which promoted exclusionary Britishness narratives towards EU/EEA citizens (Botterill and Hancock 2019).

There is then evidence that EU/EEA citizens are engaging in ‘strategies of self-securisation’ in the face of increasing ‘ontological insecurity’ produced by the anti-immigrant climate attached to Brexit (Botterill and Hancock 2019, drawing from Botterill, Hopkins and Sanghera 2017). Nonetheless, not all EU/EEA nationals have the same resources and opportunities to adopt ‘tactics of belonging’ or onward migration strategies (McCarthy 2019), those with more complex family or vulnerable situations potentially being more affected by the ongoing ontological insecurities of Brexit (D’Angelo and Kofman 2018; Duda-Mikulin 2020; Kilkey 2017). In their study of the dynamics of belonging of EU citizens living in the UK in the pre- and post-2016

referendum context, Ranta and Nancheva (2019) identified four different patterns of belonging, including ‘breakaway’ (integrationist or assimilationist), cosmopolitan (beyond nationality-based belonging), in-between (belonging in both sending and receiving societies) and patriotic (strong attachment to community of nationality). They found that ‘those who expressed the most disruption as a result of Brexit are the ones who have been most willing to integrate ([their] breakaway pattern) and who are better educated and/or highly skilled ([their] cosmopolitan pattern)’, who are also the ones ‘most likely to be considering or planning for leaving – before or after Brexit’ (Ranta and Nancheva 2019: 6).

Overall, approaching the study of EU/EEA citizens’ perspectives through the lens of belonging has been deemed appropriate due to its potential to capture ‘the dynamics of self-identification of individuals with collective identities’ (Ranta and Nancheva 2019: 1) at different scales including, in the context of Brexit, local, regional, national and European scales, which provide different spatial dimensions for belonging (Botterill and Hancock 2019). Furthermore, ‘belonging is simultaneously perceived as settled but in constant flux in relation to contingencies’ (Ranta and Nancheva 2019: 4). Brexit, as a contingency undermining EU/EEA citizens’ rights in and membership of the UK, has already been documented, as considered above, as disrupting these citizens’ attachments and self-identification. However, the scholarship focusing on the emotionality of belonging has also highlighted that belonging is not only related to membership and forms of self-identification with collective identities but also to ‘the ways in which social place has resonances with stability of the self, or with feelings of being part of a larger whole and with the emotional and social bonds that are related to such places’ (Anthias 2006: 21). As Askins (2016: 517) has proposed ‘[t]he analytic utility of emotional geographies is in its attention to the range of emotions in social relations and how they do different kinds of work in different contexts’; by zooming into the varied emotions and emotional processes which are leading to the disruption of belonging among EU/EEA citizens in the UK, it is possible to develop deeper insights into the ‘affective impact’ of Brexit (what it ‘does’) and its implications for both understandings of migrant incorporation and community relations. Next I introduce the small-scale project on which the article is based, before exploring the findings.

Methodology

This article draws on a small-scale study which explored the emotional reactions of EU/EEA citizens to the referendum campaign, its result and the aftermath (2016–2019). Data were collected from the *In Limbo Project* (ILP), a not-for-profit non-political initiative set up by a group of EU27 nationals in the UK to record testimonies from EU citizens there and British citizens living in other EU countries since the referendum in June 2016 (Remigi *et al.* 2017). ILP was selected due to its emphasis on ‘giving voice’ to EU nationals who had been absent from most of the debates around the 2016 referendum and subsequently (In Limbo Project 2019). Elena Remigi, an Italian resident in the UK, came up with the idea that, in the post-referendum conditions, the voices of EU citizens would be more effectively heard through a collective testimony (Remigi *et al.* 2017: xiii). Thus, in March 2017, with Tim Sykes and Véronique Martin and the help of volunteer moderators, she created a Facebook group with the title *Our Brexit Testimonies* which called for and collected testimonies by EU citizens (Remigi *et al.* 2017: xiv). A range of these testimonies, collected between March and April 2017, were eventually published in a book (Remigi *et al.* 2017). Although freedom of movement applies to citizens of countries in the European Economic Area (EEA), the testimonies collected from ILP included mainly (as far as it was possible to ascertain) citizens from EU countries, so this dictated the scope of the study.

The data collected for the project included the testimonies shared *publicly* by EU citizens in the published book (Remigi *et al.* 2017) and additional ones shared on the ILP blog (In Limbo Project 2019). This resulted in 140 testimonies,¹ which ranged from a couple of paragraphs to several pages of text in length (In Limbo Project 2019; Remigi *et al.* 2017). Although the vast majority were in narrative/essay style, there were also

some in the form of poetry and letters. Based on all the testimonies which provided geographical information, the countries of origin with the highest number of testimonies were France, Italy and Germany (together providing nearly half of them). Not all EU27 countries were represented but the rest of the testimonies were from citizens of 16 other Northern, Southern and Central and Eastern European countries. It is important to note that demographic information was mostly limited to length of residence and country of origin (when explicitly mentioned by the writers, some of whom chose to remain anonymous).

These testimonies were complemented by two data captures from the ILP's Twitter account (In Limbo Project 2018–2019) – @InLimboBrexit – one in autumn 2018 and the other in early summer 2019 (as an extension to the time period covered by the testimonies in the book and the blog). This resulted in around 3 000 tweets and replies which were collected using NCapture, a web browser extension which allows the user to capture content into NVivo from online sites and social media. It is important to note that there are limitations to the number of tweets that can be collected by these means as NCapture relies on the Twitter API, which only provides a sampling of tweets from the seven days prior to the capture (QSR International 2019). Given the significant number of testimonies from the book and blog, Twitter data were only selectively used by conducting specific searches in the dataset of tweets for terms that had been identified as predominant (e.g. betrayal, home) during the thematic analysis of the testimonies. The tweets identified were then added to the datasets of relevant themes, allowing the exploration of exchanges between different Twitter contributors, which provided an additional dialectic perspective to the topics previously identified.²

Overall, there are limitations to the sample collected by the study. The range of voices found in the testimonies collected by ILP is not representative of the diversity of EU/EEA citizens in the UK. As already indicated above, the geographical coverage in terms of the EU territory is uneven and only 18 of the testimonies collected (with country of origin information) are by post-2004-accession nationals, who have resided in the UK for more than five years (of whom half for more than 10). So, the vast majority of writers are from EU15 countries and have resided in the UK for significant periods of time (e.g. 22 for more than 10 years, 15 for more than 20 and 19 for more than 30 – information on length of residence was not available in a significant number of cases) and who, generally, seem to have more advantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Due to the limited demographic information available, it was not possible to establish the age range or gender balance of the sample with certainty; however, in terms of gender, a rough calculation, based on the information provided by the writers when available, would seem to indicate an overall majority – about two-thirds – of the testimonies were provided by women. These limitations constrained the comparative analysis between the perspectives of different groups (i.e. nationality or EU15 versus post-accession migrants) or within groups but the richness of the data still allowed identification of some explorative trends in terms of commonalities and diversity of experiences.

In terms of ethical considerations, there is an increasing debate on whether consent from the holders of Twitter accounts should be sought before using any harvested data for research, reflecting concerns over respecting the expectations of Twitter users (e.g. Zimmer and Proferes 2014). In this study, the testimonies and tweets used were limited to those which had been made *publicly* available either in the book or in the public fora of the blog (these were published with the consent of the authors) and the In Limbo Project Twitter account. This latter often draws on the testimonies in the blog or book to further their visibility and support the aim of the group to make the voices of EU citizens in the UK heard in Brexit debates. Given this emphasis to make the experiences and views of these citizens *publicly* acknowledged, it was deemed likely that the expectations of the Twitter account holders would be in line with that of public exposure. Nonetheless, only first names or initials and length of residence (if provided) by the testimonies have been used in the writing of the findings to keep identifying features to a minimum.

The emotional impact of Brexit and the sense of *unbelonging*

In line with existing research (e.g. Botterill and Hancock 2019; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle *et al.* 2018), the findings of this study confirm the significant affective impact that the referendum result and its aftermath had on EU/EEA citizens. The initial responses of many of the ILP testimonies to the outcome of the vote illustrate a range of strongly felt physical and emotional reactions, including experiencing ‘a tremendous shock’, ‘a physical blow’ or ‘a real punch in the face’, having ‘burst out crying’ or being ‘shocked, saddened and disappointed’ (cf. Lulle *et al.* 2018). However, these testimonies also document longer-lasting emotional impacts related to the uncertainty that the vote in favour of leaving the EU (and the subsequent triggering of Article 50 in 2017 to start the withdrawal procedure) placed on EU/EEA citizens’ legal status in the UK. For instance, some long-term residents (≥ 30 years) from EU15 member states used spatial expressions to convey the uncertainty that the referendum result had brought to their lives:

...it's taken the solid ground I was standing on and has turned my future into uncertainty (Anonymous, France, 30+ years' residence – 91).³

I felt like someone had pulled the rug from under my life (Anne-Laure, France, 30+ years' residence – 137).

Others from this group of long-term residents conveyed fear and disbelief by describing the situation in terms of being in a ‘bad dream’ or nightmare from which they hoped to wake up. These types of reference, however, were also found in testimonies from post-accession nationals who had lived in the country for 5 to 10 years, such as Ivana from Slovakia (8 years residence – 121, capitals in the original): ‘I HOPE THIS NIGHTMARE WILL END SOON AND WE WILL BE LIVING WITHOUT FEAR YET AGAIN’. Contrastingly, Anita from Hungary (9 years residence – 181) saw Brexit as a ‘wake up call’ which had allowed her to see the ‘real character’ of the country: ‘Like I was naively lived [*sic*] in a bubble and all of a sudden it's gone and I can see clearly now’.

Anita's feelings evoke the sense of betrayal that can also be found in many of the testimonies shared through ILP and which reveal different dimensions in terms of by ‘whom’ or ‘what’ they feel let down. The most evident dimension relates to the ‘institutional face’ of Brexit and its geopolitics in terms of the prospective withdrawal from the framework of freedom of mobility and EU membership which has guaranteed these citizens legal status in the UK. However, the blame is mainly directed at the UK government for having failed to ring-fence these rights immediately, instead using them as ‘bargaining chips’ in the negotiations for the withdrawal agreement from the EU (cf. Łazowski 2018).

I told [the dentist] about feeling betrayed, let down and abused by the government who did not do the humane and moral thing by us and our families. And who also betrayed and let down the Brits in relationships/marriages with EU citizens as well as Brits living in the EU, who are now reduced, as we are, to mere bargaining chips (V, France, no information on length of residence – 9).

Others, including short- (≤ 10 years) to long-term (≥ 30 years) residents referred to feeling like the government was holding them hostage or had turned hostile towards EU/EEA citizens and their families. This was also expressed both by EU15 and post-accession nationals in terms of feeling like ‘a second- or even third-class citizen’ with inferior rights to those of British citizens, showing how they were experiencing the prospect not only of losing their formal rights but also of not being treated with equanimity.

The lack of guarantees in terms of their right to continue their lives in the UK unchallenged has greatly contributed to what has been described as ‘a rupture to the continuity of EU citizens’ everyday lives’ (Botterill and Hancock 2019: 5) and undermined the formal rights which have hitherto underpinned their sense of security in the UK (cf. Zontini and Però 2020). In emotional terms, this has developed into states of uncertainty, worry and fear which have significant implications for the wellbeing of these citizens. The ILP testimonies, from short- (≤ 10 years) to long-term (≥ 30 years) residents, provide rich examples of these unsettling emotions, including feeling ‘more anxious and worried about what the future holds’, not feeling ‘safe anymore’ and being ‘nonstop on edge’ or ‘sad and raging at the same time’, as well as these emotions being ‘overwhelming and all consuming’ or feeling ‘like living under a threat, all the time’.

However, some of the ILP testimonies also illustrate the emotional agency of many EU citizens who refuse to feel victimised, instead expressing their will to regain control and to re-assert themselves and their rights. In addition, although less frequently, a few of the writers accept the uncertainty and look on it as a chance for new beginnings. Examples of these emotional strategies of self-securisation (cf. Botterill and Hancock 2019) are found across the sample of testimonies.

I refuse to feel like a powerless victim – I don’t like it. (...) So yes, my world has changed but I can and will influence my future (Carole, France, 35 years’ residence – 97).

So, at this time of uncertainty, after overcoming the initial worry and anger, we are now very excited for the future. We might continue to stay here, but we might not (Diana, Romania, no information on length of residence – 172).

In addition to feeling let down by the UK Government, the testimonies in ILP also reveal another dimension to EU citizens’ sense of betrayal, one rooted in their everyday interpersonal relationships, both within the close sphere of the family and within the wider social places which these citizens inhabit. This has translated into difficult negotiations in their everyday lives and relationships at different scales, from those closest and most intimate, to those with acquaintances or work colleagues, right up to those with their wider local or imagined national community. For instance, those in relationships with partners or who have in-law family members who voted ‘leave’ in the referendum despite how this would affect EU citizens’ lives, have felt their bonds strained, leading to emotional turmoil and distancing. Others, feel similarly let down by friends or their closest community due to a perceived lack of support and solidarity.

One of my in-laws voted leave. (...) This has created a sense of betrayal within our own family and I feel uncertain about how to speak to them (Gertrud, Germany, 28 years’ residence – 148).

...my British boyfriend voted leave. (...) I am still governed by feelings of betrayal and a sense of division within my relationship (Anonymous, Greece, no information on length of residence – 149).

A sense of having been betrayed by different sides of the imagined national community can also be identified in some short- and long-term residents’ testimonies. This is expressed in terms of a passive acceptance by half of the British voters who opted for ‘remain’ in the referendum, but also more directly by those who voted ‘leave’.

...the majority of the people I know are against this Brexit nonsense but, at the same time, it's so strange for me, this lack of public outcry, this amorphous acceptance... (Eliseu, Portugal, no information on length of residence – 54).

Like almost all of us, I feel betrayed. (...) Maybe when they voted 'leave' they didn't know what the consequences are. But I, we, three millions of us, are paying the price for it (Anita, Hungary, 4 years' residence – 182).

Overall, for many of those providing testimonies in ILP, the sense of betrayal and the 'in-securitisation' of their everyday lives and futures expresses itself in the form of a deeply felt rejection by the social place which they call home and the de-stabilisation of the emotional and social bonds which they had developed in it. These senses of betrayal relate to the everyday lived experiences of EU citizens and the ways in which the circumstances of Brexit have undermined their 'emotional citizenry' (Askins 2016) – that is, disrupting processes that may have hitherto grounded them in intersubjective relationships of security, solidarity and reciprocity which went beyond the formal rights attached to EU citizenship.

As Askins (2016: 518) has highlighted, aside from being legally and materially safe, belonging also relates to being recognised. She foregrounds Koefoed and Simonsen's (2012) articulation of the human need for recognition (based on Honneth 1995) which centres on 'societal coherence as requiring mutual recognition enacted across differentiated spheres' (Askins 2016: 518 italics in the original). Koefoed and Simonsen (2012: 627) outline these three spheres as including 'the private' which is 'based [on] the recognition principle of emotional support or love' and where subjects can build their sense of self as 'persons whose needs and wishes are important to other persons'; 'the legal' based on mutually granted equal legal rights and treatment, where 'everybody learns to understand themselves as citizens owed the same autonomy as all other members of society'; and the 'sphere of achievement' which is 'connected to the valuation of achievement within specific fields or communities', and where 'recognition renders participants able to understand themselves as subjects whose abilities and ways of life are valuable for the common ethical goals of the community'. In the case of the emotions that have characterised EU citizens' responses to Brexit, this section has considered dimensions which resonate with the first and second spheres outline above. The sense of betrayal felt by some EU citizens – by both the British government's refusal to guarantee their equal rights and by members of their community (from partners to friends and up to the imagined national collective) who voted 'leave' or did not show understanding and support for their needs – can be understood as a rupture of these mutual principles of recognition. However, there are two further emotional processes disrupting the sense of belonging of EU citizens which also speak to the spheres of legal and achievement recognition which the next two sub-sections address.

Acquiring 'migrantness'

As considered earlier, existing studies have shown the ways in which events prior to the 2016 referendum, the vote and its unsolved aftermath can be considered to have repositioned (EU/EEA) nationals in the UK as 'migrants' rather than as (EU) citizens (D'Angelo and Kofman 2018; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Ranta and Nancheva 2019). EU citizenship had, at least 'formally', guaranteed EU/EEA nationals a status of equal rights and entitlements in the UK (D'Angelo and Kofman 2018). At the level of everyday lived experience, the lack of an identification card or document system in the UK meant that these EU nationals often settled in the country without having to formally register 'as residents' with the British authorities and were able to access public services unobstructed using their corresponding EU passports.

The enlargement of the EU eastwards in 2004 and 2007 marked a shift in the freedom of movement framework as existing member states were given the power to apply temporary restrictions on the rights of Central and Eastern European nationals to migrate to their countries (Fox 2013). However, the UK was one of the only three member states (together with Ireland and Sweden) which did not introduce any ‘transitional arrangements’ to restrict the entry of 2004 accession citizens (Galgóczi, Leschke and Watt 2011) – leading, initially, to significant numbers of arrivals in the UK from these countries. Citizens from Romania and Bulgaria did face restrictions and needed work permits to access the UK job market until 2014 (Fox *et al.* 2012). Increased pressure on local services as well as the impact of the 2008 economic crisis at the time, reignited populist discourses around ‘benefits and health tourism’ in the UK (The Migration Observatory 2014). Consequently, as Barbulescu (2017) has noted, the UK and other northern EU member states started to restrict the freedom of movement rights of EU citizens by introducing measures aimed at limiting their access to social security and other benefits and deporting EU citizens who were classified as ‘homeless’. In fact, it has been argued that the anti-EU migrant discourse in the UK already characterised both the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements, making the experiences of post-accession EU migrants different to those of the EU15, the former being affected by their labour-market positioning (with high levels of de-skilling) and their identification as ‘labour migrants’ and ‘limited’ Europeanness (Fox 2013; Kilkey, Perrons, Plomien 2013).

As Fox *et al.* (2012) have shown through the case of Romanian and Hungarian nationals, exclusionary welfare dynamics have been accompanied by the racialisation (through ‘cultural differences’) of Eastern and Central European citizens in the UK, with their ‘whiteness’ and status as EU citizens questioned. Botterill and Hancock (2019: 6), based on their research with Polish nationals in Scotland, suggest that the racialised hierarchies affecting the different Central and Eastern European citizens in the UK are being unsettled by Brexit, reaching beyond particular national groups. Testimonies in ILP confirm this racialisation, for instance that of Nicoleta (Romania, 11 years’ residence – 28):

Somebody kindly explained to me that the ‘invasion’ of ‘third-world Europeans’ from Romania and Bulgaria into the UK was the last straw.

The testimonies collected by ILP also reveal how the ‘othering’ of EU citizens has started to affect ‘old Europeans’. The most common experiences of xenophobia reported across all nationalities (EU15 and post-accession groups) include being told to go home and asked when they are leaving or when they will be deported, being told to speak English or being verbally abused for using their first language in public.

I was chatting with a friend of mine in Italian. Suddenly, this lady that was sitting opposite us looked like she wanted to talk to us. (...) The lady went on and on saying that we were rude and should speak in English (LS, Italy, 20 years’ residence – 99–100).

In fact, these testimonies seem to reveal a process of *generic othering* of ‘Europeans’, a form of cultural racialisation and prejudice which affects anyone identified as such through their accents or any other visible or audible trait (i.e. speaking another language). This generalisation of prejudice towards Europeans, however, also shows a particular stigmatisation of Polish migrants, as some EU citizens have faced verbal abuse directed at Polish citizens (despite not being Polish themselves) or have witnessed xenophobia particularly directed at this collective.

*And then in June a young guy harassing me on the Tube called me “a f*cking European” (Rita, Poland, 4 years’ residence – 100).*

I was on the phone to my family, speaking in Greek (...) 'We voted you lot out. Go back to Poland'. He said that and got off the train immediately (NM, Greece, no information on length of residence – 138).

These experiences or perceptions of hostility have further nurtured the sense of insecurity of EU citizens discussed in the previous section, leading some of them to adopt 'invisibility strategies' to prevent being made the object of xenophobic abuse or racism (Botterill and Hancock 2019; Mas Giralta 2011). For instance, Victoria from Hungary (resident in the UK since 2015 – 2018), highlighted her new efforts to pass in public spaces as a response to her growing sense of vulnerability:

I find myself faking my accent as much as possible or lying about my origin, which I've always hated and thought of as pathetic.

However, other testimonies from both EU15 and post-accession citizens provide evidence that racialisation hierarchies between EU groups remain, not only in terms of nationality (mainly towards post-accession groups) but also in relation to class, as migrants in more economically privileged positions report being told that 'Brexit' was not 'about them', with the implication that 'the problem' lay with unskilled migration or 'undeserving migrants'.

Even some UKIP supporters, who were my clients prior to the Referendum attested to me that I was the kind of immigrant that was welcome in the UK. And I never even thought of myself as an immigrant. And why should I be treated differently to other people who have made their lives in the UK, in good faith and based on the same assumptions as I had? (Ariane, Germany, 16 years' residence – 132).

The processes ignited by Brexit which have positioned EU citizens as 'a problem to be solved' have meant that many mid- and long-term residents perceive the settlement status scheme⁴ (introduced to formalise their status in the UK post-Brexit) as a mechanism that also marks them as 'migrants' and thus 'other'. For instance, many object to having to 'apply' for settled status rather than just registering (being recognised) as residents/citizens, as this exchange on Twitter illustrates:

Today's my 29th wedding anniversary with a lovely Brit. Brexit has turned my life upside down. It's turned me from a citizen at home in GB to an immigrant who must apply to be allowed to stay. It hurts after 32 years! (Tweet by Veronique, France, 2019).

Indeed! I'm a migrant like anyone leaving their native place but I'm here talking about my status in the UK downgraded from citizen to immigrant, visitor, guest... and from freedom of movement to the hostile environment as with this government all immigrants are unwelcome guests (Reply tweet by a French-British citizen).

The generalised hostile environment towards migrants in the UK which has developed in the last few years (initiated in more explicit manner by Theresa May in 2012) is often referred to in these testimonies, as are internalised ideas of the criminalised figure of the 'immigrant' as an 'outsider and unwelcome guest' (Global Justice Now 2018). The prospect of being 'forced' to go through application procedures, with the attached requirements and the fear of not being allowed to stay or being stripped of their social membership in the UK – in many cases after many years residing and contributing in the UK – reveal a profound sense of disempowerment, the impact of the fear of discrimination and the erosion of their legal recognition in the country (cf. Koefoed and Simonsen 2012). This sense of disempowerment is also felt as a non-recognition of the contributions and efforts that many of these citizens have made to 'belong', something which the final section considers.

A sense of unbelonging

Some of the most heartfelt testimonies by EU citizens collected by ILP make direct reference to the loss of a sense of belonging to their locality and, by extension, British society. The sense of betrayal considered earlier resurfaces here in terms of the lack of recognition of the financial, social and cultural contributions that many feel that they have made to their local communities, and to the UK more generally, over time. These testimonies, mainly from mid- to long-term residents (≥ 10 years of residence), echo the effects of being unrecognised in the ‘sphere of achievement’, leading to a form of moral resentment and consequent alienation which emerges from their contributions to the community being dismissed (cf. Koefoed and Simonsen 2012: 627). This puts into question not only their present emotional and social bonds to their locality but also those of the past, which are seen to have not been genuine. The following extract from a Twitter thread initiated by ILP illustrates this, highlighting the potential lasting effects of this un-bonding for a sense of *unbelonging*.

Homelessness as “nowhere to sleep” is an absolute nightmare. Most of us have a place to live, a roof on our heads and still in our familiar environment so we can still carry on “as normal”. However the loss of “belonging” to our towns and villages is real. For me, i live and work here (as a fact) but my head and heart are not engaged anymore. It brings an odd feeling of freedom from any effort i had made to be actively involved in my area for 23 years. Now i am only here, counting the years until retirement will bring us somewhere else. I don’t think we will be missed by many here, our “friends” have also deserted us. It’s a sad state, but a more peaceful one than the constant battle to still try to be part, when i doubt we ever really belonged... (Testimony by Juliette shared on Twitter by @InLimboBrexIt, 2018).

Yep. That knot in the stomach you’ve been waking up with every morning, and going to sleep with every night, since June 2016. 25 years of tax and NI contributions and what is now clearly a deluded sense of hard-earned belonging. General apathy killing you. Slowly but surely (Helene replying to @InLimboBrexIt).

A group of testimonies, both from EU15 and post-accession countries, also brings to the fore feelings of sorrow and bereavement, with writers expressing the fact that they are grieving for the country they considered home and that now they can no longer recognise. These accounts often refer to Britain as a welcoming, multicultural and cosmopolitan society that allowed their mixed European families to feel at home or to these values being aligned with their own personal viewpoints.

More than feeling betrayed, I am in mourning for a country I admired for its liberal principles and now at risk of losing them (Elena, Italy, 11 years’ residence – 12).

Nonetheless, in line with previous research (Lulle *et al.* 2018), the ILP testimonies show that, despite the sense of *unbelonging* discussed, there has been an ambivalent impact on EU citizens’ potential plans to stay or leave the UK in the longer term. Some of the accounts collected seem to confirm Ranta and Nancheva’s (2019: 6) findings that EU citizens fitting breakaway (assimilation) and cosmopolitan patterns of belonging to the UK are those the more unsettled and angered by the events surrounding Brexit, the result of the referendum and its aftermath, and are thus more likely to think about leaving or to have already left. Some testimonies, mainly from those with privileged economic backgrounds and high social capital, express a significant emotional disconnection and an awakening to the possibility of leaving if the right opportunity arises, echoing Botterill

and Hancock's (2019) finding of the potential for onward migration as a response to political disenfranchisement.

I came to this country because of its tolerance, its diversity of ethnicity and cuisine, its great music & art, its thriving science & technology and its vibrant multiculturalism. I made the UK my home. I am now a foreigner, a migrant, an immigrant amongst British people. My home has been taken away. The time has come, it is now time to leave (Bruno, France, 26 years' residence – 21).

So until now we had not discussed possibly leaving the UK but now we have our eyes open, and if an opportunity arises, we may say goodbye. Indeed, it is hard to feel as welcome as we felt when we arrived, and ultimately if we can't vote at the ballot box, we will vote with our feet (Matteo, Italy, 10 years' residence – 190).

However, there are also many testimonies from both EU15 and post-accession citizens who do not feel they can consider leaving, as their lives are in the UK, where they have often resided for considerable periods of time (≥ 10 years) and invested their resources and efforts, with many also having relationships with British-born citizens and/or children who have not known another country (cf. Kilkey and Ryan 2020). Some long-term residents (≥ 30 years) also express an additional emotional conundrum as they have been away from their countries of origin for so long that they feel they no longer belong there either.

Now I feel a foreigner again, and more than that, I feel unwelcome. But how can I go back to Italy? I do not feel I belong there anymore than I belong here. I've become a foreigner in my own country as well as here. Besides, my daughters are British and have their life and work here and I want to stay near to them (Marina, Italy, 39 years' residence – 63).

On occasions, these testimonies are tainted by a sense of rejection and *unbelonging*, unwillingly staying put in body but un-bonded with the UK in mind. These disrupted attachments and the resentment or disappointment that some EU citizens are experiencing have implications for the re-building of 'emotional citizenry' (Askins 2016) between minority and majority groups post-Brexit, which will require attention to dimensions of inter-subjective recognition which go beyond formal residency rights.

Concluding reflections

This article has discussed the emotions and emotional processes which have led to the disruption of the sense of belonging of EU citizens in the UK in the context of Brexit. In line with existing studies (e.g. Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle *et al.* 2018, 2019; Ranta and Nancheva 2019), it has shown evidence of the strong negative impact that the referendum result, the events leading to it and its unsolved aftermath have had on many of these citizens. Feelings of sadness, anger, rejection and also, increasingly, states of uncertainty, worry and fear, all underpin a growing sense of insecurity both in terms of their future status in the UK and in their everyday lives in the public spaces which they inhabit. Some EU citizens, however, also display emotional strategies of self-securisation by refusing to feel victimised. Nonetheless, a sense of insecurity and disorientation often translates into a sense of betrayal and deeply felt rejection which leads to un-bonding processes characterised by non-recognition across intersubjective private, legal and communal spheres (cf. Koefoed and Simonsen 2012).

The hostile environment and the criminalisation of the figure of the ‘immigrant’ in the UK appeared in many testimonies (both from EU and post-accession countries), explaining migrants’ fears of being stripped of their equal rights and being considered as an ‘unwelcome outsider’. This potential loss of rights is also seen as a failure by the UK and fellow (British) citizens to recognise the efforts that many EU migrants have made to contribute and become members of their local community. The realisation that close relatives, friends or members of their communities are in favour of Brexit without acknowledging the effects that this may have for them as EU citizens, or a perceived lack of solidarity or empathy from those who do not favour Brexit, is leading many EU citizens to un-bonding with the social spaces which they had hitherto called home. This, in turn, becomes a sense of *unbelonging* which seems to reach into their past as well as their future selves. The implications of the uncertainty regarding their rights and security as well as the emotional un-bonding experienced are not clear in terms of the longer term plans to stay or to leave, but those with higher social and economic capital seem more likely to have decided to leave or to have awoken to the possibility of doing so.

The ‘othering’, which had affected Central and Eastern European nationals in particular pre-Brexit, seems to have extended to ‘old Europeans’ who had previously (generally) been more protected by the legal privileges attached to EU citizenship and their putative whiteness (cf. Burrell and Schweyher 2019; Fox *et al.* 2012). Testimonies from both EU15 and post-accession nationals seem to reveal a process of *generic othering* of ‘Europeans’ but also a particular prejudice towards Polish migrants, who are sometimes seen as representing this *European other*. It is important to emphasise, however, that EU nationals in the UK are not a homogenous group and a diversity of personal characteristics and circumstances will have a bearing on their experiences in the context of Brexit and its aftermath as well as their opportunities to negotiate or resist forms of exclusion and im/mobility (e.g. Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Kilkey *et al.* 2013; Lulle *et al.* 2018). Thus, further research is needed that pays attention to the diversity of experiences *within* as well as *across* groups of EU/EEA citizens, taking into account, for example, the different socio-economic backgrounds or periods of residence.

The focus on the emotionality of belonging adopted in this article has brought to the fore the emotional processes of non-recognition and alienation affecting some EU citizens in the UK in the context of Brexit. What these processes ‘do’ is lead to feelings of no longer ‘being in place’ or ‘secure’ and of being disallowed on different scales, from the interpersonal to the local and national. The resulting sense of *unbelonging* can illuminate further the interdependent personal and socio-political dimensions of belonging, ‘being and longing to be (in place)’ but also being intersubjectively recognised as such across a range of spheres and scales. In contrast to the notion of non-belonging, which pays attention to collective processes of boundary- and hierarchy-making (Anthias 2016); theoretically, *unbelonging* captures individual experiences of reversion to feeling part of a larger whole, both in spatial and temporal terms. Taking into account May’s (2016) view of belonging as a temporal experience helps to illustrate the dynamic nature of *unbelonging* by which efforts and yearnings to belong to particular places or social spaces may be undone through time. The ILP testimonies pointed to the potential enduring character of *unbelonging*, as disruptions to present emotional and social bonds seemed to be bringing into question those of the past, which were seen as not having been genuine (thus fleeting), as well as those in the future, which were seen as broken beyond repair.

As Guma and Dyfdd Jones (2019) have noted, the unsettling effect of the referendum (and the potentially enduring sense of *unbelonging* considered here) have far-reaching implications for wider community relations as it disrupts (but also disallows) migrants’ participation in their localities and society more generally. The findings of this research indicate that any efforts to re-build social bonds post-Brexit will require attention to dimensions of intersubjective recognition and ‘emotional citizenry’ (Askins 2016) between majority and minority members in addition to more formal membership rights.

Notes

¹ These testimonies included those of a few British citizens who have other European heritage or are in partnerships with or parents to EU citizens. There are also three joint testimonies by couples.

² Twitter data had some additional limitations as the available information about the authors of the tweets was scarce, often not even providing an idea of the country of origin.

³ Where quotes are extracted from the *In Limbo* book by Remigi *et al.* (2017), only the page number is used after the quote.

⁴ Under the EU Settlement Scheme (introduced in 2019), EU, EEA and Swiss applicants need to have been resident in the UK for five years before they qualify for settled status; those with fewer than five years' residence are eligible for pre-settled status and will need to re-apply when they reach five years (Home Office, UK Visas and Immigration 2019).

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Liminal Lives: Navigating In-Betweenness in the Case of Bulgarian and Italian Migrants in Brexiting Britain

Elena Genova*, Elisabetta Zontini*

The UK's decision to leave the EU illustrates some of the tensions embedded in European integration, enabling us to examine how nationalism and cosmopolitanism operate simultaneously, thus reinforcing each other. Furthermore, the prolonged Brexit negotiations have created a climate of protracted insecurity where the only certainty is uncertainty. This is particularly reflected in the migratory experiences of European citizens currently residing in the UK. Academic research has begun exploring the affective impact of Brexit; however, little is known about how processes of connection and disconnection operate simultaneously, nor which coping strategies European migrants have employed to navigate this state of in-betweenness. Using the anthropological notion of liminality as a lens, we draw on participant observation and semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of Brexit and the coping practices of a range of (new) Bulgarian and (old) Italian European migrants. We argue that Brexit results in a loss of frames of reference for European migrants in the UK – which can be both liberating and unsettling, depending on migrants' positioning as unequal EU subjects as well as their views on the nature of their future re-incorporation in post-Brexit Britain.

Keywords: Brexit, liminality, Bulgarians, Italians, coping practices

Introduction

Intra-European mobility and its driver, European citizenship, are the by-products of years of European integration and, as such, they arguably bear not only the hopes and strivings of that process but also its tensions and dysfunctions. As Stevenson argues, 'Europe is actually a site of ambivalence (...)', a place of '(...) both hope and nightmare' (2012: 114) and it has been the negotiation between these two that has woven the nuanced character of European integration. A clear illustration of these tensions could be discerned in the 2016 EU referendum in the UK, which culminated in the country's decision to leave the Union. Before and, especially,

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since then, public discourse in relation to intra-European mobility, has clearly highlighted how cosmopolitan and nationalist ideas not only operate simultaneously (King and Pratsinakis 2020) but, as we argue, also reinforce each other. Furthermore, the arguably controversial win for camp ‘Leave’ has led to a sharp polarisation of public opinion, supplemented by political volatility which (so far) has seen the change of three different Brexit Secretaries, three different Home Secretaries and three different Prime Ministers, as well as more than 50 ministerial resignations (Sandhu 2019). In such turbulent times, Brexit negotiations have created a climate of protracted insecurity where the only certainty is uncertainty. This has been palpable for the estimated three million European citizens who currently reside in the UK. Amidst the initial shock and incredulity (Lulle, Moroşanu and King 2017), followed by an upsurge of hate crime (Rzepnikowska 2019), Europeans in Britain have seen their citizenship status and rights being questioned and transformed – from ‘citizens’ into ‘migrants’ and ‘bargaining chips’. The latter have highlighted their precarious status in a UK negotiating its way out of the EU and aiming to ‘take back control’ over its borders.

With this context in mind, this article aims to understand not only how Europeans living in the UK make sense of their state of in-betweenness but also the kind of strategies they employ to navigate Brexiting Britain. To do so, we draw on the experiences of two groups of Europeans who belong to different phases of the process of European integration: Italians as foundational members and Bulgarians as relative ‘newcomers’. Based on their length of benefitting from EU mobility rights, we refer to them as ‘old’ Europeans (Italians) and ‘new’ Europeans (Bulgarians). Our choice has been motivated by our longstanding research interests and expertise as well as by the fact that Bulgarians are relatively less researched within the group of Central and Eastern European migrants. Furthermore, despite some similarities in patterns and cultural traits (further explained in the next section), Bulgarian migratory flows have not been considered in relation to those of Italians, particularly with regards to their shared South European context.

The article is methodologically informed by a set of ethnographic methods such as participant observation and 30 semi-structured interviews. Conceptually, we argue that the anthropological notion of ‘liminality’ first coined by van Gennep ([1909] 1960) then further developed by Turner (1967) and Thomassen (2014), is particularly useful in making sense of both protracted periods of in-betweenness and of the strategies that people employ to navigate such contexts. Bearing this in mind, we ask how European migrants experience this state of in-betweenness forced upon them – what are their coping strategies and plans for the future and how these experiences differ in terms of length of beneficence from EU mobility rights. The broader aims of this empirical article are thus two-fold. Firstly, we aim to advance the emerging field of Brexit studies by reinvigorating van Gennep’s ([1909] 1960) anthropological notion of liminality which, as Thomassen (2014) has argued, is particularly useful in understanding periods of crisis. Secondly, we aim to unravel the differentiated ways in which such a state is affecting EU migrants as well as their plans for the future.

The article is structured as follows: first, we review both the Bulgarian and Italian migratory flows, including the emerging Brexit migration literature. We then map liminality as a way of conceptualising protracted insecurity and Brexit more specifically, asserting its effectiveness in illuminating the experiences of European migrants in the UK. Next, we provide a methodological overview of our study. This is followed by two empirical sections – one that focuses on how migrants navigate Brexit and one that focuses on their plans for the future. The final section brings all the themes and arguments together to demonstrate how opportunity and insecurity operate simultaneously in an unsettling and uncertain context, signifying the shifting nature of the European migratory regime.

Theoretical overview

Arguably, the UK’s decision to leave the EU has highlighted the fragile, contested nature of EU mobility rights, creating a unique context that enables us to gain comparative insights into the experiences of various groups

of European migrants and the way in which they navigate what we argue is a liminal state (Thomassen 2014; van Gennep [1909] 1960). Thus, we firstly discuss various theorisations of the European migratory regime, noting how Bulgarian and Italian migratory flows feature within them. Next, we map the emerging Brexit migration literature before engaging with the notion of ‘liminality’ (Turner 1967; van Gennep [1909] 1960) which, we argue, offers a useful conceptual lens through which not only to understand Brexit as a state of ‘betwixt and between’ for European migrants but also to understand migratory decisions in the case of protracted uncertainty.

The changing European migratory regime

While both Italians and Bulgarians were mobile long before the establishment of the EU, recent flows cannot be understood in isolation of the process of European integration itself. One of the most influential earlier conceptualisations of unconstrained intra-European mobility belongs to Favell (2008) whose ‘Eurostars’ were the pioneers of EU mobility in the early 1990s – middle-class professionals from often humble backgrounds who were residing in major European hubs such as Brussels, Amsterdam and London. For his cosmopolitan participants, simply scanning passports and IDs without the requirement of a visa was a mundane, everyday practice. Thus, Favell (2008) has powerfully argued that, rather than ‘migrants’, the pioneers of EU mobility rights should be described as ‘free movers’, whose individualised paths were based on the flexibility associated with being the first to reap the benefits of freedom of movement. Yet, even then Favell notes that ‘(...) as soon as intra-EU mobility passes some threshold (...) the value of being a pioneer drops sharply’ (2008: 229), predicting rightly the rise of hostility towards EU migrants that came with subsequent waves of enlargement. Italian migratory flows featured quite prominently in this first phase of unconstrained and largely less problematic intra-EU mobility characterised by the introduction of European citizenship and the demise of EU internal borders as a result of the Schengen Agreement. These migrants were moving for educational, career and lifestyle reasons and saw migration in emancipatory terms (King and Pratsinakis 2020). In comparison, Bulgarian migratory flows in the early 1990s were still visa-regulated, mostly prompted by political disillusionment with the process of transition to democracy (Krasteva 2014).

This soon changed with the first and second waves of Eastern enlargement; ‘liquid migration’ emerged as a prominent theoretical framework for the analysis of, in particular, East-West post-accession migratory flows associated with legality and driven by economic motivations as well as temporariness and individuality (Engbersen and Snel 2013; Engbersen, Snel and de Boom 2010). ‘Liquid migration’ has been quite popular in studies of, for example, youth mobility to the UK (Lulle *et al.* 2017; Lulle, King, Dvorakova and Szkudlarek 2018) and Central and Eastern European (CEE) labour migration to the Netherlands (Engbersen *et al.* 2010). Yet, its applicability can be questioned with regards to Bulgarians and Romanians, who had labour restrictions in many EU countries, the UK included, until 2014. The concept of ‘liquid migration’ also does not account for mobility patterns where educational motivations precede career aspirations and other subjectivities. For instance, Manolova’s (2019) study with prospective Bulgarian migrants illustrates how the imaginaries of life in the ‘West’ often associated with ‘normality’ work as a strong pull factor that also counterbalances post-socialist realities. Furthermore, Ryan’s (2018) research on Polish migrants negotiating belonging in London over a decade further questions the circularity and temporality of post-accession migratory flows. In exploring processes of differentiated embedding, Ryan rightly notes that mobility rights ‘(...) also confer opportunities to adjust migration plans and extend the stay’ (2018: 235).

Additionally, the conceptual suitability of ‘liquid migration’ can also be questioned in the context of what King and Pratsinakis have termed ‘the third phase of EU mobility’, which started with the 2008 European financial crisis and led to new South-to-North migrations (2020: 9). Pratsinakis *et al.* (2020: 12) argue that the

slow and patchy post-2008 recovery has ‘(...) “re-peripheralized” Southern Europe as a broad region of economic fragility’, which had prompted growing numbers of young adults to migrate. These new flows are comprised mainly of young, unemployed and career-blocked graduates, motivated by a desire for socio-economic stability. Contrary to their Eurostar predecessors, their migration occurs at a time of increased hostility towards migrants and multiculturalism as well as raising Euroscepticism. Italians take a prominent place in this ‘crisis migration’.

The brief overview above thus reveals that Italian and Bulgarian migratory flows feature differently at various moments of the theorisation of intra-EU mobility. Focusing specifically on the UK as a destination, significant Italian migratory flows consisting of agricultural workers from the northern regions were already established in the pre-war period, followed by their Southern Italian counterparts, who began arriving in larger numbers in the 1950s and 1960s to take up factory jobs in industrial towns such as Bedford, Peterborough and Nottingham (Zontini 2015). Subsequent waves have included Italian ‘Eurostars’ in the 1990s and, later, ‘crisis migrants’, largely attracted to the cosmopolitan, super-diverse and economically thriving London (Pratsinakis *et al.* 2020). In comparison, Bulgarian British-bound migratory flows prior the country’s EU accession in 2007 have been minimal and quite sporadic (Maeva 2017). Since then, however, numbers have grown and, in parallel, so has the hostility directed towards CEE migrants, not specifically aimed at but inclusive of Bulgarians (among many studies, see Genova 2017; Moroşanu and Fox 2013). As Manolova (2019) rightly observes, this has produced a rather paradoxical trend that combines an intensification of host society ‘othering’ discourses with a rising popularity of the UK as a destination. We have chosen Italians and Bulgarians to typify ‘old’ and ‘new’ European migrants in the UK. Such categorisations, however, should be used more cautiously as Italians themselves could be divided into ‘old’ (Eurostars) and ‘new’ (crisis migrants) free movers with the latter being more similar to Bulgarians, as we demonstrate later. Finally, the above overview also highlights King and Okólski’s (2019) argument that intra-European mobility cannot be considered in isolation from the larger economic and socio-political events and processes that ‘disrupt’ and largely shape it. The first and second waves of Eastern enlargement, the Eurozone crisis and the ‘migration’ crisis have all left their mark. Brexit is yet another one of these events that will reconfigure intra-European mobility flows as well as the experiences of Europeans themselves – this is what we consider next.

Overview of the emergent Brexit literature

In the last few years, academic scholarship that aims to understand the EU referendum vote in the UK and future migration policies has grown exponentially. A primary concern has been how Brexit is likely to differently affect individuals and their families, revealing cross-European and within-EU group divisions and nuances (D’Angelo and Kofman 2018; Kilkey 2017; Lulle *et al.* 2018; Zontini and Però 2019). The burgeoning literature includes explorations into the (mostly) initial reactions to the referendum, migrants’ future plans and how this event has affected their identities, sense of belonging and perceptions about rights. This has begun to unravel the complex impact of the EU referendum result with considerable research conducted shortly before and after the vote and focusing mainly (but not exclusively) on London (Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019).

For example, Lulle *et al.*’s (2017) study captured well the immediate aftermath of the EU referendum result. Comparing the experiences of young Irish, Italians and Romanians in London, their work illustrates very clearly not only the raw emotional reaction to the referendum result as a political rupture but also how some of their participants are employing various ‘tactics of belonging’. This is furthered subsequently by scrutinising ‘new’ Europeans’ (Slovaks, Latvians and Poles) perceptions, revealing the key role of migrants’ unequal positioning in shaping power geometries (Lulle *et al.* 2018). Thus, Brexit deeply questions EU citizens’ sense of

belonging, which is also illustrated by both Ranta and Nancheva's (2019) and McCarthy's (2019) studies. Indeed, in the context of political vacuum, legal uncertainty and democratic deficit, Ranta and Nancheva (2019) emphasise the emergent processes of reconstitution of belonging, which could potentially undermine integration. Finally, in looking at how Brexit amounts to an ongoing process of unsettling and othering for EU migrants in Wales, Guma and Daffyd Jones (2018) argue for the need to scrutinise how Brexit manifests itself in various geographical localities to account for possible differences and nuances.

Even though these studies have described Brexit as a shocking event and as a political rupture that has deeply unsettled European migrants, two very different studies – that of Rzepnikowska (2019) and that of Benson and Lewis (2019) – remind us to be cautious about framing this event as a complete qualitative change of attitudes, perceptions and experiences. In studying Polish migrant women before and after the referendum, Rzepnikowska (2019) argues that racism and xenophobia manifested themselves not only *after* the vote but also *before* it, as also testified by earlier studies conducted by Moroşanu and Fox (2013) and Genova (2017) with other CEE migrant groups. Similarly, in looking at British citizens of colour residing in the 27 EU countries, Benson and Lewis (2019) contend that, while Brexit may have amplified the process of racialisation, the latter both precedes and supersedes the referendum, reminding us that this is not a British-only problem. Thus, these studies highlight the importance of grounded analysis, which is spatially and temporally sensitive and reliant on a strong historical contextualisation.

While the early Brexit literature has enriched our understanding of the initial insecurities that structural changes to migratory regimes instigate amongst European and British nationals alike, some studies have begun exploring the significance of time in responses to Brexit. Looking at Poles and Finns in Scotland, Gawlewicz and Sotkasiira (2019) demonstrate how reactions to socio-political changes are not only fixed *in* but also fixed *on* time. It is precisely this aspect of protracted insecurity that we aim to better understand through the lens of liminality.

On liminality

We argue that the notion of liminality first conceptualised by van Gennep ([1909] 1960) and later developed by Turner (1967) and Thomassen (2014), is particularly useful in understanding the contextual uncertainty of Brexit as a phenomenon, as well as European migrants' practices of coping with it. We maintain that liminality serves as a useful lens that illuminates the state of in-betweenness that European citizens in the UK have been subjected to since the vote to Leave.

Rooted in anthropology, liminality as a conceptual idea was first introduced by Arnold van Gennep in 1909 in his seminal work *The Rites of Passage*, in which he argues that '[t]he life of an individual in any society is a series of passages from one age to another and from one occupation to another' ([1909] 1960: 2–3). Van Gennep further elaborates that each of these 'transitions' is not only marked by a ceremony or a ritual but also that, within them, three separate but interlinked stages can be discerned: pre-liminal (separation rites), liminal (rites of transition) and post-liminal (rites of incorporation) ([1909] 1960: 11). He clearly identifies the middle, liminal stage as the most important one in rites of passage ([1909] 1960: 15) as it follows the real or symbolic separation from the 'normal' *status quo* and precedes the re-entry into a new social order. The value of this conceptualisation of rites of passage lies in the strong emphasis on the dynamics of experience. Liminality, then, is about experiencing change and dealing with its consequences; it is a state of in-betweenness, of crossing a threshold (physical, cognitive or emotive), which redefines and reformulates a person's existence. Liminality as an idea, then, emerges as a useful conceptual way of evaluating experience, accounting for all the factors and subjectivities that underpin it.

In describing ‘the peculiar unity of the liminal’, Victor Turner summarises it as: ‘(...) that which is neither this nor that, yet it is both’ (1967: 99). Here an important nuance must be highlighted. While van Gennep’s ([1909] 1960) main concern is with the *uncertainty* associated with liminal periods, Turner’s approach to the condition of ‘betwixt and between’ centres upon the *positives* by highlighting that ‘[u]ndoing, dissolution, decomposition are accompanied by processes of growth, transformation, and the reformulation of old elements in new patterns’ (1967: 99). Undergoing a period of liminality goes straight to the core of an experience, uncovering its various nuances and opportunities. Essentially it is not only about the loss of frames of reference but also about the process of discovering new ones, which can be both distressing and liberating – even exciting. Liminality entails a complex amalgamation of uncertainty and ambiguity but offers the possibility for reinvention. Finally, as Thomassen (2014) argues, the conceptual value of liminality lies in its malleability: that is, in its anthropological sense, it can not only refer to either temporary and more permanent, longitudinal transitions but can also be applied to individuals, social groups or whole societies – even civilisations – in relation to a variety of social phenomena that trigger or are associated with transitory periods. Yet he reminds us of the limitations of the concept: ‘Liminality explains nothing’ (Thomassen 2014: 7). The notion itself cannot serve as an explanatory framework or a tool for prediction; rather it enables us to comparatively consider the impact of contextual social changes upon individuals, societies and different time periods.

In migration studies, liminality has been widely used to conceptualise migratory experiences as a state of in-betweenness from a cultural, legal or life-course perspective (Collyer 2007; Kirk, Bal and Janssen 2017). Specifically, there has been a strong emphasis on using liminality as a lens for understanding marginalisation and vulnerability. For example, studies such as Menjivar’s (2006) on Salvadorans and Guatemalans in the US as well as Collyer’s (2007) research on trans-Saharan migrants use liminality to capture precarity and uncertainty. Equally illuminating has been the application of a liminal lens to understand both *temporality* or how ‘waiting’ may be a notable part of in-between states at refugee reception centres (Sutton, Vigneswaran and Wels 2011), and *spatiality* or how migrant activities are segregated and othered spatially by dominant groups (Noussia and Lyons 2009). While, in his research with Roma refugees in Italy, Però (1999) engages more thoroughly with in-betweenness by positioning it as central but inseparable from pre-liminal (separation) and post-liminal (reincorporation) rites of passage, the main emphasis is still on illuminating oppression. Thus, overwhelmingly, liminality has been used in relation to low-skilled and legally precarious migrants, often emphasising in-betweenness as destructive and marginalising. Such accounts of liminality tend to emphasise vulnerability and question migrants’ agency. One of the few exceptions is Kirk *et al.* (2017), who have studied the experiences of highly skilled Indian bachelors in Amsterdam. Their use of liminality is useful because it understands the ritual of migration as a performance and not a set of rules (Kirk *et al.* 2017). Importantly, the study also captures both the debilitating and the liberating qualities of the state of ‘betwixt and between’ (Kirk *et al.* 2017). Albeit very different contextually, we contend that European migrants’ complex and contradictory experiences of the ambivalence of living in Brexiting Britain and the insecurity associated with their rights and social positioning can be usefully framed within and understood through liminality.

Drawing on the work of van Gennep ([1909] 1960), Turner (1967) and Thomassen (2014), we argue that liminality serves as a useful lens through which to understand both protracted periods of uncertainty and how individuals themselves experience them. We aim to also advance the way in which the state of ‘betwixt and between’ is used in migration studies by combining the understanding of liminality as a context (structural changes to migratory contexts) and as an individual (migrant) experience. We therefore argue that an analysis of the migratory experiences of Italian and Bulgarian migrants residing in the UK which uses a liminal conceptual lens is uniquely positioned to capture and better understand not only the state of in-betweenness itself but also how migrants navigate it. Thus, we regard liminality as a state in which EU migrants find themselves as a result of Brexit – a state of in-betweenness which was symbolically unlocked with the referendum itself,

lasting through the years of negotiations that followed and eventually ending with the UK's formal exit. While, formally, EU migrants' legal status has not changed during this period, symbolically their social positioning as free movers enjoying the privilege of mobility has been questioned. Thus, this liminal state has emerged as a 'middle' stage resulting in the symbolic stripping off of EU migrants' previous identity (and potentially their rights), leaving them oscillating between their previously privileged social positioning of free movers and a new, unclear and, very likely, more-restrictive post-Brexit migrant social status. While a lot of the emergent Brexit literature has focused on capturing the *beginning* of this liminal stage, there is still a need for a more in-depth investigation of this most important 'middle' stage and how it informs the eventual re-incorporation of Europeans as either migrants (with lower status and rights than before, and equal to non-EU migrants) or as UK citizens (if they have the requisites and choose to apply). *Experiencing* Brexit then, we maintain, is essentially undergoing a period of liminality in itself, which can entail a complex amalgamation of often oppositional feelings and, as such, can be both liberating and entrapping, constructive and deconstructive. Our empirical sections document not only how EU migrants experience this process but also how they cope with it by searching for new frames of reference.

The study: a methodological insight

In comparison to other hard-to-reach migrant groups, studying European migrants in Britain is relatively easy. However, their European citizenship status, which gives them the right to reside, work and study without the need to apply for a visa or a work permit, certainly poses its challenges to researchers.¹ This means that migratory flows fluctuate greatly; they are incredibly diverse in terms of socio-economic and ethnic profile and their geographical location in the UK is difficult to determine. Therefore, Europeans in the UK remain relatively invisible (Genova 2017; Ryan and Mulholland 2014), thus rendering any statistical data unreliable. Nonetheless, rough estimates are useful in terms of getting a sense of the scale of the phenomenon.

Although the number of EU migrants in the UK has increased more rapidly than that of migrants of non-European origin in the past decade, Europeans accounted for only 39 per cent of foreign-born citizens in the country in 2017 (ONS 2017). Comparing Bulgarians and Italians reveals that, even though the former have received more media attention than the latter in the last decade (Genova 2016, 2017; Manolova 2019), it is the latter who are more numerous: Italians are an estimated 600 000 (Marchese 2016), whereas Bulgarians were only 71 700 by the end of 2016 (ONS 2017). This article is based on a dataset from an ongoing comparative project that aims to explore EU migrant workers' settlement practices and experiences of Brexit. We thus recruited participants based on their occupational status and those with 'specialist knowledge' or key informants who were knowledgeable about these two migrant groups' practices and experiences. We used a wide range of recruitment strategies – from relying on previous contacts and acquaintances through identifying gatekeepers to snowballing, confirming that finding participants is never a 'straightforward procedure' (Burgess 1984: 45). Interestingly, the recruitment of participants was not confined to or mainly driven by shared ethnicity. For example, there was an instance when Elena got in touch with a Romanian gatekeeper who assisted her in recruiting two Italians for Elisabetta to interview. Similarly, Elisabetta was able to help in recruiting one Bulgarian participant whose partner she had met at a workshop. These instances further remind us of the complexity of social ties post-migration (Ryan 2011).

In this article, we mainly draw on 30 semi-structured interviews which explore participants' migratory projects and journeys, their feelings regarding the UK's decision to leave, homing practices and future plans. The interviews are supplemented by both on- and offline participant observation. In the first instance, we monitored some prominent Facebook groups for Bulgarians and Italians in the Midlands whereas, in the case of offline participant observation, we visited cafés and organised workshops and events for both groups of

migrants as well as informal gatherings, celebrations, protests and demonstrations. On a few occasions, we did so together to foster a stronger reflexive account (Davies 2008; Okely 2012).

Thirteen of our participants are Bulgarian and 17 are Italian, with the youngest being a 20-year-old male Italian waiter and the oldest two being both 55 years old and female – a Bulgarian entrepreneur and an Italian cook. However, our wider project included further interviews with children as well as informal conversations with a larger number of participants. Our informants' work profile (types of job and industry) and employment status (type of contract) was diverse: participants worked in catering, management, services or academia on zero-hour, temporary or permanent contracts. One Bulgarian participant (Lily) had her own cleaning business and described herself as an entrepreneur. Furthermore, only one of our participants was also a Master's student but we decided to include her in the sample as she was also working part-time and thus able to reflect on her experiences. While the Italians' educational profile was quite varied, with four having only secondary education, all the Bulgarians were educated to university level. The gender make-up of the sample is slightly imbalanced, with 19 females and 11 males, possibly influenced by the gender of the researchers. Most of our participants are from the Midlands area but the varied channels of recruitment also meant that we had a few participants from other locations (three in London, three in southern towns and one in Northern England). Finally, as Figure 1 below illustrates, our participants had spent varying amounts of time living in the UK, with four of the Bulgarians arriving after and, in some cases, because of, Brexit. While we initially set out to do a comparative analysis on the basis of nationality, it quickly became evident that our informants' experiences were also shaped by factors such as age, gender and occupation as well as the time of arrival as linked to larger socio-economic processes (King and Pratsinakis 2020). This is indicated by the three periods we identified on our migration arrival timeline.

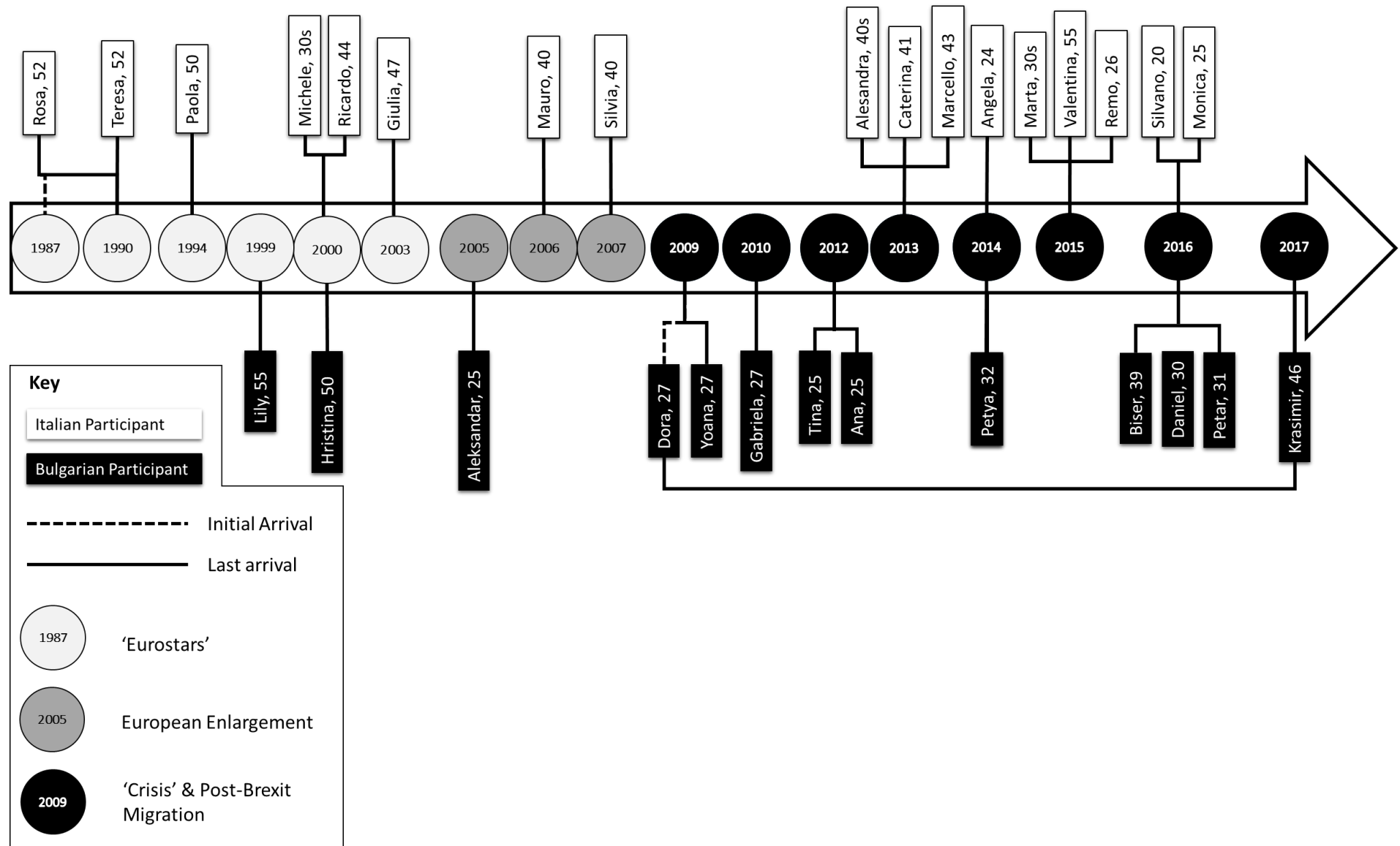
The project followed ethical guidance as it is outlined by the University of Nottingham and this project was approved by the School of Sociology and Social Policy Research Ethics committee. All participants were thoroughly informed of the aims and objectives of the study as well as their rights to withdraw. We obtained consent from our participants but throughout our fieldwork we continuously ensured they wanted to be involved in the study. Furthermore, the participants clearly indicated they were happy for their personal details such as age and location to be disclosed. However, we have used pseudonyms throughout this paper. While most participants chose to conduct their interviews in their native language, two of the Bulgarians, Hristina and Yoana, chose to speak in English, arguing it was much easier to tell their 'story'. The interviews were transcribed verbatim by external but trusted Italian and Bulgarian transcribers who signed confidentiality statements to maintain participants' anonymity and privacy. The data were analysed thematically (Braun and Clarke 2006) by the researchers, whereby Brexit clearly emerged as a state of in-betweenness producing conflicting reactions and various coping strategies, which we explore below.

Brexit: living in liminality

This section considers how Brexit has produced a sense of liminality in EU migrants. As Thomassen has argued, liminality is a 'paradoxical state, both at the individual and at the societal level. At the level of the individual, it is the destruction of identity while, at the level of society, it involves the suspension of the structure of social order' (2014: 92). Our data demonstrate that in-betweenness can be experienced negatively (as the loss of frames of reference) or positively (as a wide range of opportunities) or could even be deemed as ordinary, as we illustrate below.

The loss of identity and other frames of reference clearly emerge in the narratives of our Italian participants, especially those who had been in the UK for several years. They considered themselves as European citizens who chose to settle in the UK for both personal and professional reasons (career or study prospects, proximity

Figure 1. Timeline of Bulgarian and Italian participants' arrival in the UK Source: Researchers' database



to country of origin, multicultural environment), often after a period of work or study abroad there. For example, Marta (IT)² describes Brexit ‘like a betrayal’, signifying the strength of attachments that EU citizens form with the host society, despite the fluidity embedded in the idea of intra-EU mobility. Marta thus experienced the referendum as a personal rejection of her Europeaness and, together with her husband, they began questioning whether the UK was the country for them, especially in light of the protracted uncertainty and what they perceived as the rejection of the cosmopolitan and multicultural values which they had hoped to find there. Paola (IT) refers to a game that has gone wrong. Specifically, she feels that the UK changed the rules after she had started playing, finding this extremely unfair. She explains that she chose not to accept a job in the US, preferring the UK because it was in the European Union, with the rights and protections that this ensured her. The stripping away of her European citizenship was deeply unsettling for Paola, as it was for other of our long-standing Italian migrants. Teresa, too, a teacher in her 50s (IT), feels tricked and thus full of ‘anger, disappointment, fear of having done the wrong thing, because I always thought that life was like a poker game and that I was a good player, having played the right cards, but actually I played the wrong game, that’s what I think now’. While, up until this moment, she has been relatively privileged in being able to freely exercise her agency, she now finds her ability to act curtailed and somehow limited. With her husband, she previously had had the opportunity to move back to Italy but had chosen to stay on for the sake of her children. She now feels cheated and regrets the choices made. Thus, for many of our participants, entering a state of liminality provoked by Brexit resulted in them losing their frames of reference as EU citizens with a specific set of rights.

Mauro (IT), too, felt shaken and unsettled by Brexit, describing feeling like: ‘someone who got an enormous vase on the head but eventually is going to be all right’. It is interesting to note that Mauro, like other Italian participants, still felt a certain sense of security (I’m eventually going to be all right). This is because some of our participants, both Italian and Bulgarian, believed that they are part of a ‘class that, in the end, will somehow survive’ (Michele, IT). This hints at the heterogenous nature of liminal experiences, with class and skills playing a key role. In Rosa’s (IT) words: ‘I’m getting increasingly worried, even if in reality I’m safe, because I am highly skilled, I have been here many years, so I don’t think they are going to kick me out’. This highlights the importance of social class and inequality in determining migrant–local relations (Pratsinakis 2018). This is confirmed by Marcello (IT), who states that ‘I’ve never thought they are going to kick me out, not even for a second, because I know that unfortunately the Brexit campaign was aimed at poorer people’. A slightly different nuance to this class dimension is revealed by Daniel (BG), who is educated to Master’s level but works in packaging factories. He uses educational status and his willingness to work not only as a source of division but also as a sense of privilege and security:

The British society is completely uninformed. So, whatever you tell them, i.e. ‘Brexit is good, Eastern Europeans – Bulgarian and Romanians – steal your jobs’, they believe it. Okay, but the English are just used to living on benefits. I see them all the time, the women having 3–5 children and not working and the men not going to work.

However, this sense of security determined by the participants’ perceived privileged status is fragile. Episodes of racism and othering were encountered by our informants, further exacerbating their sense of liminality. This was particularly the case for younger Italians who lived in the city centre and had busier social lives. Angela (IT) recalls: ‘It has happened to me more than once – when people start to realise that I’m Italian – that they say “Ah, you are Italian, you are here and don’t pay taxes. You are using our own resources”’. It also affects older migrants who live in the suburbs, like Teresa, who commented that she often feels uncomfortable when out: ‘I look around and I wonder if that person had voted Brexit’. Michele feels OK at his workplace which he considers ‘international’ but feels that, in other contexts such as the pub or in the countryside, he stands out as

different, creating uneasiness – a point shared by several other Italian male participants. Such sentiments had a broader geographical dimension too: they were more prominent among participants who reside in regions that voted ‘Leave’ than among those where the population voted to remain.

However, even though some of our Bulgarian participants shared the same negative associations with their state of in-betweenness, their reactions and conceptualisations of Brexit were often more pragmatic and, at times, even positive in comparison to those of the Italians, thus revealing the complexity of a state of ‘betwixt and between’. Specifically, many of them saw their newfound liminal state as an opportunity that they tried to use in creative ways to enhance their position, status and skills. For example, Tina, a 25-year-old Bulgarian with a finance job in London, was initially ‘shocked’ by Brexit as it disrupted her carefully arranged plans. However, after consulting with her family, she decided to be pro-active and moved on to do a Master’s degree sooner than she had anticipated, in order not to ‘waste’ the investment that her family had made to support her migration to the UK. She thinks she could live anywhere in the world but, for now, she is in the UK because she has ‘an interest in being [here]’ (our emphasis). This clearly illustrates the paradoxical nature of liminality: an amalgamation of positive and negative features, of the disruption and reconstruction of migratory plans. Similar liminal complexity is revealed by 27-year-old Dora (BG). She was initially surprised and had negative feelings about the referendum result, even though she was not in the UK at the time: ‘I felt horrible. I was disgusted and felt cast out. I just could not believe that people think like that about me’. Nonetheless, such negativity was short-lived and temporary: she has now consciously decided to discard her feelings and look at her situation positively, even taking up a job opportunity in the UK post-referendum. In fact, some Bulgarian participants such as Petar, Biser and Daniel saw Brexit as the last opportunity to relocate to the UK and improve their quality of life.

Liminality can also be experienced as liberating, as illustrated by 46-year-old Krasimir (BG). Despite realising the implications of Brexit economically and politically, he sees Brexit as an opportunity to not be seen as one of ‘them’ – i.e. one of those ‘lazy bums on benefits and those others [Bulgarians] who come here to claim benefits and steal’. He further confirms that the only reason why he has not been discriminated against outside work is because strangers tell him “‘You look like an Italian” and my sister looks like a Pole, so we do not get discriminated against outside work’. This quote hints that there is a certain hierarchy among different groups of European migrants. This is not only confirmed but also succinctly summarised by a few informal comments made by some of the highly skilled, highly paid Bulgarians who, upon the announcement of the settlement scheme, have remarked that, at least now, all Europeans, not just Bulgarians and Romanians, have to go through the same steps to secure their status. This suggests a possible new levelling of previously established intra-EU mobility hierarchies.

Finally, there was also a group of both Italian (mainly crisis) and newly arrived Bulgarian migrants for whom liminality was banal and ordinary. For them, Brexit and the uncertainty that ensued were not new experiences and, as such, were deemed insignificant and unimportant. An example is Petya (BG), who has two part-time jobs (both to do with customer services) and describes herself as a ‘domoshar’ (a person who likes to stay at home) who has finally found ‘peace’ in Brexit Britain, which makes her and Doncho, her husband of eight years, feel ‘at home’. Partially this could be explained by the fact that, for both of them, this is the first time that they have stopped moving and have lived without housemates; however, they also find the UK ‘full of opportunities’ – referring to the kind of minimum-wage jobs still abundant in the service economy. Unsurprisingly, then, when asked about how she is experiencing Brexit, she remarks quickly ‘I don’t think our family will be affected. As I said, we have some specific dreams and goals and I hope that whatever we have decided to do we will not be stopped’. She then candidly admits that they do not have a TV at home, so she does not know much about it. Her conviction that Brexit ‘does not exist anymore’ is further reiterated by the fact that, while at work, no one appears to be talking about it: ‘My job is such that you have to listen to your customers

but you end up also listening into their conversations [pause] and no one mentions Brexit'. While she is not entirely sure whether or not people are afraid or that it is a taboo topic or there is a sense of tiredness, it is evident that the contextual liminality is completely ignored on this occasion. Similarly, 55-year-old cook Valentina does not question her liminal state but, instead, feels grateful for the opportunities that Brexit Britain has given her and sees it as a necessary step towards a future stability.

Overall, it becomes evident that the liminal state that has been forced upon EU migrants in the context of Brexit manifests itself differently depending on the various personal characteristics and skills the migrants have and on their length of stay and context of arrival. Liminality emerges as a complex, paradoxical state that is experienced both positively and negatively – as both a disruption and an opportunity.

Imagining reincorporation: coping with liminality

While the previous section demonstrated the range of experiences resulting from a newfound liminality – prompted by the UK's decision to leave the EU – and attitudes towards the protracted Brexit negotiations, this section discusses old and new European migrants' coping strategies. Drawing again on van Gennep ([1909] 1960), these strategies could be conceptualised as ways not only of navigating in-betweenness but also of imagining the reincorporation that would follow the period of liminality. Specifically, here, we want to expand on how our participants imagine their future reincorporation post-Brexit.

Interestingly, for participants such as Lily (BG), who has lived in the UK for 19 years and has been granted an indefinite leave to remain, as she arrived long before Bulgaria was a member of the EU, Brexit Britain brings up memories of the migratory regulations before freedom of movement. Respectively, her post-Brexit prediction resonates with the same pre-EU restrictiveness and differentiation:

It will be very difficult to get a visa, just as it was once upon a time. They just crucify you [at the visa interview] and they say 'No' to you. But they are saying that your children and grandchildren will have the same settlement rights as you do... So those Bulgarians who want to work, they will be able to find a job and work but they [the government] will cut down on benefits.

Lily hints at possible changes in the new migratory regime post-Brexit. This quote highlights not only that a differentiation in migratory statuses is possible but also that settlement rights and thus, by extension, the length of residence in the country, will remain a key marker of difference in the new UK migration policy. Also and quite importantly, the current Brexit status is hinted at as a period of liminality, of a transitory state that precedes the new *status quo*.

In anticipation of this new *status quo*, all the long-standing Italian migrants had expressed a desire to leave the UK. However, age, skills and particularly stage in the life-course affect their possibilities of realising such a desire. Teacher Teresa, who arrived in the 1990s, admits that relocation, instead of providing a solution, may lead to further complication of reintegration: 'I'm an adult now and starting all over, I don't know if I feel like doing that'. Paola has no intention to go back to Italy but looks forward to being able to 'start travelling again', something she sees as possible when her son goes to university. She remarks: 'If it wasn't for Fabrizio I would have already left'. Clearly, further mobility or return are seen as ways of dealing with participants' newfound liminality, yet the presence of school-aged children complicates this coping strategy. Respectively, Rosa shares:

We don't have many plans for the future, except for looking for work elsewhere – if not necessarily through me, through Peter – and see if we can start a life; clearly, we have a daughter who is still young so we can't

leave her behind. Also, at her age is difficult if we take her away – it could have emotional repercussions, so at the moment we don't know what to do.

Evidently the life-course reluctantly grounds some of our participants in the UK (Ryan *et al.* 2009; Zontini and Però 2019). Even if these 'Eurostars' are currently unable to move, they struggle to come to terms with the idea that Brexit will remove the option of fluidity associated with EU mobility rights. Paola candidly admits: 'I struggle – and I have always struggled like many of us, I think – to put down roots just in one place'. Thus, for this group of old Europeans, any form of grounding and giving up some of the freedom associated with mobility rights as a way of reincorporation post-Brexit is something they find very difficult.

For those who were younger and had children not yet in school, Brexit acted as a catalyst to clarify their plans. This was the case for two of our Italian participants and their partners, who moved away from the UK after our first interview. These were highly skilled people in their 30s who chose, in one case, to take a job opportunity elsewhere and, in the other to 'return'. They felt that having pre-school children and still being employed on temporary contracts allowed them to continue to be mobile, pushing them to try out their preferred plans before they became 'less fluid' – in terms of getting permanent jobs or having their children start school in post-Brexit Britain. This was also the case for some of Dora's friends for whom Brexit again was seen as a catalyst that helped them to make a decision – which in her case was to return to Bulgaria. In all these cases there is a confluence between life-course and external events (Brexit) to instigate return/further migration.

Those who have arrived more recently have fewer concrete plans to return. However, they are not foreseeing or even aspiring to achieve a future stable re-incorporation in the UK. Michele is clear about the downgrading that Italian migrants like him are experiencing because of Brexit, which he describes as a 'mental shift': 'Before there was a clear distinction: British and European were part of the same intellectual category and then there was the rest, divided in many groups. Now Europeans are part of the rest'. Marcello and Caterina, having recently moved from Italy as adults, know that they do not want to go back but, being sceptical about their future in the UK, are open to the possibility of further migration. Caterina, for example, shares with us that: 'Well, I can't deny that, in the last 5 or 6 months, I started to look at the States as well...'. A similar open-endedness is maintained by Michele, who plans to go back to Italy after five years abroad. At present he is investing a lot of time and energy into trying to keep his options open, both in Italy and in the UK. He is continuously applying for permanent jobs in British academia but is also considering taking the public exam to gain access to the Italian system. For the young highly skilled Bulgarians – Ana, Tina and Dora – the future is still undetermined, though they envisage life and work in other countries, including outside of the UK.

Only one of our Bulgarian participants – Daniel – expressed a clear desire to leave at the time of his interview. His reason was not Brexit – in fact, he had come *because* of Brexit. However, he feels very bitter and frustrated by his UK work experience and is determined to go back as soon as possible. Return is a huge part of his narrative: 'I do not know a Bulgarian who does not want to go back. I personally want to return and I intend to do so by the end of the year. (...) There is no point wasting your health and feeling like a slave here'. Interestingly though, not only did he not keep his promise but he also found an alternative way to manage his frustrations – by enrolling on a distance-learning postgraduate degree, which was seen as a way of opening the door to better job opportunities in the UK. This approach is consistent with that employed by other participants for whom liminality was the 'normal' *status quo*. They envisaged their post-Brexit futures in terms of personal and professional satisfaction but firmly based in the UK. Petya and her husband, Doncho, who migrated recently because of their dissatisfaction with the socio-political and economic situation in Bulgaria, are determined to make it work in the UK and settle down there, if not permanently at least until retirement. This is also the case for our Italian participants who have arrived more recently, because they have experienced the

Italian job market and feel that their prospects, regardless of Brexit, are still better in the UK. Valentina is the most enthusiastic in this group: 'My plans for the future are, if I can, to open my own coffee shop. I hope not to have problems with Brexit; if there are problems we'll go to Ireland or Scotland but the best for me would be to stay here'.

Most of our Bulgarian participants fit in this group of would-be settlers. Like Valentina (IT), Hristina (BG), too, is in love with the UK and is determined to stay; however, she also thinks that Scotland could potentially be a valid plan B 'where they like migrants'. Krasimir is convinced that people treat better those migrants who have decided to settle in the UK:

English people always ask me whether I like England and why I am here. So, the first thing I tell them is that England is my favourite country, which is really true, no hypocrisy involved. Secondly, I tell them that I have come here to settle down because I do not want to live in Bulgaria. My sister is here and my brother-in-law is here. So the attitude towards me is always different.

He contrasts himself to those who come for short-term economic goals, a move that is sometimes portrayed in the British press as coming to 'leech off the system'.

Thus, the way in which post-Brexit reintegration is imagined differently is impacted by migrants' length of stay as well other personal characteristics and experiences. Those who are the most precarious and have a long history of experiencing liminality (including in their countries of origin) appear to be more favourable towards settlement, whereas those who are more privileged appear concerned about the degrading of their status as a result of their future re-incorporation post-Brexit and the ways in which their mobility rights can be curtailed.

Conclusion

This article has shown that the post-Brexit period, which spanned from the referendum until the transition period when the UK has formally left the EU but no substantive change has yet actually happened, can be interpreted as a period of liminality when the previous order where EU migrants were EU citizens with guaranteed rights has been suspended but the new post-Brexit stage has not yet been delineated. The ways in which EU migrants will be re-incorporated and 'integrated' into British society after Brexit are still unclear. In the meantime, EU migrants have to come to terms with their loss of terms of reference and previous identities and learn to navigate this period of uncertainty and fluidity which, for some, is impacting on their life trajectories and migratory plans.

By comparing the experiences of Italians as an old EU group with those of Bulgarians as a new EU group, we have demonstrated that experiences of liminality do diverge between these two groups. However, ethnicity and length of membership in the EU did not appear as the only important factor in accounting for such differences. Length of stay or, rather, period and reason for arrival, have a profound impact on the ways in which our participants experience the Brexit liminal period. Those who arrived in the heyday of multiculturalism, also attracted by the promise of a diverse and cosmopolitan environment, experience with profound unease the rejection of such values and the spread of nationalist sentiments. Those who are able to, plan further mobility or even return migration. Those who arrived recently, often also pushed by economic and political crises in their own countries, are less surprised and therefore feel less affected by the Brexit context. The latter group are thus the ones more willing to stay on post-Brexit and to accept whatever type of re-incorporation is offered to them.

Using liminality as a lens has been instrumental in illuminating the diversity in EU migrants' experiences. In addition to the negative aspects just highlighted, this period of uncertainty and transition has, nevertheless,

also emerged as positive and creative for some, as it was for those who used this unexpected event to re-think their plans and take some important life decisions, thus pushing further their individualised plans. It was also seen as an opportunity by those, especially Bulgarians, for whom it afforded the possibility to level the hierarchy that previously existed between ‘first-class’ and ‘second-class’ European migrants. This hierarchy of migrants was established through different waves of enlargement and European integration but is losing salience in the post-Brexit context, when everybody needs to negotiate a new status. This shows the fragility and temporariness of different migrant categories and the continuous re-shifting of such categories and mobility rights.

In conclusion, this article has demonstrated that the way in which intra-EU mobility is going to change as a result of Brexit is difficult to predict. It may favour settlement (with migrants rooting in place), increased mobility elsewhere (to destinations perceived to be more attractive) or return. Migrants’ life-course and relationships are likely to shape these patterns. What seems clear is that the fluidity and mobility that characterised the 1990s and the early 2000s, that our ‘older’ migrants find hard to relinquish, are the exception rather than the rule and are difficult to maintain. Processes of bordering and re-bordering are currently taking place across Europe, changing the future and the shape of intra-EU mobilities, simultaneously redefining the hierarchies of ‘desirable’ and ‘less-desirable’ migrants.

Notes

¹ Under the principle of the freedom of movement, European citizens have the right to enter an EU member-state freely and remain without declaring their purpose for a period of up to three months. However, not only have there been restrictions to EU mobility but these restrictions have been unevenly applied to migrants who belong to different waves of EU enlargement. This has been particularly the case with regards to access to the labour market, with the so-called EU8 – or the countries that joined the EU in 2004 – being the first group who had to register to work, albeit without restrictions. These latter were then introduced for EU2 (Bulgaria and Romania) in 2007, whose migrants were required to apply for registration certificates. This requirement was only lifted in 2014 after the full seven-year period of labour restrictions was implemented.

² The abbreviations denote the country of origin of participants: IT for Italy and BG for Bulgaria.

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Migrant Experiences of Conviviality in the Context of Brexit: Polish Migrant Women in Manchester

Alina Rzepnikowska*

This paper explores how people live together in different places in the context of Brexit. This issue seems more relevant than ever due to the continued attention being paid to immigration, identity and nation and raising questions about conviviality – understood in this paper as a process of living and interacting together in shared spaces. Building on my earlier research in 2012/13 and drawing on qualitative interviews conducted with Polish migrant women after the EU referendum in 2016, this paper explores the complexity of my participants’ everyday interactions with the local population in Manchester in the context of Brexit, viewed by many as a disruptive event impacting on social relations. The paper shows that conviviality is a highly dynamic process influenced by spatio-temporal characteristics, revealing not only tensions but also various forms of conviviality, in some cases sustained over time. It illustrates that, while Brexit poses challenges to conviviality, there are instances of thriving and sustained conviviality that endures despite exclusionary anti-immigration rhetoric. The paper also reflects on the possibilities of maintaining social connections and belonging in the context of Brexit, whereby some migrants become more rooted in their local areas and are likely to be settled on a more permanent basis, contrary to earlier assumptions that post-accession migrants are temporary.

Keywords: Polish migrant women, Brexit, conviviality, racism/xenophobia, belonging

Introduction

The outcome of the European Union (EU) referendum in the UK on 23 June 2016 was strongly linked to views about immigration. An Ipsos MORI (2016) poll showed that immigration was the top issue for British voters. The wave of post-Brexit vote hostility revealed the extent of the racism and xenophobia which affected migrants and minorities (Burnett 2017; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Komaromi and Singh 2016; Rzepnikowska 2018b; Virdee and McGeever 2018). While Manchester had the strongest ‘remain’ vote in the North West, the majority of Greater Manchester’s boroughs were characterised by the majority ‘leave’ vote, linked with an

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enduring frustration over immigration, including concerns about jobs, wages and public services. Many studies have shown that perceived threats to economic resources, particularly in cases of financial hardship and the risk of unemployment, lead to increased negative attitudes to immigration (Storm 2015). Hence, these longstanding frustrations should also be interpreted in the wider context of economic and political change in the UK since the 1960s which affects not only less-affluent Brits but also the ethnic minority population. Furthermore, these frustrations over immigration in the context of Brexit can be understood in terms of a resurgent nationalism and anti-immigrant populist sentiment forming part of the political narrative not only during the Brexit Leave campaign, but over at least the past six decades:

British immigration debates have long been intertwined with public anxieties over race and identity, with public hostility in earlier decades directed at black and South Asian migrants from former imperial territories in the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent, who began arriving in large numbers from the 1950s onward. Yet starting in 2004, the focus of anxiety moved to the large new flow of migrants from EU states in Central and Eastern Europe. As a result, anti-immigration voters came to see migration (and the social changes that it brought) as an issue closely bound up with Britain's EU membership (Ford and Goodwin 2018: 21).

EU migration into the UK was a key issue in the EU referendum debates in 2016. The Leave campaign used the anti-immigration discourse to claim that the main cause of all the UK's issues – including housing shortages or the strained National Health Service (NHS) – is uncontrolled mass immigration from other EU member-states. Amber Rudd, in her speech at the Conservative Party conference in October 2017, said that foreign workers should not be 'taking jobs that British people could do' (see Vicol 2016), echoing Gordon Brown's 'British jobs for British workers' remark in 2007. Even though it seems that the responses of some politicians to EU migration have not been racially but, rather, economically motivated, they do produce racialised effects (Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2012). Furthermore, in the run up to the EU referendum in 2016, mainstream media reporting of immigration more than tripled over the course of the campaign. The coverage of the effects of immigration was overwhelmingly negative, particularly in the *Express*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* (Moore and Ramsay 2017). Amongst those migrants singled out for particularly negative coverage were Poles. Existing research shows a link between the language and behaviour of perpetrators of racist violence after the EU referendum and the rhetoric of some politicians and the media (Burnett 2017). Nevertheless, recent findings show a positive shift in attitudes since the Brexit vote across both the political and the social spectrum (Ford 2018; Ipsos MORI 2017). They show that, while a majority still want immigration levels reduced, people have become more positive about immigration in the last few years. About half of those who said that they have become more optimistic about immigration attribute this to more positive discussion about immigrants and their contribution to the UK, while a quarter said that they personally knew more people who were migrants either at work or socially (Ipsos MORI 2019).

Over the years since the Brexit vote, while some attention has been paid to attitudes towards immigration following the EU referendum, little is known about the complexity of the actual everyday experiences of migrants in their local areas, particularly Polish migrants, who constitute the largest group of non-UK-born nationals in the UK. Both prior to and at the time of the referendum, Polish migrants were subjected to significant levels of hostility and racialisation. This paper explores how people live together in the context of Brexit. The focus seems more relevant than ever due to the continued attention to immigration, identity and nation, which raise questions about conviviality – understood in this paper as a way of living together in shared spaces where diverse groups and individuals coexist. Building on my earlier work and drawing on qualitative interviews

conducted with Polish migrant women after the EU referendum in 2016, I explore here the complexity of my participants' everyday interactions with the local population in Manchester in the context of Brexit.

Brexit can be understood as a transitional event set in a broader context of economic, political and social transformation and impacting on social relations in various ways. Brexit can be viewed in different ways and from diverse positions, depending particularly on class, race, location, gender and age (see Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019). As Anderson and Wilson (2018: 292) suggest:

Brexit is many things: the apparently accepted name for a decision that marks an event to come; a state project of disentangling and separating the United Kingdom from the European Union; a proliferating set of impacts and effects felt across multiple dimensions of life; and an end point to be desired, feared or more ambivalently related to.

My article focuses on the impact of Brexit on the everyday lives of migrant women in everyday spaces. The existing literature on geographies of encounter shows how some city spaces are more convivial than other. Amin (2002: 959) emphasised the significance of 'prosaic sites of cultural exchange and transformation' where 'much of the negotiation of difference occurs at the very local level, through everyday experiences and encounters'. He highlighted that 'micropublics', such as the workplace, schools, colleges and youth centres, may serve as sites of inclusion and negotiation. This means that people may step out of their daily environment and into other spaces which bring them together with those from different backgrounds and allow a habitual negotiating of difference. This is explored in more detail in this paper, which shows that conviviality is a highly dynamic process influenced by spatio-temporal characteristics and revealing various forms of interaction in immediate neighbourhoods, family spaces and workplaces. Amin (2008: 7) also reminds us of the erosion of public space, policing and neglect, resulting in the running down of public facilities and the emergence of 'dangerous' streets, causing fear and avoidance. This raises the issue of 'less convivial' spaces in cities marked by socio-economic deprivation, fear and avoidance. This paper pays particular attention to the spatio-temporal and highly contextual dynamics underpinning more and less convivial encounters. Conviviality becomes a useful concept, broadening our understanding of complex and ever-changing social relations in different places and in uncertain times.

I begin by providing some contextual information on Polish migration and outlining my methods. I reflect on the importance of conviviality in exploring migrant experiences. Finally, I discuss empirical findings which draw on the narratives of my female Polish migrant participants, who recounted their experiences of living alongside local residents in Manchester and the wider area of Greater Manchester in the context of Brexit. This illustrates the situatedness of conviviality within the geographical, social and temporal contexts. While my findings show how less-visible minorities can become racialised, they also provide examples of conviviality resisting racism and xenophobia, characterised by habitual interactions between mothers and neighbours, co-operation, trust and acts of care and kindness. This illustrates the possibilities of maintaining social connections and belonging in the era of Brexit, as well as a more resilient form of conviviality which is able to thrive in uncertain times. It also means that some of the participants become more rooted in their local areas and are more likely to settle on a more permanent basis, contrary to earlier assumptions about post-accession migrants being temporary.

Polish migrants in the UK and Manchester

The accession of eight new member-states (A8 – Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary) to the European Union on 1 May 2004 has resulted in significant migration

within Europe in recent years. The UK, as well as Ireland and Sweden, granted A8 nationals free access to the labour market immediately after the enlargement, in a bid to alleviate severe labour-market shortages, mainly in low-waged and low-skilled occupations in construction, hospitality, transport sectors and public services (Anderson, Ruhs, Rogaly and Spencer 2006; Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2006). This freedom of movement attracted many Polish people, especially the young, who were affected by high rates of unemployment, low wages and a lack of opportunities in Poland (White 2010). These newly arrived migrants constituted the largest group from an A8 country entering Britain. Between 2003 and 2010, the Polish-born population of the UK increased from 75 000 to 532 000 (ONS 2011b). It was estimated that, in 2015, the most common non-British nationality was Polish, with 916 000 residents or 16.5 per cent of the total non-British national population resident in the UK (ONS 2015), although these data do not record the length of stay and there is limited knowledge of how many have left the UK. According to 2011 census data, Polish migrants have the highest birth rate amongst other migrant groups in the UK (ONS 2011c) and the Polish language has become the most commonly spoken non-native language in England and Wales (ONS 2011a).

In the post-2004 period, Manchester has witnessed the arrival of Polish migrants, amongst other A8 nationals, who have contributed to a greater diversity of the city. The official statistics on the their number and distribution are limited – according to Manchester City Council (2015: 29) data, Polish migrants constituted 1.2 per cent of Manchester's population and 0.8 per cent of that of Greater Manchester (based on self-descriptions). Polish is the second most-common language spoken in Manchester other than English. Polish residents are dispersed across Manchester and the area of Greater Manchester, although the City Centre ward and Cheetham are described as popular with the Polish community (Manchester City Council 2015). It is a city with a migration-friendly narrative characterised by wide support from local government (Smith 2010).

Polish migrants, as well as many other EU migrants, have been in a position of privilege in terms of the legal, social, cultural and racial capital closely linked to their Europeaness and whiteness (Burrell and Schweyher 2019). Nevertheless, Brexit might mean the removal of these protective privileges – which are linked to their EU citizenship status granted in 2004. Furthermore, despite their assumed whiteness, the Polish presence has become particularly visible across the UK, with Polish shops in most towns and cities, community centres, Polish Saturday schools, as well as visibly distinctive Polish surnames. This visible and audible difference has often been racialised, particularly in the context of Brexit (Rzepnikowska 2018b).

Post-accession migration has initially been considered as 'fluid migration' (Grabowska-Lusińska and Okólski 2009) with no settlement goal and an undefined time period; it is associated with short-term, temporary and circular migration. Burrell (2010) reviewed previous studies which considered whether post-accession migration marks a new type of movement or whether it is temporary. The answer, however, for Burrell, is not so straightforward, as 'post-accession migrants are a diverse, not entirely predictable, population, all existing within the same economic framework but formulating different strategies of migration and return' (Burrell 2010: 299). Their intentions concerning the length of their stay will change over time (Ryan 2018; Spencer, Ruhs, Anderson and Rogaly 2007). Ruhs (2006) argues that post-2004 flows would not necessarily be as short-term as had been expected. While the impact of Brexit might affect settlement plans due to restricted mobility, the majority of my participants felt that they were settled in the UK and their local areas and were here to stay. Only two of my interviewees left the UK for family reasons. One of them obtained British citizenship, which gave her the unrestricted option of return to the UK in the future. Nevertheless, in most cases, Brexit has introduced a disruption in the continued security of Polish migrants as citizens (Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019).

My interviews before and after the EU referendum revealed that the length of residence in particular places – whether their local area or their workplace – and their relations with the local people both play a crucial role

in influencing the Poles' experiences of the conviviality that develops over time; this, in turn, can affect their sense of belonging, both in their neighbourhood and in the UK as a whole.

Conviviality: conceptual considerations

In recent years, a growing number of scholars have focused on exploring conviviality and discussing ways of living together in urban spaces, where diverse groups and individuals coexist in multicultural cities (Gilroy 2004; Heil 2015; Karner and Parker 2011; Morawska 2014; Neal, Bennett, Cochrane and Mohan 2018; Wessendorf 2014a, b; Wise and Velayutham 2014). As Nowicka and Vertovec (2013: 341) point out, 'conviviality across a number of disciplines now conveys a deeper concern with the human condition and how we think about human modes of togetherness'. However, conviviality should be placed in a wider historical context which influences the complexity of encounters with difference. Gilroy (2004) discusses two concepts: on the one hand, postcolonial melancholia – defining guilt and grief over the lost British Empire – and, on the other, conviviality. Gilroy (2006a: 2) argues that some European nations have been unable to get past their 'loss of global pre-eminence'; this inability then leads to 'all sorts of pathological features in their contemporary encounters with strangers'. Brexit became a symbolic marker of nostalgia for Britain's lost imperial past.¹ Gilroy (2004: xi) considers conviviality as the alternative to postcolonial melancholia – stressing the significance of how ordinary people manage tensions through the practice of living together – and defines it as 'the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multicultural an ordinary feature of urban life in Britain's urban areas'. For Gilroy (2006a: 40):

Conviviality is a social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity, but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not – as the logic of ethnic absolutism suggests they must – add up to discontinuities of experience or insuperable problems of communication.

Thus, racial, linguistic and religious differences are not considered to be an obstruction to convivial experiences and communication between people who interact and live together. These two forces of postcolonial melancholia on the one hand and of convivial living on the other are often at play, and the relationship between the two is paradoxical and defined by ongoing tensions (Back and Sinha 2016). Similarly, Neal *et al.* (2018: 29) consider conviviality as 'a mode of togetherness but one saturated with and defined by ambivalence – tension, conflict, engagement and collaboration'. Hence, conviviality, in this article, is explored as a process of interaction that is not always free from racism and tensions (Gilroy 2004; Karner and Parker 2011; Nayak 2017; Neal *et al.* 2018; Nowicka and Vertovec 2013; Rishbeth and Rogaly 2018; Rzepnikowska 2019; Wise and Velayutham 2014).

While Gilroy focuses mainly on the postcolonial context, convivial encounters can no longer be solely explored in the context of a diversity conventionally characterised by the presence of African-Caribbean and South Asian communities from Commonwealth countries or former colonies but must also be seen through the lens of super-diversity as the result of an increase in migrants of different ethnic origins, with their diverse migration histories and their various characteristics such as gender, age, religion, language, education, legal status and economic background (Vertovec 2007). This includes Polish migrants who constitute a large proportion of ethnic minorities in the UK.

Conviviality can also be better conceptualised by drawing on the meaning of the Spanish word *convivir*, which allows us to understand conviviality as a mode of living together. In Latin, *convīv(ere)* means to live together (*con* 'with' + *vīvere* 'to live'). In their analysis of the word *convivencia*, Giménez Romero and Lorés Sánchez (2007: 78) also refer to the Latin origin of the word and stress the Spanish interpretation of it as

‘*acción de convivir*’ (action of living together) or ‘*relación entre los que conviven*’ (relations between those who live together). Therefore, I use the term ‘convivial’, as informed by the idea of *convivir*, to describe the relations of living and interacting together in shared spaces. Furthermore, my conceptualisation of conviviality considers geographies of encounter, a body of work focusing on encounters with difference in urban spaces and seeking to document how people negotiate difference in their daily lives (Amin 2002; Rzepnikowska 2018b; Valentine 2008; Wilson 2016). It concentrates on cities as spaces of encounters between people from different backgrounds and highlights the importance of gendered spaces – often overlooked in debates on geographies of encounter. In my previous work (Rzepnikowska 2018a), I used the concept of situated conviviality, which I further develop here, because my research shows that conviviality is highly dynamic, contextual and characterised by spatio-temporal dynamics.

I argue in this paper that conviviality is a useful conceptual tool in the context of Brexit, as it allows us to consider the complexity of migrant experiences and the changing nature of everyday social relations in these times of Brexit uncertainties and tensions. Nevertheless, scant attention has been paid to conviviality in the context of Brexit. My previous work (Rzepnikowska 2019) highlighted the fact that the racist and xenophobic violence experienced by Polish migrants has been particularly notable since the Brexit vote. Furthermore, based on interviews with EU nationals in 2016 and 2017, Guma and Dafydd Jones (2019) explore the various experiences of hostility and violence encountered by these migrants both during and after the referendum campaign. Burnett (2017) and Komaromi and Singh (2016) also focus on how the wave of post-Brexit-vote hostility revealed the extent of the racism and xenophobia which affected migrants and settled ethnic minorities, including British citizens. In the context in which Brexit produces tensions and divisions, other research shows how it also strengthened co-national relations and solidarity with other Poles (Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019). This paper, however, shows a greater complexity of migrant experiences, the changing nature of encounters in the context of Brexit and the possibilities of more resilient forms of conviviality, experienced in different places and able to thrive in uncertain times. In addition, it stresses the importance of conviviality in understanding how migrants negotiate belonging and attachment to local people and places and the possible impact it can have on their settlement in the context of Brexit.

The research

My initial research, conducted in 2012/13, focused on different forms and degrees of conviviality in various city spaces and in the workplace by exploring the narratives of Polish migrant women in Manchester and Barcelona; it included participant observation, focus groups and narrative interviews. The interviews in Manchester included 21 Polish migrant women who were resident there and who entered Britain either just before or just after Poland joined the EU. I maintained contact with 15 of the 21 interviewees and contacted them again in 2017/18 to discover the impact which Brexit was having on their everyday experiences. The non-representative sample is varied, as it included Polish migrant women of different age, class, education level, family status and length of residence. The project received an approval from a relevant academic ethical review committee. The participants were interviewed at the place of their choice after signing the informed consent form which included information on anonymity and confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the research at any time. Initially, my research was not designed as longitudinal. As Ryan, Rodriguez, and Trevena (2016) point out, it would have been difficult to plan a longitudinal study considering the temporariness and uncertainty of Polish migrants’ trajectories. This paper draws on the data gathered during both stages of my research, with the qualitative interviews examined through narrative analysis and focusing on how the participants tell their stories and what is important to them. I chose narrative analysis because it allowed me to use a person-

and case-centred approach and to concentrate on how the interviewees interpret and make sense of their experiences of everyday encounters in various parts of the city. Here, I mainly focus on the accounts of Renia, Nikola, Krysia and Oliwia (pseudonyms), illustrating how different local contexts, class dynamics and spatially distinct inequalities may influence migrants' experiences, relations with the local population and sense of safety and belonging.

The interviewees were aware of anti-migrant sentiment in the run-up to and the aftermath of the EU referendum. Several were fearful of the post-Brexit racism and xenophobia which they had heard about in the media or from family and friends. Uncertainty about the future in the light of Brexit has bred further anxiety and distress. Nevertheless, going back to Poland was usually not considered a good option because they felt settled in the UK or felt discouraged by the current situation in their country of origin. Their complex experiences in the context of Brexit have been very much influenced by class and temporal dynamics and by the areas where they live and interact with the local residents. Their narratives show both tension, hostility, racism and various forms of conviviality, all holding up against exclusionary anti-immigration discourses.

Conviviality under threat?

Renia's story

My research participants were aware of anti-migrant sentiment in the run up to and the aftermath of the EU referendum, some experienced post-Brexit racism and xenophobia. This was particularly Renia's experience. Renia, one of the oldest interviewees, in her sixties, experienced both conviviality and racism in her immediate neighbourhood in Ashton, Greater Manchester, both before and after Brexit. In her area, 61.1 per cent voted to leave, with all the wards, including Renia's, having a majority leave vote. As mentioned earlier, the leave vote was associated with a longstanding frustration over immigration in the more deprived parts of Greater Manchester. This can be linked to economic insecurity and the established population's concerns about immigration (Storm 2015), combined with a negative public, media and political rhetoric which developed over the years and marked immigration as one of the top issues for British people at the time of the EU referendum.

Renia's positive relations with her neighbours of a similar age, both before and after the Brexit vote, were overshadowed by xenophobic harassment by white British youth. It happened on different occasions, both long before the EU referendum – as she recounted in her first interview in 2013 – and just after the Brexit vote. This continued for months, until the caretaker intervened six months before our interview in 2018. This ongoing hostility affected Renia's everyday life. Even though the harassment stopped, Renia noticed that her relations with other neighbours were not the same after the Brexit vote in 2016. She noticed that a close neighbour, a white British woman, was no longer as welcoming and friendly as she used to be:

Everything changes. It constantly fluctuates. A neighbour who has been living here for several years, always used to talk to me, you know, she asked 'How are you, how is it going, is everything OK?' and everything was fine. Now, when I see her, she turns her head away and pretends she doesn't see me. I think that there starts to be a tendency of negative sentiment towards migrants because of Brexit. I can't tell you that this is 100 per cent the case, but I have this feeling based on people's attitudes.

This indicates how dynamic conviviality is and how it can be limited by specific events at certain times and in certain places. It illustrates how daily encounters are marked with tensions. As Neal *et al.* (2018: 38) point out, 'conviviality speaks to the unpredictable experiences and responses to urban multicultural'.

Renia does not work because of health issues but she was particularly concerned about and affected by her husband's experiences at his workplace after the Brexit vote in June 2016. As shown in other research, work has constituted a core aspect of living in the UK and the workplace became one of the most hostile environments, particularly for those in lower-paid jobs (Burrell and Schweyher 2019). Renia told me about an incident at her husband's workplace (a meat-processing plant in Greater Manchester) the day after the EU referendum, when several white British workers celebrated the Brexit vote victory and verbally assaulted migrant workers of Central and Eastern European origins. The chants included a racist slur: 'No more Polish vermin' which seems to originate from the racist incident in Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire. At this incident, laminated cards in English and Polish with the words 'Leave the EU / No more Polish vermin' were left outside primary schools and posted through the letterboxes of Polish people. Even though racism and xenophobia were not new to Renia and her husband, they had not experienced it on such a scale before the Brexit vote. This reflects how the imagined British 'we' during and after Brexit excludes those Polish and other non-UK EU citizens from post-accession countries who were, initially, seen as potentially able to belong to the British 'we' (Rzepnikowska 2019). The Brexit vote contributed to the construction of an imaginary national boundary line. In this example, EU workers are homogenised and considered as non-belonging, even though they still have the right to remain in the UK. This reflects the 'Leave; campaign's implicit discourses on race and migration, on who belongs and has rights and who does not, and is closely linked to the slogan: 'We want our country back' (Bhambra 2017: 91). Anti-migrant sentiment in the context of Brexit illustrates 'a more complicated racial stratification than is sometimes acknowledged (...) Eastern European whiteness in a Western European context carries with it further, emplaced, geopolitical racial connotations' (Burrell and Hopkins 2019: 4).

Renia's account also shows how migration, race, class and place are interconnected in the context of Brexit (Burrell and Hopkins 2019). While the so-called white (English) working class has often been labelled as racist and xenophobic, both in the context of Brexit and beyond, it is important to acknowledge that it is often working-class people, including ethnic minorities, who are amongst those the most affected by exclusionary politics such as austerity and anti-immigrant right-wing populism. The racialised and politicised discourse of the 'left behind' associated with the Brexit vote is closely attached to the category of the English white working-class, constructed as neglected in favour of migrants and ethnic minorities, even though deprivation also largely affects these latter communities (Isakjee and Lorne 2019; Khan and Shaheen 2017).² While the poorer sections of British society have been blamed for the Brexit vote, the racism and the xenophobia aimed particularly at post-accession migrants, it must be acknowledged that there was also a large middle-class 'Leave' vote; the lowest two social classes accounted for less than a quarter of the total Brexit vote (Dorling 2016).

Even though Renia's husband's employers responded to the incident by organising a staff meeting and explaining that similar behaviour would not be tolerated, everything changed after the incident. While there have always been some divisions at her husband's workplace, she gives here some examples of conviviality which was later disrupted by hostility in the light of the Brexit vote.

I don't work there but I'm affected by this. (...) They were always told to integrate. There was never such a huge division. My husband was better integrated with the British workers than with the Poles. (...) He preferred working with the Brits and singing with them on a Friday. (...) When Friday was coming, they were so happy at the production line. He preferred to goof around with them. He felt better in their company. (...) Now he feels some discomfort because he feels that he works the way he did before but they [the English co-workers] don't want him anymore. (...) They no longer sit together at the canteen. The relations changed completely. Everything changes.

Renia's narrative illustrates the fragile and temporary nature of workplace conviviality (see Rzepnikowska 2017 for a more detailed discussion), disrupted as it is by social inequality, exclusion and anti-migrant sentiment, all of which significantly increased at the time of the EU referendum. Renia felt that this deeply affected her and her husband and, as a result, they experienced a sense of disconnection to both their neighbourhood and the workplace. This, in turn, strongly influenced their sense of not belonging and added to their uncertainty over Brexit. Renia's account also highlights the emotional impact of Brexit on the changing relations between migrants and the native population, which triggered feelings of being unwanted and rejected. Recent research shows that non-UK EU citizens feel anxious, betrayed, undervalued and disempowered by Brexit and the prolonged negotiation process, and are uncertain about how Brexit will affect their lives, and future, in the UK (Botterill and Burrell 2019; Duda-Mikulin 2019; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle, Moroşanu and King 2018; Sigona 2018; Trevena 2018). This is echoed in Renia's narrative:

I applied for Permanent Residence, I submitted the online application two months ago. But my children didn't. They think that there is no need, but I feel that I have to. And this is the difference. My daughter and her husband bought a house. My younger daughter bought a flat. But my husband and I live in [social] housing [a my mieszkamy w hażingu], and we actually don't have anything here and we hardly speak any English. I feel very insecure [zagrożona] and they don't. And here you have a different way of thinking. It depends on the company and the people you work with. My husband comes back very distressed because he has started to feel unwanted for the first time in the last 12 years, as if he were no longer needed, but he is a really good and skilled worker.

This shows the importance of considering economic and cultural capital in understanding the impact of Brexit on migrants and their sense of insecurity. The possession of economic (property ownership) and cultural (speaking English) capital determines people's positions of power in specific fields. These forms of capital and the interplay between them, can be considered important in building a sense of security and belonging. Scarce economic capital can cause feelings of insecurity and powerlessness, of losing the right to live in the UK – therefore permanent residency / settled status is being sought in order to secure that right. This can particularly affect women and older migrants who might not be engaged in the paid labour market (Duda-Mikulin 2019), as is in the case for Renia due to her chronic illness. The process of obtaining permanent residence or settled status excludes a number of people, including female migrants who are homemakers or carers, those who are in unregulated work, and those who are disabled. This puts them in a particularly vulnerable position in the context of Brexit (see also Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019). This vulnerability, linked with the lower social status of migrants like Renia and her husband, contributes to the feeling of being unwanted, which can also affect their relations with their co-workers and neighbours. Hence, conviviality cannot be explored without considering socio-economic inequalities. This is in sharp contrast to the experiences of Renia's daughter and her husband, who own their own property and are highly skilled workers. According to Renia, they do not perceive Brexit as a threat to their socio-economic and legal status. Nor did they experienced xenophobic attitudes at their workplace following the EU referendum. Renia recognised the different class dynamics of workplace interactions following the Brexit vote. As Burrell and Schweyher (2019) point out, it is the most vulnerable who are affected by the hostile environment agenda (and its consequences) forged by the UK government, rather than those in more secure work and housing positions.

Renia's post-Brexit-vote experiences of uncertainty in terms of relations with the local population and her socio-economic situation made her feel like she does not belong. On the other hand, she does not consider returning to Poland as she is disappointed by the current situation in her country following the electoral victory

of the Polish populist Law and Justice Party (PiS) in September 2015, and the country's intensifying xenophobia (Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016; see also Nowicka 2018). Renia is aware of anti-migrant sentiments in both Poland and the UK and this strongly affects her sense of non-belonging. These dynamics in both sending and receiving countries complicate post-accession mobility in the context of Brexit. Renia's example shows how Brexit may constitute a potential threat to conviviality and a more inclusive society, particularly in the areas marked by tensions and socio-economic inequality. This is where policy intervention is needed to address these inequalities and promote mutual understanding and dialogue.

Nikola's story

Nikola's case is very different to that of Renia. Nikola, an office worker in her late thirties, is significantly younger than Renia and her socio-economic situation and experiences of conviviality are also very different. She first arrived in the UK as a tourist. She did not want to stay but the friend whom she was visiting found her a temporary job. Nikola then decided to stay for a bit longer in order to learn the language. She attended a language course and planned to return to Poland one year later. She changed jobs several times and lived in various areas of Manchester, sharing accommodation first with other people and, later, with a British boyfriend who is now her husband. She improved her English and pursued further study. As time went by, Nikola's temporary plans turned into a long-term stay and possibly permanent settlement, especially after she married, bought a house with her husband and became pregnant. In our interview in 2012 she recounted a gruesome experience of racist and xenophobic violence which left her traumatised for a long period of time. When I contacted her in 2018 to find out about her experiences in the context of Brexit, she was living with her husband in a house they had bought in a suburban area of Manchester which she described as a bohemian neighbourhood. Nikola emphasised that, even though she was aware of the negative sentiments towards Polish migrants in the context of Brexit, she told me that she thought that the attitudes of people living in her area did not change for the worse. In analysing the impact of Brexit, as seen in Renia's case, the importance of place and class dynamics needs to be taken into consideration. Several participants at both stages of my research noticed the absence of any negative discourse about Polish migrants in the more affluent areas characterised by the absence of competition for jobs. Despite her previous experiences of racism and xenophobia, Nikola felt safe in her local area. Renia's and Nikola's accounts show how different local contexts, class dynamics and spatially distinct inequalities may influence the experiences of migrants, their relations with the local population and their sense of safety and belonging.

Unlike Renia, who lived on a council estate characterised by local tensions and social inequality, Nikola felt that she became more attached to her neighbourhood, especially after buying her own property together with her husband and when their family was about to enlarge. This contributed to an increased sense of security and stability. Because of this, she was also not concerned about her legal status in the light of Brexit. This contrasts with Renia's uncertain situation and shows the importance of economic and cultural capital, life-stage and spatio-temporal characteristics. It is important to point out that stay-at-home migrant mothers, and parents in general, could be the most at risk of falling through the cracks of the new system of applying for legal settlement in the context of Brexit.

Nikola's case highlights the importance of family and social-network formation which can lead to longer or permanent settlement (see also Ryan 2018). Nikola's acquaintances in the local area expanded further after meeting other mothers-to-be through antenatal classes and activities. These social connections in a local community constitute important resources with which to establish anchors (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018). After becoming mothers, women start using their neighbourhood more intensely than before and seek out other

mothers to spend time with (Byrne 2006; Fenster 2005; Ryan 2018; Ryan, Sales, Tilki and Siara 2009; Rzepnikowska 2018a; Wessendorf 2014b). As discussed in my earlier work (Rzepnikowska 2018a), motherly conviviality highlights a connection between motherly activities, spaces for mothers and conviviality, including nurseries, schools and children's centres where parents and children meet others from different backgrounds. Interaction through school encounters may also permit migrant mothers to develop new forms of social learning. Similarly, based on the study of encounters in the lives of young British Bangladeshi Muslim women, Nayak (2017: 294) claims that 'the school functions as a microcosm for multicultural interaction and lively encounters'. My interviewees established strong links with other mothers from various backgrounds on the basis of their shared experiences of being migrant mothers; indeed, some migrant mothers created opportunities for cross-cultural interaction between those from various backgrounds, thus facilitating conviviality. For Nikola, becoming a mother allowed her to get to know other mothers in her neighbourhood through children's activities and this offered her a greater sense of belonging and attachment which may then contribute to a more permanent settlement. My earlier research (Rzepnikowska 2018a) illustrates the possibility of the multi-sitedness of convivial encounters involving interaction with other mothers at the adult education college, at the school gates and at home. This interaction takes place in different but connected spaces. Motherly conviviality transcends a single place of interaction and reflects the interconnection of several spaces. The proximity of my participants' residential area to the school and the college, and the same spaces being used for similar activities by different individuals, all facilitate this interconnection (Neal *et al.* 2013).

Some migrant mothers can be excluded from the spaces mentioned above due to class dynamics. For instance, existing research shows how Roma mothers may be affected by isolation due to their lower levels of employment and their limited social contact beyond their existing networks, as well as lower levels of spoken English which restrict their engagement with schools (Manzoni and Rolfe 2019). Similarly, in Wilson's (2013) study on parental encounters with difference at a Birmingham primary school, Asian parents were considered by British parents to be refusing to get involved in the running of the school and its extra-curricular activities. However, the reasons behind their 'not contributing' were potential language barriers, socio-economic differences and other forms of exclusion.

Sustained neighbourly conviviality

Krysia's story

Most of my interviewees experienced neighbourly conviviality, which included often underestimated fleeting but regular encounters allowing them to become familiar with their neighbours. Laurier and Philo (2006) argue that low-level sociability should not be underestimated as it represents mutual acknowledgement. Similarly, Boyd (2006) discusses the importance of civility in facilitating fleeting and superficial social interactions between urban dwellers, involving basic mutual respect. In line with Lofland's (1989) argument that fleeting relationships can be transformed into more sociable forms, my research shows that fleeting encounters between neighbours may lead to more meaningful forms of contact and a sense of belonging which develops over time as the residents become more familiar with each other (see also Wilson 2016). This is particularly evident in Krysia's case, discussed in this section.

Krysia is in her mid-50s. She arrived in 2006 and moved into a studio flat in northern Manchester. Then, following the arrival of her son and grandson, they moved to a house in an inner-city area in northern Manchester, which is one of the most ethnically diverse as a result of several waves of immigration to Britain. I met Krysia in 2013 in a Polish shop. She was very keen to share her experiences of living in the area and

invited me to her rented home. Like Renia, Krysia is one of the oldest participants in my sample and is currently unemployed due to ill health. Yet, her experiences in the light of Brexit are very different to Renia's.

Krysia's narrative from 2013 demonstrated how convivial interaction in her immediate neighbourhood developed, over time, from adaptation practices – which involved observing and following certain norms – into instances of cooperation, interdependence, gift-giving and exchange, which are more meaningful forms of contact (Rzepnikowska 2019). Her narrative is also an example of the transformative potential of convivial encounters (see also Nayak 2017) as, initially, Krysia did not feel welcomed by her neighbours. When I contacted Krysia in 2018, she was still living in the same place. Her relations with her neighbours had not been negatively affected by the Brexit vote, although she had been aware of anti-Polish sentiment at the time of the EU referendum in 2016. In fact, she felt that these neighbourly relations had become even stronger in recent years, with an emphasis on the length of time spent living in the same area:

Nothing much changed in our neighbourhood. God, I would wish everyone to have neighbours like ours. We are closer than before, and I can count on them. (...) They aren't happy with Brexit, at least not those who live next to us. They don't approve of it. They voted against it. We have been living here for nearly 12 years, so we can talk about everything. We like each other. They like us. (...) We saw stuff about Poles on the Internet, in the newspapers; we heard about it [anti-Polish sentiment]. We were saying all the time with my [Polish] friend [living with Krysia], 'Jesus, thanks God we live in this neighbourhood which is different to what you hear', it's a neighbour-friendly area. Even a bit further away in the shops [people are friendly]. We don't feel discriminated [against]. We didn't experience it at the time when anti-Polish sentiment was more intense.

Conviviality in Krysia's example is socially, spatially and temporally constituted. It illustrates a stronger sense of belonging in the context of Brexit. Everyday convivial relations between Krysia and her neighbours play a crucial role in building this sense of belonging, which can be understood as 'a dynamic emotional attachment that relates people to the material and social worlds that they inhabit and experience. It is about feeling "at home" and "secure", but it is equally about being recognised and understood' (Wood and Waite 2011: 201). Building connections and trust across ethnic lines plays an important role in Krysia's growing sense of rootedness and attachment in her local area despite the Brexit uncertainties.

As in her first interview, in 2013, Krysia explained how her neighbourhood had become a space of co-operation, inter-dependence, care and trust, where the residents not only come together to make their area safer but also support each other:

It's important that I can count on my neighbours; that they keep an eye on my house and I keep an eye on theirs when they are away. There is this, you know, neighbourly trust. This is very important. It is a different kind of conviviality [współżycie] between us and the English neighbours. (...) We go out to the garden, greet each other, ask if everything is fine, about health, I make a cake... Our neighbour's wife died about three years ago so when I make some food, I share it with him. When his daughter comes with the children, he brings us some cake (...) if any help is needed, we help one another. (...) When an ambulance arrived to take Mirek [Krysia's friend and housemate] to the hospital when he was ill, I couldn't speak [English] properly because of nerves (...) so both neighbours came to help.

These practices demonstrate that the neighbourhood can become a space of co-operation, care and trust. As Bridge (2002: 25) has suggested 'the neighbourhood provides the realm of practical relations involving the exchange of small services as well as convivial relations that might contribute to a diffuse feeling of security

and well-being'. Krysia's narrative is a good example of a thriving neighbourly conviviality which develops over time and endures despite exclusionary anti-immigration rhetoric. In fact, it is possible that, paradoxically, these exclusionary discourses strengthen the existing conviviality. In this example, stronger bonds are formed in response to the challenges of Brexit.

Oliwia's story

The sense of safety was particularly important for my interviewees in the context of their local areas after the Brexit vote, as seen above. This was particularly visible in Oliwia's narrative. As other participants discussed in this paper, Oliwia (in her late thirties), who had lived with her husband in an inner-city area of southern part of Manchester since 2010, was aware of anti-immigrant sentiment in the run up to and after the EU referendum and this triggered a sense of fear and uncertainty about the future, feelings shared by several other interviewees:

When the results were announced I was a bit afraid and I started to feel uncertain. (...) I started to think what would change and how quickly changes would happen. For the first few days I had to get used to this new and uncertain situation. I was wondering if the welcoming England would change for the worse.

Oliwia's case raises question about how difference is perceived in and through place. In contrast to Renia's experiences, Oliwia did not experience racism or xenophobia in her ethnically mixed neighbourhood. She told me how surprised she was when her acquaintances apologised for the referendum results and reassured her that Britain was still her home and she was welcome to stay. It was important for her to hear this in the context of increasing hostility towards Polish people after the referendum. This act of solidarity was reassuring and made Oliwia feel less unwelcome. She assumed that she did not experience anti-Polish sentiment possibly because she thought she did not 'look Polish'. She pointed out that, because of her darker complexion, she has often been perceived as Spanish or South-East Asian. She felt that she blended in well in her ethnically mixed area. This, again, shows how different localities may influence the experiences of migrants and their relations with the local population. Oliwia's case adds some complexity to the debates on racialisation and the misrecognition of East Europeans (see Fox, Moroşanu and Szilassy 2012; Hopkins, Botterill, Sanghera and Arshad 2017), and shows how convivial living in multicultural cities is eminently possible.

Oliwia thought that it was much safer for her to stay in the UK than to go back to Poland because of the growing hostility to ethno-national and religious minorities in her country of origin (ECRI 2015; Kornak, Tatar and Pankowski 2016) and because of her darker complexion. Even though some of my participants thought of going back to Poland or, like Oliwia, moving to another country, they said that a move was not as straightforward as that because some of their children were born and had grown up in the UK, and attend school there. Hence, some mothers did not want to disrupt these attachments. Despite these local connections, developed over the years, and the granting of British citizenship, Oliwia moved to another EU country after her husband was offered a job there. Nevertheless, Oliwia told me that, thanks to her British citizenship, she would be able to return to the UK in the future despite Brexit uncertainties. The new legal status and higher socio-economic position of Oliwia and her husband in comparison to Renia's puts them in a more privileged position and allows them more freedom in keeping the different options open.

Conclusions

The concept of conviviality has opened up a new understanding of living with difference which emerges from interaction between different groups and individuals in multicultural societies. The growing interest in the

concept across various disciplines in recent years indicates that conviviality emerges in many societies and reflects the importance of studying this mode of living together. Nevertheless, the tendency to focus on problematic relations obscures current debates. By the same token, idealising urban encounters disguises hierarchies of power and inequality. This paper contributes to the field of studies on the conviviality experienced by post-accession migrants by adding more empirical depth to this concept. My findings illustrate various forms of conviviality – at times fragile and situated in particular times and places – and provide examples of the practices that underpin it. They highlight the role of shared spaces, including the immediate neighbourhood, spaces for mothers and their children, and the workplace in bringing diverse populations together.

The aim of this article was to apply the concept of conviviality in understanding the impact of Brexit on the changing social relations between Polish migrant women and the local population in Manchester. This approach provides an opportunity to capture the complexity of living together in uncertain times, a complexity influenced by spatio-temporal, class dynamics and discourses on immigration and socio-economic inequality. Brexit, a macro-level political phenomenon, has inevitably influenced everyday social relations at both individual and local levels. Brexit was present in the lived experiences of migrants as they talked about their daily encounters, sense of safety/uncertainty, belonging / not belonging and connection with / disconnection from their local community.

Even though there are some similarities in the experiences of my participants in the context of Brexit, there are important differences. Renia's narrative illustrated the co-existence of conviviality, tensions and racism in her immediate neighbourhood in Greater Manchester and in her husband's workplace, an area characterised by a significant leave vote. As discussed earlier in this paper, conviviality is a dynamic and ongoing process without any guarantees. The current crisis in Brexit Britain has been marked by racism and insular nationalism (Virdee and McGeever 2018), posing a significant challenge to conviviality. Brexit has revealed and (re)produced divisions (Anderson and Wilson 2018; Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019). These were particularly discussed in the context of specific places, mainly in deprived neighbourhoods (Rzepnikowska 2018b) and workplaces offering low-paid manual jobs, where new racialised hierarchies in the post-referendum era are present. Renia's case highlighted how less-visible minorities can become racialised and experience racism and xenophobia in both the neighbourhood and the workplace. Such an experience can contribute to feelings of rejection and a sense of not belonging and detachment, which were also intensified by uncertainty and anxiety around their future rights and status, earlier afforded by EU citizenship. This highlights the importance of place, race, ethnicity and class in discussions on conviviality and Brexit and raises issues of inequality and hierarchies.

In contrast, other accounts in this paper show various examples of conviviality, from fleeting encounters to more meaningful and sustained forms of living together, promoting a sense of safety, trust, belonging and attachment. This adds some complexity to earlier debates on disconnection, rejection and alienation in wider neighbourhood communities in the context of Brexit (see Botterill, McCollum and Tyrrell 2019). These various forms of conviviality are characterised by varying degrees of engagement with difference. The very diverse migrant experiences explored in this paper show different forms of the lived experience and this reminds us that, alongside racism, conflict and practices of classed and ethnicised avoidance, there is clear evidence of often-overlooked conviviality. Krysia's narrative shows a great example of a sustained neighbourly conviviality resisting racism and xenophobia and characterised by habitual interactions between neighbours, trust and acts of care and kindness. Her account shows the possibility of maintaining social connections and a sense of rootedness and belonging in the context of Brexit. This challenges divisive public and political discourses in the Brexit era linked with the racialised politics of English nationalism (Virdee and McGeever 2018) which hinder a constructive engagement with difference (Heil 2015) – and reveals a more resilient form of conviviality which is able to thrive in uncertain times.

The interviewees' experiences discussed here show the situatedness of conviviality within geographical, social and temporal contexts. Situated conviviality is 'local and specific', 'not something that can be replicated in a programmatic way' (Wise and Velayutham 2014: 425). This paper has illustrated conviviality as a spatially bounded concept occurring in particular sites, including immediate neighbourhoods and spaces for mothers such as nurseries, schools and children's centres. Motherly conviviality transcends a single place of interaction and reflects the interconnection of different spaces (Neal *et al.* 2013). Hence, this paper contributes to the existing literature on conviviality and migrant experiences by recognising the spatiality of convivial relations, closely linked with the dynamics of race, ethnicity, gender and class, keeping in mind that some migrants might be excluded from certain spaces. Conviviality evolves as time goes by, showing the possibility of building up resilience to everyday racism and anti-migrant discourse in the context of Brexit and of everyday boundary-crossings, which have the potential to break through racialised discourses at the local level. Sustained conviviality developed over time may contribute to a growing sense of rootedness and the attachment of migrants in their local area despite uncertainties over Brexit. This means that they are likely to be settled on a more permanent basis, contrary to earlier assumptions about post-accession migrants being in the UK on a temporary basis. This, however, requires further longitudinal research.

Finally, while there are some commonalities in the experiences of A8 migrants in terms of their response to Brexit (feelings of insecurity about the future and experiences of racism and xenophobia following the EU referendum), the diverse migrant experiences and trajectories explored in this paper through the lens of conviviality suggest the need to unpack and differentiate both between and within EU migrant groups. Their complex and diverse experiences, various socio-economic and legal statuses, age and gender indicate that they should not be treated as homogenous groups and more attention should be paid to these different categories, their personal biographies, spatio-temporal dynamics and spatially distinct inequalities.

Notes

¹ The Leave campaign during the EU referendum in June 2016 is a good example of the prevalence of imperial and colonial nostalgia in British politics. The memories of the Empire informed how UKIP and Conservative Brexiters imagined Britain's future out of the EU, with an end to uncontrolled EU immigration and strengthened ties with Commonwealth states in the aftermath of the Brexit vote (see Ashe 2016). This strategy is known as 'Empire 2.0'.

² As in Renia's case, migrants and ethnic minorities in the UK also constitute the category of working class, even though this is often unacknowledged.


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Going Back, Staying Put, Moving On: Brexit and the Future Imaginaries of Central and Eastern European Young People in Britain

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This paper explores the ways in which young people aged 12 to 18 who were born in Central and Eastern European EU countries but now live in the United Kingdom construct their future imaginaries in the context of Brexit. It reports on findings from a large-scale survey, focus groups and family case studies to bring an original perspective on young migrants' plans for the future, including mobility and citizenship plans, and concerns over how Britain's decision to leave the European Union might impact them. While most of the young people planned to stay in Britain for the immediate future, it was clear that Brexit had triggered changes to their long-term plans. These concerns were linked to uncertainties over access to education and the labour market for EU nationals post-Brexit, the precarity of their legal status and their overall concerns over an increase in racism and xenophobia. While our young research participants expressed a strong sense of European identity, their imaginaries rarely featured 'going back' to their country of birth and instead included narratives of moving on to more attractive, often unfamiliar, destinations. The reasons and dynamics behind these plans are discussed by drawing on theories of transnational belonging.

Keywords: Eastern European migrants, future imaginaries, belonging, transnationalism, Brexit

Introduction

Research on transnational families has highlighted the efforts that migrants put into the maintenance of family networks at a geographical distance, giving insights into the mechanisms, processes and practices that sustain family relations and friendships across borders (Assmuth, Hakkarainen, Lulle and Siim 2018; Reynolds and Zontini 2014; Sime and Fox 2014). Once in a new country, migrants negotiate their sense of identity and

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relationships with those around them and aim for stability, security and a sense of belonging. At the same time, they continue to engage in various cross-border transactions and maintain socio-cultural identities that incorporate both country of origin and country of settlement (Haikkola 2011; Ryan 2011; White, Ní Laoire, Tyrrell and Carpena-Méndez 2011). However, adult migrants and their children often have different experiences post-migration. Their relationship with the country of birth and their new country of residence is transforming through time and their family relationships are also changing. The resources, values and practices that circulate within families have been described as a by-product of a 'transnational family habitus' (Zontini and Reynolds 2018), which young people access when they are 'doing families' transnationally. A transnational family habitus, the authors argue, is an asset that can be activated by young people whenever needed. Young people have trans-local, social and emotional connections which anchor them in two or more places. This translocal view disrupts conventional understandings of belonging and family practices tied to co-locality.

In this study, we draw on extensive research with young people aged 12 to 18 born in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), who had been living in the UK for at least three years. While still nationals of their countries of birth, they had spent at least three years and most of their lives in the United Kingdom and felt 'at home' in Britain, yet, as EU nationals, their plans for future had been altered by the so-called 'Brexit' referendum on Britain's membership to the European Union. Zontini and Però (2020) argue for renewed scrutiny of the role of public discourses on migrants' experiences, which illuminate the redrawing of the boundaries between inclusion and exclusion, especially at a time of increasingly neo-assimilationist pressures in Britain. As the data in our study were collected in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, we show how the looming possibility of Brexit and the ongoing debates on immigration had a practical and emotional impact on this generation of young people. As adolescents, at a crucial stage in their identity formation and thinking about their futures, they experienced the transition to Brexit both on a personal and on a group level, through the ongoing hostility towards migrants and the othering of EU nationals during the Brexit debates (Guma and Jones 2019; Rzepnikowska 2019).

Being from a migrant background impacts the ways in which young people think about their future and their im/mobility. In this study, we show how their sense of belonging and plans for future can be unsettled by a changing political landscape. We consider future imaginaries as wishes and plans for the future, which are shaped by young people's aspirations, desires and life trajectories as well as by what they think is possible in the current socio-political context. The certainty over the future and future imaginaries 'mould and shape who we are and the directions in which we wish, can and will go' (Cantó-Milà and Seebach 2015: 198). Given the age of our participants, we thought it was important to examine how they experienced the life transition from childhood to youth, grappling with issues of who they are, who they want to be and where they belong (Tyrrell, Sime, Kelly and McMellon 2019) in the context of Brexit. We thus explore the dynamism and contingency of young migrants' plans through changing as being not only relational and personal, but also as shaped by structural and political contexts. Brexit is a 'rupture' that appears to jeopardise their rights to education, work and citizenship, as available to them up to now through the freedom of movement in the EU (see also Lulle, Moroşanu and King 2018).

For adult EU migrants, work opportunities and better living conditions legitimise decisions to move abroad and often take their children with them (Assmuth *et al.* 2018; Vathi, 2015). At the same time, while for many adults the prospect of 'a better future' for their children plays an important role in the migration process, children's agency will vary when it comes to migration decisions (Moskal and Tyrrell 2016; Sime and Fox 2014). At times resentful of their parents' decisions and their lack of say in them, children do not always buy into their parents' imaginaries of a 'better future'. Our research involved adolescent migrants finding themselves at a critical point in their life trajectories, one at which they could envisage a future which they could influence, as their agency in the family decision-making process was increasing with age. In this context, we asked the following questions: *How do young people experience and interpret their current options and plans*

for the future, especially in relation to their mobility/immobility rights post-Brexit? How much certainty do they have over these plans? Finally, how do future imaginaries shape and are shaped by young people's sense of belonging?

The article focuses on young people's ideas about their future and describes the three types of futures that they imagined for themselves. These three imaginaries centre on their views of mobility and their rights, including uncertain rights to immobility and staying in the UK. We provide evidence of how young people explained these imaginaries and what motivated them to think of themselves as willingly or unwillingly mobile, keen or reluctant to stay or trapped in immobility. We also show the strategies adopted by these young migrants to cope with the three scenarios, which can be summed up as follows: 1) 'Going back' – imagining a move back to country of birth; 2) 'Staying put' – imagining a future in the UK; 3) 'Moving on' – imagining a future elsewhere.

Young migrants, belonging and future imaginaries

Research on young CEE migrants' imaginings of the future is limited, while adults' imaginings are better documented (Benson 2013; Guma and Jones 2019; Lulle *et al.* 2018; McGhee, Moreh and Vlachantoni 2017). Tyrrell (2013) explored the future plans of young CEE migrants who had moved to Ireland with their families. The study focused on the young people's plans for the future in the wider context of the collapse of the 'Celtic Tiger' economy; they were weighing up the perceived advantages and disadvantages of staying or leaving Ireland during the economic recession. Similarly, our young respondents can be considered to be weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of staying or leaving Britain in the context of Brexit. More recently, other authors (see Assmuth *et al.* 2018; Zontini and Però 2020) have also asked EU children to share their future imaginaries and showed the significant role played by the translocal capital which young people acquire through migration and which enables their imaginaries of what is possible in the future.

A focus on intra-EU mobility flows has meant that surprisingly little academic attention was paid initially to how European migrants negotiated attachments, belonging and processes of settling in destination countries (Ryan 2018b). While many remained firmly focused on eventually returning, they continued to postpone this or decided to settle indefinitely in the UK and bring family over. Moving with children can have an anchoring effect (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2016) for migrant adults, as they experience family life in the new country differently to migrants who are single or in couples with no children. Children attend preschool, school and social and leisure activities and forge links between their families, neighbours and local communities. However, an extended family stay cannot be simply understood as evidence of gradual 'integration' in the host society (Ryan 2018b). Such a static view of integration as permanent adjustment overlooks the ongoing spatio-temporal dynamism of migrants' complex and contingent relationships in the home and host countries (Erel and Ryan 2019).

The literature on young people and migration has often focused on children's integration within the 'host societies' and their prospective futures as adults, rather than on their immediate, direct experiences. Research with young CEE migrants in Ireland has suggested the importance of national identity as a point of fixity for young people when they migrate. Young people living transnational lives and having multiple homes across national borders helped contest ideas of declining, nationally oriented senses of belonging and attachment (Ní Laoire, Carpena-Mendez, Tyrrell and White, 2011). Transnationalism thus provides an important framework in which to understand the everyday realities of CEE migrant youth and their future imaginaries. Children and young people take part in transnational practices and have a range of transnational perspectives and emotions (Assmuth *et al.* 2018; Gardner 2012). They may, however, experience these processes in different ways to adults and this emphasises the need to explore their ideas and understandings separately and in their own right.

Transnationalism and integration are not mutually exclusive, as connections with the host society and sending nation occur concurrently (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Within the transnationalism–integration dynamic, place continues to hold an important position; residing in the place of settlement may lead to integration, although connections with the place of birth remain active (Erdal and Oeppen 2013; Ptashnick and Zuberi 2018). In the case of young people, their future imaginaries are shaped not just by their daily encounters, but also by their memories of a past in another country, or stories of a past handed down to them by adults who migrated with them or stayed behind. Migrant children’s lives are characterised by the simultaneous development of strong local connections and emplacement practices and the retention of an ongoing engagement with their areas of origin through transnational family connections. Telegdi-Csetri and Ducu (2019) argue further that the ‘otherness’ or ‘strangeness’ acquired through migration becomes a permanent trait, one to be coped with, irreducible to the emigration–immigration–repatriation axis. Translocal children are not rootless cosmopolitans but rooted individuals, whose relocation becomes a constituent factor of their lives.

A sense of the future and future imaginaries is important in the personal identity development of young people. Little, Paul, Jordens and Sayers (2002), drawing on Locke’s (1992 [1689]) influential analysis of personal identity and continuity of memory, called for an examination of psychological dis/continuities in order to understand identity development. Similarly, Demblon and D’Argembeau (2017) argued that personal identity is nurtured by memories of significant past experiences and by the imagination of meaningful events that one anticipates may happen in the future. The development of identity could be then explained as the finding of ways to preserve continuities between past memory, present experience and constructions of the future. Little *et al.* (2002) posit events of the past and present contribute thus to the continuity of memory and what we consider ourselves to be here and now; this continuity extends to the future. The future, in this sense, does not only refer to ‘plans’ or ‘expectations’ of what will happen. It involves an act of imagination, whereby we envisage, in the future, looking back at identity-defining events which have yet to occur. When individuals build plans and think of future expectations, they form the basis for the continuity into the future of a person’s lived life. In relation to our data, we show in this paper how the Brexit process can be considered as disruptive to the future imaginaries of young migrants in the UK, with consequences for their identity development as it leaves them uncertain about the direction and location of their lives. Brexit has brought wider structural shifts which can reframe and reverse migrants’ rights and attachments and influence their sense of identity and agency, as well as the sense of what they would like and can realistically chose for their future (Cantó-Milá and Seebach 2015).

Methodology

In order to provide an empirically informed perspective on research on future imaginaries and their importance to individuals, we draw here on quantitative and qualitative research with young people who had moved to the UK as children from Central and Eastern Europe. The original project (‘Here to Stay? Identity, Belonging and Citizenship among Eastern European Settled Migrant Children in the UK’) used multiple methods to explore the lives of young migrants, aged 12–18, who had lived in the UK for at least three years. An online survey took place between October 2016 and April 2017, a few months after the June 2016 Brexit referendum. In total, 1 120 young people participated in the survey, with 806 full completions.¹ Advertised through schools and social media, the survey mainly attracted young people aged 16–18 (68 per cent), more female than male respondents (60 per cent) and 97 per cent – the vast majority – who identified as White. Over half of the

respondents were Polish (56 per cent), followed by Romanian (10 per cent) and Lithuanian (9 per cent) nationals. Data from the survey were analysed using descriptive statistics. The nature of the sample limits the possibilities for generalisation.

In addition to the survey, 20 focus groups were carried out with young people who met the inclusion criteria (born in a CEE country, living in the UK for at least three years), followed by 20 family case studies. The focus groups explored in detail some of the emergent issues from the survey, focusing on feelings of identity and belonging, relationships, access and use of local services and the implications of Brexit. In total, 108 young people, including 50 females and 58 male participants, all aged 12–18, were involved in focus groups between June and November 2017 across the UK. We used a toolkit for creative engagement (www.ketso.com) to allow all young people to fully participate in the group discussions. Family case studies involved 20 young individuals and their consenting family members. At first, a researcher visited the family to discuss participation, meet family members and give the young person a box with creative materials which they could use independently. Later, two family meetings were completed, which included a meeting with the young person to discuss the materials produced by them independently with the use of the ‘creativity box’ and a meeting to carry out a Ketso-mediated focus group with willing family members, including the young person. Most focus groups and case-study meetings took place in English (some case studies were carried out in other languages with an interpreter, if necessary) and were recorded and transcribed in full, in order to allow an in-depth thematic analysis.

To develop the analytical framework, several transcripts were first coded independently by the research team, who then agreed jointly on a framework for analysis to be applied to the remaining data. In order to identify young people’s future imaginaries, we scrutinised all transcripts, looking for all instances when young people talked about their future dreams, plans and aspirations. This analysis indicated that place was an important dimension of these plans, where young people connected their imaginaries of the future with the UK or elsewhere – place of birth, place of current residence and other places. Three themes are thus presented in the paper.

All appropriate ethics and local governance approvals were obtained before the project started, with approval from the University of Strathclyde’s Ethics Committee. The research followed the ethical guidelines of working with young people specified in the University’s Code of Practice on Investigations Involving Human Beings. Our participants all provided their consent before they started the online survey and at the beginning of every meeting, after having received detailed information about the project and what their involvement would require. They were also encouraged to discuss their participation with their parents/carers and parents of children under 16 involved in the case studies and focus groups also provided written consent. Consent was seen as an ongoing process, whereby we re-established participants’ willingness to continue with the meetings and their consent for us to use the data for research purposes. Participants’ names were anonymised throughout the datasets. In two cases, a disclosure of harm (bullying) made during the focus groups was brought to the attention of senior teachers.

‘Going back’ – imaginaries of return

Our participants had moved to Britain in the mid-to-late 2000s and many were now reaching adulthood and deciding on their future plans. For some, these future imaginaries were destabilised by Britain’s decision to leave the EU, while others said that their plans had not changed and they hoped for a smooth transition post-Brexit. Many said that conversations with their parents about ‘moving back’ to their birth country or staying were part of family life since the Brexit referendum. While research on return migration has shown that adults return for a variety of reasons— including improving work opportunities in their country of birth, ageing parents, changing

labour markets and much more (Kilkey and Merla, 2014; Lulle *et al.*, 2018)– we know less about the return plans of young people who migrated as children. In this sense, our data add new knowledge to existing work on return migration.

The majority of the young people displayed a sense of transnational belonging, sustained by frequent visits to their country of birth – in the survey, 78 per cent said they had visited their country of birth at least once in the previous year, while one in three said they had visited ‘a few times’ in the same period. Like in Ní Laoire *et al.*’s (2011) study of CEE young people living in Ireland, many of the young people in our study felt a sense of belonging to different places and at multiple scales. While we acknowledge that the meaning of being ‘transnational’ is contested (Ryan 2018a, b), we see our participants as having a sense of transnational belonging and engaging in ‘doing family’ transnationally (Carsten 2004). Their ability to move freely between European countries influenced their feelings of being European, whilst also having a sense of belonging to both their country of birth and Britain, as shown in this group discussion with Dagnija, 14, from Latvia and Marek, 15, from Poland:

Researcher: *Do you feel like you have another home in Latvia, or you just feel like ‘This is my home, in the UK’?*

Dagnija: *This is more of a home, Latvia’s more of a... I really don’t know. Like, I feel Latvia’s my home, too. Then here, this is where I live and stay, so...*

Marek: *I feel like I, I am, kind of belong in Poland, but I feel better here [in the UK].*

A sense of belonging often resulted from feeling connected to people and places that were familiar and welcoming (Moskal and Tyrrell 2016). In this way, our young respondents indicated that their sense of ‘home’ had changed in the past and might change again in the future. They expressed a sense of unfamiliarity with the country of birth, not only because they were losing their language skills in their parents’ home country, but also because the places they were born in were changing, too. Belonging by birth to a country was not enough to make young people think of a long-term plan to return, as these young interviewees reported in focus groups:

It feels like I should be there, but I haven’t been there for eight years and it’s just not the same. The place has changed so much because now there’s pretty much buildings everywhere. (Marek, 15, Polish, Focus Group)

I don’t have anything there. Like, I have no friends. The only thing I have is a house, and that’s it. I would be going back to nothing because I don’t know, I know hardly anything about Poland. About Polish history, the Polish language. (Antoni, 14, Polish, Focus Group)

Young people commented on how they were often asked if they were planning to ‘go back’ to their country of origin. The assumption that one’s place of birth is also where one feels that one belongs was implicit in these everyday encounters. However, being told to ‘go back’ was also used as a form of xenophobic slur in the schools and communities the young people attended, especially since the referendum on Brexit:

Sometimes, like, I remember in primary I got in a fight with, well, it’s more of a bully. She said I should go back to my own country because I don’t belong here. (...) Well, I do kind of feel the odd one ... because I’m from a different country. Yeah. (Dagnija, 14, Latvian, Focus Group)

At school sometimes people would say something about Hitler and aim it at me because of Auschwitz. Also, they would say something like 'Go back to your country'. (Dorota, 16, Polish, Survey)

Casual, everyday encounters with discrimination and xenophobia were becoming more common, the young people said, which made them feel that they would not be allowed to belong in Britain. Many talked about changes in the perceived levels of discrimination since the Brexit referendum:

I have encountered a lot discrimination. Of course, racism is the main one; many people have been mean just because my name looks different. I speak Polish in a public place, and they just don't like the look of me. After Brexit, this has definitely increased and people are now quicker to assume... (Emilia, 18, Polish, Survey)

Young people often were more likely to say that they were becoming the targets of xenophobic bullying since the Brexit referendum. These incidents, even if isolated, were sufficient to make some participants consider their position in Britain and future plans and question their sense of belonging. In this context, many also realised that a return might become a forced and unwanted option, which would not be straightforward. The difficulties which some young people experienced with their first language were often a barrier for them when imagining their futures in their country of origin, as mentioned by these participants:

Because since they [the parents] dragged us out here at such a young age, we're used to living here and we don't want to move back because we'd have to learn the language over again, since we're starting to forget it. And then we would have to go back to school for another year. (Dymitr, 16, Polish, Focus Group)

It's a lot harder, yeah. (...) I mean I'd go on holiday, obviously, but not to stay there. (Grzegorz, 15, Slovakian, Focus Group)

In Glasgow I can speak English. If I go to Slovakia, I won't understand a lot of Slovak. (...) I know a bit, but it's like, different skills you need in Slovakia. (Dominik, 13, Slovakian, Focus Group)

*If I have to leave the UK, I'm f***ed, man. Can't speak Polish that well, nor write.* (Andrzej, 16, Polish, Survey)

With the loosening of family and cultural ties over time, young people were worried not only that they did not know the language in the country of birth well enough to continue their education or pass exams, but also that their qualifications would not be recognised and they would find it difficult to secure work. For those older and closer to transitioning to work, they worried that their unfamiliarity with the job market in the country of origin would be a barrier, as skilled work is often built on place-specific accreditations, contacts and experience. Erel and Ryan (2019) pointed to the difficulty not only of migrants transferring their cultural capital from the country of birth to the destination country, but also of transporting this newly acquired cultural capital back to the country of origin or elsewhere.

However, for those whose families and friendships had endured the distance and time, out-migration from Britain, back to their country of birth, was becoming a possibility, because they felt that they did not belong in Britain and were marginalised. In considering the possibility of return, young people who left their country of birth as teenagers and had more vivid memories of living there were more likely to imagine themselves returning:

Well, my memories are there and everything is simpler because I live in a small town, I know a lot of people there. And even now, if I go back people recognise me, they say 'Hi, how have you been?' ... I know my neighbours there; I don't really know my neighbours where I live round here. (Monika, 17, Polish, Focus Group)

Having a sense of belonging and being recognised as part of the community gave young people an image of a future where they would 'count' and would be connected to others and the places where they would live. Any consideration of social memory inevitably comes around to questions of power and the uneven access to a society's political and economic resources (Kilkey 2017). In the UK, this increasingly includes access to citizenship, mentioned by many of our participants:

I am worried about the legal safety of people like me; my parents are currently sorting out legal documents to ensure that we are completely safe from any changes to laws that may happen after leaving the EU. It is an uncertain time and, despite promises that EU citizens living here already will be safe and will not be deported, it leaves us in a vulnerable and uncomfortable position. (Nora, 17, Hungarian, Survey)

Brexit was thus creating not only anxieties and concerns over residence rights but also familial tensions, with a divergence of plans starting to emerge in some cases. Young people were now envisaging the possibility of their parents returning and them being left to continue their education or work in Britain. In Dymitr's case, the family had two younger children and conversations about a family return were ongoing for a while:

My parents have wanted to go back since Brexit started, like the rumour around it. They were thinking about going back as soon as I finish Year 11, but then they changed it until I finish college. (...) But at college, the course I want to do is for four years, so when I finish college I'll be 21. So, I could potentially live here by myself and, if they go back, I can go and visit them. So what I was thinking was to get maybe two or three friends and share an apartment. (Dymitr, 16, Polish, Focus Group)

Despite increasing levels of xenophobia and insecurity over their residence rights, most young people in our study were not seeing themselves 'going back' to their countries of birth. While some mentioned an emotional connection to the places where they were born, especially due to family and friends left behind, many had difficulties envisaging a permanent return. Return was thus an extreme-case scenario, often linked to the threat of losing their rights to stay in the UK, or to parental plans, rather than to their own future imaginaries.

'Staying put' – imaginaries of a future in Britain

A majority of young people in the study (83 per cent) had reported feelings of belonging to Britain and their local communities and wanted to continue to live here, at least in the medium term. Often, this was based on a desire to complete their education at college or university in Britain or wanting to gain work experience. In the survey, 85 per cent of the respondents said that they thought they would still be living in the UK three years later and only 10 per cent said they might leave. The intention to stay was justified not simply in terms of practical decisions, but also in relation to a sense of belonging. Feelings of national belonging to the UK were expressed concurrently with a strong sense of a European identity (92 per cent of survey respondents stated that they felt European). Many said that a European identity would always be part of who they are and how they see their place in the world. However, given that many had also expressed a sense of belonging in Britain (33 per cent 'most of the time', 29 per cent 'definitely' and 20 per cent 'a little'), they were concerned that

their right to immobility was under threat – they could not just simply stay on without securing their status. Their plans to secure residence included plans to apply for ‘settled status’ or British citizenship for some, while others were waiting to see how things developed before making a decision:

It's changed plans for me, I want to do a citizenship test, just to have that security, but my Mum, yes, she feels afraid of what's going to happen. She doesn't want to move back, neither do I. I don't want them to move back, I don't want to be here on my own. We might have to change plans after Brexit, it depends what the negotiations are. For now, we're just sticking to what we've been doing so far. (Melania, 17, Latvia, Family Interview)

Brexit deprives EU citizens of their European citizenship on the UK territory, which not only puts them in a situation of structural marginality, but also makes them experience exclusion on an emotional level. The potential loss of residence rights made many take actual steps to ensure that they could continue with their plans to stay in Britain. Some were therefore saving money to cover the high fees of British citizenship (over £1,300):

When I get a job, I'll start earning and saving money so I can get British citizenship, which I can legally obtain as I have lived in the UK for nine years but, due to the expensive prices, my single mum cannot afford it for us. I feel as if it [citizenship] is more a legal thing. (Dimitar, 17, Bulgarian, Survey)

Most young people were very focused on their need for education if they were to provide a better life for themselves, conscious that their parents had made compromises and were sometimes de-skilled when they moved to Britain. Financial gains and giving children a better chance in life often were stated as a motivation for parents' migration to Britain and young people often considered finishing their education in Britain as an important part of the family project in which they had all invested. While 70 per cent of our survey respondents said that they wanted to continue their education, they were concerned that Brexit may impact on their right to access college and university. For those who wanted to remain in Britain long term, the risk to their educational prospects was of great concern, as they felt that their employment prospects would be directly affected and they would end up in low-paid work.

Although I live in the UK, I don't feel that I belong here and I think that I'm a lot more comfortable in Poland. I wish to go to university in England, because I have been educated here, but afterwards I hope to return to Poland or live in a different country. I definitely don't plan to stay in the UK any longer. Because of this, I don't have very strong feelings about Brexit, but because this is such a history-changing move, I'm excited to see how the issue progresses. (Nadia, 17, Polish, Survey)

Finally, while some young people felt that they had a choice over staying or moving on, others felt that they were not in a position to choose their path or start imagining a future elsewhere. While they did not feel a strong sense of belonging to the UK, they felt ‘stuck’ in Britain, mainly due to their lack of economic power, with not enough resources to move elsewhere or live independently. In their case, resentment over their parents' decision to move to Britain was more openly expressed – but so was their anger at their economic situation and their lack of networks and capital which would make a move possible.

‘Moving on’: imaginaries of futures elsewhere

A majority of young people (81 per cent in the survey sample) did not feel hopeful about Britain’s decision to leave the EU and expressed uncertainty over their status and rights as migrants. For some, the prospect of Brexit had increased their desire to leave Britain, while for others, it had prompted them for the first time to consider whether they had a future in Britain:

I was once talking about Brexit with my college lecturer. He said I was lucky because you can’t tell I’m Polish by the way I speak. I don’t want to stay in a country in which I need to hide my nationality to be treated equally. (Ada, 18, Polish, Survey)

When considering their futures, many young people were fearful about whether they would feel welcome in Britain in future as the Brexit vote meant that Britain rejected Europe and its values and this had shaken their sense of belonging to Britain. As a ‘return’ to the country of birth was not seen as a viable option, many said their plans were up in the air:

Brexit obviously, you know, I’m not going to lie, it had a huge impact on how things went and at first I was like, ‘Oh my God, they’re going to send me back’, you know, I need to return, but now it’s just like, ‘I’ll see how things go, and then I’ll start making my mind up’, because that’s when, with time, I hope things will become more apparent. I hope, but no guarantee. (Jana, 17, Polish, Family Interview)

Young people commented that the result of the Brexit referendum had altered their feeling of belonging to their neighbourhood because of the hostility towards migrants being expressed openly by people they knew. In this sense, their future imaginaries were shaped not just by a changing political climate and rising anti-immigration attitudes, but also by their everyday encounters with prejudice and the subsequent pressure to hide their nationality:

I moved here when I was six years old and, even though I speak English with a British accent as a result of using it for over 11 years, when people find out that I am Polish, I often face racism and discrimination. I find that I belong as long as no one finds out my nationality. (Artur, 17, Polish, Survey)

For some young people, out-migration to countries such as the USA or Australia or to European countries they had visited or knew of was starting to feature in their future imaginaries, with a view to securing better employment and quality of life. Overcoming the challenges of migration and settlement in the UK had given them the confidence to consider options for education and work that they felt they might not have considered if they had remained in their birth country. Some felt that their parents should be credited with opening up their worldview and making them see migration to another place not only as possible, but also as desirable as a life experience and character-building:

I genuinely don’t think I’d be the person that I am if I hadn’t moved here because, right now even, I don’t see myself being here constantly. I want to go to America and I don’t think I would have been like that, like globally, such a person before. I would have just been stuck in that, that’s where we live. (Barbara, 18, Hungarian, Family Interview)

The ways in which these changes will play out in their young adult lives are only just beginning to be realised. Some young people felt that their initial migration had enabled and encouraged them to feel footloose and able to move anywhere, a useful skill given the Brexit-induced uncertainty they were experiencing:

I think I might spend some time in the US, potentially. However, looking into the next three, five years, I am looking to be in London but, of course, as my work hopefully progresses, my ideal place to end up would be Japan. (...) If I can't get to Japan, I'll go to France. France will do. (...) I think my mother moving us here has definitely shown me that anything is possible. I know my mum went through a whole lot of poo to get us where we are, but she's shown me that we can. (Daria, 17, Polish, Family Interview)

When deciding on potential future locations, young people were weighing up not only the economic conditions and what they heard or knew about countries to which they were aspiring to move, but also the existing networks – such as family and friends – which they might use to help them with the move, thinking thus about activating their family cultural habitus:

I would like to move somewhere where I have family, that's why I want to move to Australia. I don't want to go back to Poland, which is quite surprising to some people, 'cos I know my friend Martha she wants to go back to Poland. (Kinga, 17, Polish, Family Interview)

In many respects, some of our participants were displaying a 'footloose' attitude to migration, where the idea of moving to new countries was exciting and possible – although they were unsure about what it would be like to live in their imagined destinations. To keep their options open, some young people held multiple countries in their imagined futures simultaneously.

Emese: *I want to stay here [the UK] but, at the same time, I want to go for a year or two to France or Germany.*

Vanda (Emese's mother): *Japan?*

Emese: *Japan as well.*

Researcher: *Do you want her to go to Japan?*

Vanda: *No, I don't want her to go anywhere, but she wants to, she said.*

Emese: *I don't know, maybe I would live there for a bit. (Emese, 17, Hungarian, Family Interview)*

Imagining their futures beyond Britain created unwanted uncertainty for many. The EU referendum and its aftermath had forced them to question their identity and right to belong in a country which a majority of them considered as their home. Some young people were envisaging opportunities in new countries, drawing on their feelings of Europeanism, their transnational social fields and/or their research for future employment prospects. Some of them said that they were considering out-migration in order to not be discriminated against in the future.

I feel very connected to Europe and European culture. There has been some concern regarding whether I want to stay in this country in the future due to the political changes happening in the UK. I am considering moving to the EU after finishing university, despite the fact that I enjoy living in this country. (Andris, 18, Latvian, Survey)

For the young people who wanted to move to another country, their future imaginaries often involved family separation. They were aware that their plans to move elsewhere did not engage their parents, who might want to remain in Britain or return to their country of birth to look after elderly parents or retire.

I've been going to Poland quite often now and, like, I just feel a lot more at home there and the fact that my brother's there, there's family to go to and, yeah, 'cos if I go to the USA for university, my parents are probably going to move back 'cos there's nothing holding them here, they don't own a house and my grandma's getting quite old, so my mum wants to look after her mum. (Katia, 18, Polish, Family Interview)

Young people's plans for the future were thus shaped by different considerations – such as their disenfranchisement with their potential loss of rights in Britain and their everyday experiences of being othered, as well as their ideas about what desirable careers or inclusive places to live might be available to them. While, for their parents, a return to the country of origin was both possible and likely, the young people preferred to keep their options open and envisaged themselves as exploring other locations and destinations, often unfamiliar to them. Similar to other research with young migrants, a particular concern expressed by several participants was the uncertainty over a future location (Jørgensen 2016). While this was exciting for some, it did make others feel worried and insecure. The situation of the young people and their families could not be seen in separation from the legal and socio-political climate of Brexit and their transnational links with families in other countries. Everyday bordering affects not only adults (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss and Cassidy 2018), but also, as we have shown, their children. As Erel and Ryan (2019) rightly point out, Brexit reaffirms the importance of national boundaries, which had faded in the context of intra-European mobility.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to discuss young EU migrants' imaginaries of their futures, in light of Brexit-driven uncertainties and risks as well as contradictory processes of assimilation and exclusion (Guma and Jones 2019; Kilkey 2017; Zontini and Però 2020). Our findings showed that, despite the fact that the vast majority of young people had a strong sense of belonging to the UK, the increasing uncertainty which they were facing since the Brexit vote and their everyday encounters with xenophobia and racism had impacted on their future imaginings in different ways. While, for a minority, their outlook remained unchanged for now, for most of them, Brexit and the increase in their everyday experiences of being othered had acted as triggers for the re-evaluation of their plans for the future. While most said that they had no immediate plans to leave the UK, their imaginings for the future were more complex. Some wanted to remain in Britain to finish their education and perhaps gain some work experience – even to settle and secure citizenship rights. For many others, though, imaginings of the future included places of which these young people had no direct experience of, but where they thought that they would have a better chance of feeling fulfilled and secure (Sime 2018). For most, their future did not include a return to the country of birth other than to visit family, as some were conscious that their future plans to out-migrate might mean leaving their parents behind. These findings add to the evidence on translocal childhoods and family mobility (Assmuth *et al.* 2018) by identifying the role that the sense of security and belonging plays in young people's future imaginings. The agency of young people is exemplified in their claims to

a future that can be shaped by them, although some are aware of the structural barriers which they may encounter on the way and of their multiple attachments to places to which they want to belong, like their schools, communities and nations. Yet, their belonging is unsettled by the ongoing political events which mark them out as unwelcome citizens, despite their proven loyalty to the places in which they live.

This paper has also addressed the issue of the implications of Britain's exit from the European Union for the security, mobility and immobility rights ('right to stay') of CEE migrant youth. At the time of writing, their right to remain in Britain is subject to individuals applying for 'settled' or 'pre-settled status' or British citizenship for those who qualify through long-term residence. We have shown that young people were discussing their rights and their plans to secure their status in the UK, including through applying for British citizenship. However, while many said that they felt 'settled' and 'at home' *before* the Brexit vote, three years after the Referendum, young people were already envisaging the possibility of having to leave. In mapping out their plans to move on, some of which were not yet concrete plans, but rather imaginaries of the possible, we have taken into consideration young people's emotional responses to the Brexit situation, their coping strategies with being othered and the uncertainty which Brexit has created. Many were confident that they could uproot again and move on if they had to, while others felt more insecure, stuck and uncertain about possibilities. Similar findings were reported in Lulle *et al.*'s study (2018) with European students and workers in the UK; although the migration trajectories of young Europeans were often open-ended, given their age and early-adult life stage, Brexit had sharpened the potential choices of returning to their home countries or moving elsewhere within Europe to countries where the rights to free movement, work and residence seemed more secure.

To conclude, we have argued that Brexit, as an unexpected socio-political change, has created conditions of significant uncertainty for young people with a European migrant background and their families. While many expressed disappointment and anger at Britain's decision to leave the EU, their imaginaries were shifting in response to the new situation and the novel circumstances of uncertainty created by Brexit. Many envisaged a future where they might decide to leave the UK if circumstances became unfavourable to their plans for education, training, employment or a secure family life. While some expressed sadness at seeing the country they now lived in removed from the EU, their main concerns were over their rights to mobility – including opportunities to work and study in other countries – and concerns over family life. In this sense, their imaginaries of a future elsewhere were still evolving – just like the Brexit situation – and most seemed to be remaining open to readjusting their plans and ideas about what the future would involve depending on the outcome of the Brexit transition. This underscores the importance of analysing the wider socio-political discourses that shape young people's sense of security and control over their future imaginaries, as these can undermine their identity projects and relational subjectivities. Future research will need to examine the increasingly complex and unpredictable nature of young migrants' plans within an intergenerational and translocal framework and to consider the multiple social, political and economic factors which may impact on individuals' future imaginaries. Longitudinal studies might also examine the extent to which young people's imaginaries materialise, given previous research showing that migrants' plans change over time (Ryan 2018b), as migration requires negotiation over time and decisions are often taken by considering the implications not only for the individual, but also for other family members.

Note

¹ This was a convenience sample and the data could not be weighted due to the absence of existing reliable data on EU nationals in the UK.

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Push, Pull and Brexit: Polish Migrants' Perceptions of Factors Discouraging them from Staying in the UK

Barbara Jancewicz*, Weronika Kloc-Nowak*, Dominika Pszczółkowska*

The fate of European citizens living in the United Kingdom was a key issue linked with Britain's departure from the European Union. Official statistics show that some outflow has taken place, but it was no Brexodus. This article investigates Brexit's impact within a theoretical (push–pull) framework using a survey of long-term Polish migrants in the UK (CAPI, N = 472, conducted in 2018). Our results show that the perception of Brexit as a factor discouraging migrants from staying in the UK was limited. Still, those with experience of living in other countries, those remitting to Poland, and those on welfare benefits, were more likely to find Brexit discouraging. However, many claimed that the referendum nudged them towards extending their stay instead of shortening it. In general, when asked about what encourages/discourages them from staying in the UK, the respondents mainly chose factors related to the job market. Therefore, we argue, in line with Kilkey and Ryan (2020), that the referendum was an unsettling event – but, considering the strong economic incentives for Polish migrants to stay in the UK, we can expect Brexit to have a limited influence on any further outflows of migrants, as long as Britain's economic situation does not deteriorate.

Keywords: Brexit, Polish migrants, post-accession migrants, migration, push-pull framework

Introduction

The results of the British referendum of June 2016, with the majority of voters supporting the proposal to leave the European Union, caused very emotional reactions among many of the 3.7 million citizens of other EU countries residing in the United Kingdom (Brahic and Lallement 2020; Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Lulle, Moroşanu and King 2018). Immediately, researchers (McGhee, Moret and Vlachantoni 2017; Piętka-Nykaza and McGhee 2017) started working to predict how the perception and possible consequences of Brexit would

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influence the intentions and life strategies of migrants, including the over 1 million Polish citizens – the largest group of European immigrants in the UK. Even before the new legal conditions of residence for foreigners were known, some scholars predicted an outflow of people (Portes 2016; Portes and Forte 2017), while others believed it would have a limited effect (McGhee *et al.* 2017). We argue, in line with Kilkey and Ryan (2020), that the referendum was an unsettling event but, by itself, will not be enough to cause a major outflow of migrants. We believe that post-Brexit migration is still in line with pre-Brexit studies and theories on intra-EU mobility, where economic factors – such as available employment, high earnings and career development – were key forces behind migrants' decisions.

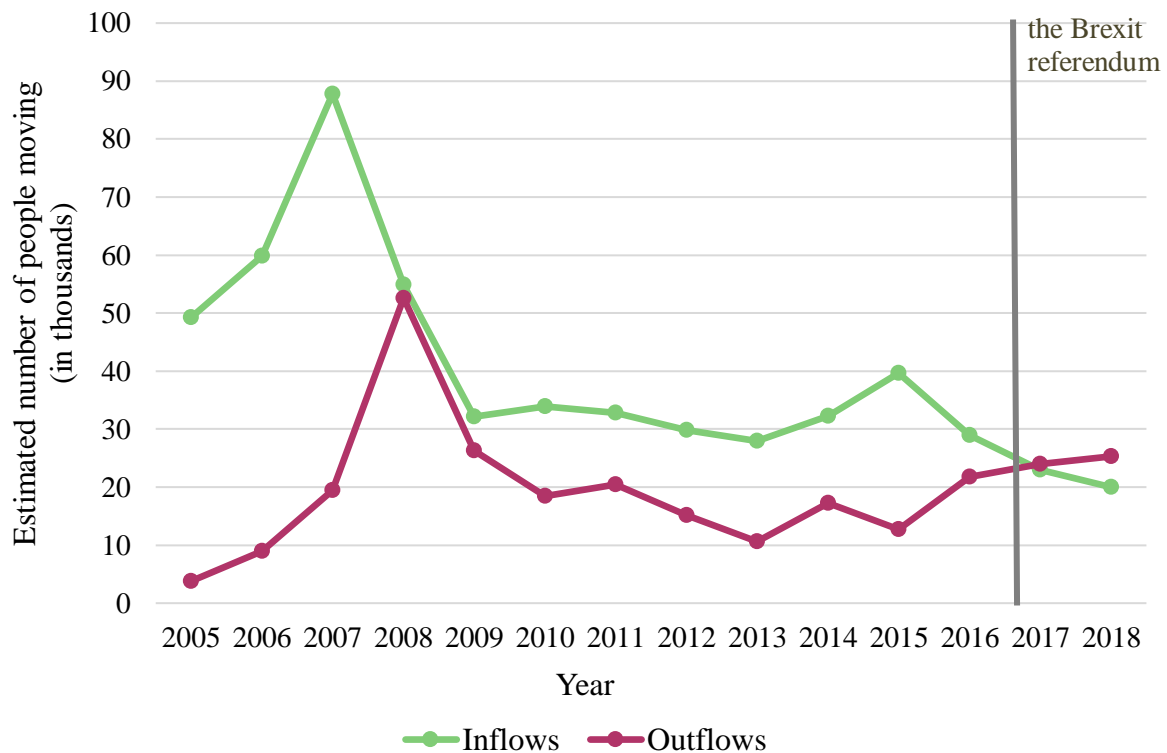
Brexit, and especially its impact on migration, is an occasion to understand better how people decide to migrate, stay or return and how they relate to their countries of origin and residence. In order to achieve this, we present the results from a face-to-face survey ($N = 472$) of long-term Polish migrants in the UK, conducted two years after the referendum but still before the UK left the EU. Our analysis follows the wider push–pull framework (Lee 1966) to determine whether the individuals' perceptions of various factors encouraged them to remain or discouraged them from staying in the UK. The changes brought about by Brexit had a varying impact on migrants depending on their individual characteristics and situation. Thus we test not only whether Brexit was a factor discouraging some migrants from staying in the UK but also who these discouraged migrants were and how this related to their socio-economic, legal, cultural or political integration (Entzinger and Biezeveld 2003).

Our article contributes to the literature by investigating Brexit's impact in the context of a larger set of factors and analysing it within a theoretical (push–pull) framework. Our study shows how political shifts, such as the Brexit referendum and the following process, were reflected in different migrants' perceptions, which might in turn influence migrants' decisions. The article starts with a short overview of the trends in Polish migration and naturalisation statistics in the period leading to and following the Brexit referendum. The subsequent sections set the conceptual basis for our analysis by first referring to the literature on post-EU accession migrants and the strategies and factors affecting their decisions regarding their stay in the UK and then moving on to the more general push/pull framework in which our hypotheses are grounded. After presenting our methodology and data, we turn to the analysis and discussion of the survey results – descriptive statistics and logistic regression – which lead to our conclusions.

State of knowledge regarding Brexit

Official statistics for 2017 and 2018 (ONS 2019) have demonstrated that net migration from the EU has decreased significantly since the referendum and that net migration from the EU8 countries (those which joined the Union in 2004, including Poland) has even become negative. In the case of Polish migrants, between 2005 and 2016 the number of Polish citizens moving to the UK was constantly larger than the number of those leaving, with both numbers being almost equal only in 2008, the year when the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) started, when outflows increased somewhat and inflows decreased significantly; 2017 was the first year since EU enlargement when slightly more Polish people left the UK than arrived, again due to higher outflows and especially lower inflows. In 2018, the last year for which data are available, the inflow dropped even further while the outflow remained at a similar level as in 2017, making the balance even more negative for the UK (Figure 1). Thus, it seems that the vision of Brexit did indeed deter some migrants from coming and encourage others to leave the UK.

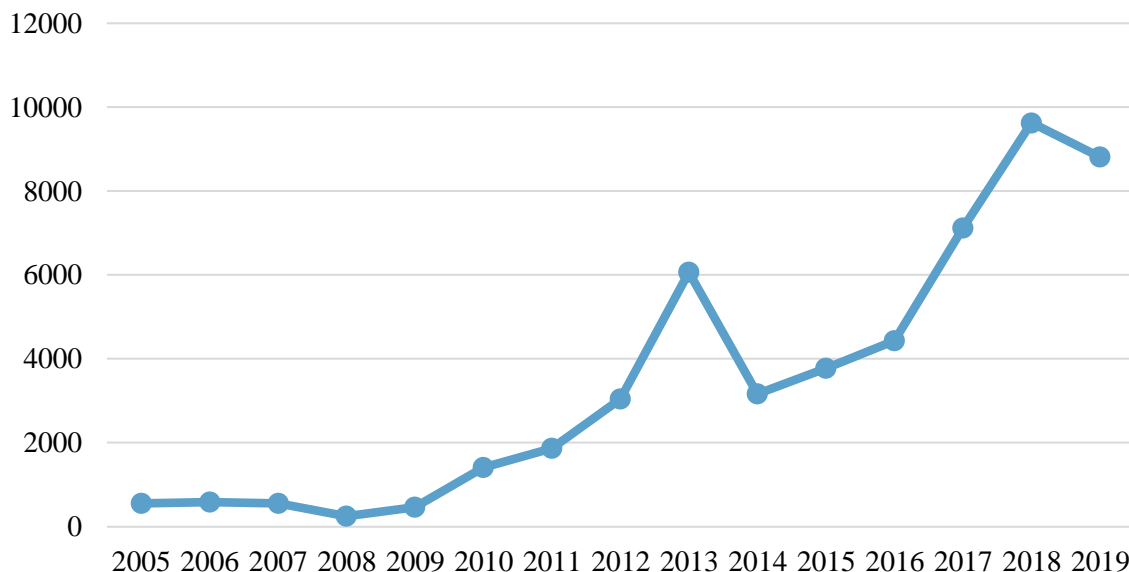
Figure 1. Estimated number of Polish citizens (in thousands) coming to live in (inflows) and leaving the United Kingdom (outflows), 2005–2018



Source: ONS, International Passenger Survey (4.07 IPS Sex by Age by Citizenship).

Data on citizenship granted to Poles illustrate a somewhat opposite reaction to Brexit, with the number of citizenships spiking after the referendum (Home Office 2020). To be granted citizenship, one needs to have lived in the UK for five years and then to have obtained an indefinite leave to remain, permanent residence or settled status; after 12 months, one can then apply for British citizenship. The whole process takes over six years and demands a significant investment of money and time, since applicants have to pass a ‘Life in the UK’ test and pay a fee of over £1 300 for applying. Holding dual Polish and British citizenship is allowed. Figure 2 shows that, in 2005–2009 the number of British citizenships granted to Polish citizens was small – below 1 000 a year. In 2008, during the GFC, the number fell. Then it gradually grew, with the first spike in 2013, probably due to an increased number of Poles having fulfilled the eligibility criteria after several years of residence. The second spike came after the Brexit referendum, which suggests a sudden increase in interest among those already eligible.

The above suggests that Brexit had a polarising effect: while the number of permanent residence and citizenship applications grew, so did the number of those who were leaving. The analysis presented in this article aims to identify the factors contributing to these seemingly contradictory reactions and migration intentions in response to Brexit among those Polish migrants who were still present in the UK two years after the referendum.

Figure 2. UK citizenships granted to Poles (total = 51 729), 2005–2019

Note: Includes registration and naturalisation.

Source: Home Office 2020, Citizenship grants by previous nationality (Cit_D01).

Situating migrants' reactions to the Brexit referendum in the conceptual framework on post EU-enlargement mobility

Our interpretation of the post-EU-enlargement migrants' diverse perceptions of the UK's decision to leave the EU is grounded in the preceding scholarly narratives regarding this type of migration. The early interpretative frames concentrated on the flexibility and initial open-endedness of many migrants' plans, using such concepts as 'intentional unpredictability' (Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2007), 'deliberate indeterminacy' (Moriarty, Wickham, Salamońska, Krings and Bobek 2010) and liquidity (Glorius, Grabowska-Lusińska and Kuvik 2013). This indeterminacy or liquidity, characteristic of the mobility of young new European citizens, as pointed out by Lulle *et al.* (2018), mostly means being flexible and open to opportunities but does not exclude enjoying security or stability. Instead, the flexibility has been based on the privileged status of EU citizens securing the freedom to move, stay and work in a (gradually enlarging) number of countries. This privileged status enabled some migrants to already be able to live not in one but in two or more countries, providing them with geographically dispersed networks and a knowledge of several locations (Ciobanu 2015; Salamońska 2017). Since the privileged status works for Europeans within the EU, some migrants obtain a new passport (such as a British one) to enable them to migrate further following a period of settlement in one country (Szewczyk 2016).

The new statistical trend of increasing outflow and decreasing inflow of Central and Eastern Europeans to the UK in the aftermath of the referendum could be interpreted as a display of the intentional unpredictability (Eade *et al.* 2007) or liquidity (Engbersen, Snel and de Boom 2010; Glorius *et al.* 2013) of migrant plans. According to these perspectives, a lack of long-term plans and reacting to the conditions and opportunities of the moment were particular features of post-accession migration, long underlined in regard to young migrants from Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. However, perceiving migrants as liquid raises an expectation of a massive movement when the circumstances worsen – a movement that has not materialised as the number of migrants leaving the UK is still modest.

Many migrants have remained in the UK despite Brexit. This is often explained using stability- or settlement-oriented perspectives (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2018; Ryan 2018), which claim that after ten or more years migrants may have reached a different stage in their life course and are not as liquid in their plans as they were previously, due to various ties or anchors to the spatial and socio-relational contexts of the country of residence. The factors which contributed to prolonging migrants' stay and shifting to long-term orientations include, for example, family reunification and securing a home in the new location (White 2010), social relationships (Ryan 2018), a sense of dignity and 'normality' based on the affordability of everyday life (McGhee, Heath and Trevena 2012) and investing in children's education (Rodriguez 2010) or their own career (Trevena 2013). Grzymała-Kazłowska (2018) introduced the term 'anchoring', referring to the process of developing such subjectively important ties and contributing to the migrant's sense of stability and belonging. Proposing the term 'differentiated embedding', Ryan (2018) emphasised that the attachments, which resulted in the prolonging of the initially temporary stays of post-EU-accession migrants, develop in a non-linear dynamic process of negotiating social relations in multiple sites, structured by the spatial and temporal context. Again, it has to be remembered that these are not unidirectional processes as, along the evolving structural context and migrant's life course, various ties in the country of origin and stay may change their relative importance. According to Kay and Trevena (2018), declared settlement can be an open-ended project depending on changing relations, resources, family needs or life course phase. As observed by Ryan, post-2004 accession migrants extending the initially temporary stay are comparable to the earlier waves of Irish migrants settling in the UK 'who also enjoyed mobility rights and thus had opportunities to come and go, stay or return' (2018: 234). From this perspective, prolonged indeterminacy and non-permanent settlement are not new features of post-accession migration but are, rather, features resulting from the legal privilege of citizenship of the freedom of movement area.

In the periods of the pre-Brexit referendum campaign, the shock from its results and the political disturbance regarding the timing and form of Brexit, the status of EU migrants has been an often discussed issue. This discourse undermined the migrants' achieved stability and security, decreasing their quality of life and causing anxiety. Experiencing being unwelcome was perceived as painful, especially for the thus-far more privileged old member-state citizens (Brahic and Lallement 2020; Lulle *et al.* 2018). Although anti-immigrant and racist attitudes had been reported at least since the economic crisis of 2008 (Rzepnikowska 2019), and the government had already been creating a 'hostile environment' around migrants for some years (as described in detail by, for example, Burrell and Schweyher 2019), the referendum made it very clear to some EU citizens that, in spite of their privileged legal position, they also belonged in the category of migrants. From the liquidity perspective, the atmosphere during the Brexit negotiations could be interpreted as one discouraging migrants from staying in the UK, regardless of the legal changes to be introduced. Hence, a change of intentions to remain in reaction to Brexit could be expected. Yet, during the pre-referendum campaign, only a small proportion of Polish immigrants declared their intention to leave the UK if Brexit happened (McGhee *et al.* 2017). The relatively low popularity of this reaction was confirmed by the lack of any dramatic 'Brexodus' in the ONS migration statistics published since 2016.

Why is the reaction of post-EU accession migrants to the possible leaving of the EU by the UK so limited? Why was there no Brexodus? The answer can be partly found in the analysis of migrants' reactions to the previous shock of the Global Financial Crisis when, contrary to the expectations of migrants' rapid reactions to the economic downturn, many Polish migrants stayed abroad (Janicka and Kaczmarczyk 2016). Since the GFC, repeated questionnaire surveys of Polish migrants have shown a decrease in short-term mobility and a prevalence of more long-term migrants among Poles in the main EU destination countries (Janicka and Kaczmarczyk 2016). Furthermore, Jancewicz and Markowski (2019) have shown that length of stay, higher earnings and owning real estate are all associated with the settlement intentions of Poles remaining abroad. This

confirms that those migrants who have developed attachments and long-term plans related to the country of immigration are less prone to react to external shocks by emigrating. Post-accession migrants have already invested greatly in their ties to the British labour market and society, so emigration from the UK (be it to return to Poland or for further migration) could incur a considerable loss of UK-specific capital, especially that related to professional qualifications and networks (Erel and Ryan 2019). That is why, in the context of uncertainty around Brexit, we expect that migrants who invested in their UK-specific skills and achieved job stability will not take the decision to leave lightly as it may be more profitable to postpone the move (cf. Burda 1995), stay in the UK and continue earning there for as long as possible.

Economists point to (lifetime) earnings as a primary factor in migration decision-making, often disregarding other aspects related to moving to a new place (e.g. Borjas 2014). However, even when using such a financially oriented framework, we find that the cultural, institutional and social aspects of the host country do matter as they indirectly influence economic possibilities, decisions and outcomes. Similarly, we see that the Brexit referendum results, which initially concerned the rules of stay, also deeply touched the emotions of migrants and their feelings of being at home. Later, it translated into uncertainty in both the legal and the economic realms, as the Brexit process influences not only employers' attitudes toward migrants but the condition of the whole economy of Britain (Portes and Forte 2017). According to Lulle, King, Dvorakova and Szkudlarek (2019), the way in which the Brexit referendum changed the institutional landscape for new EU state citizens in the UK introduced into their lives a new layer of uncertainty. At the time when our survey was conducted (June–September 2018), the future legal status of Poles in the UK was unclear. No withdrawal agreement had yet been negotiated between the EU and the UK. As Gawlewicz and Sotkasiira (2020) notice in their study of Poles in Scotland, this was long enough after the referendum for people to get over the initial shock of the result and adopt a calmer, more rational attitude. Nevertheless, apart from economic precarity, migrants had to face the fact that comparing their possible future in the UK with a possible future in another country became even more difficult – they had to introduce more unknowns into the equation. Thus, we expected that the number of those who just did not know what their plans were might have increased due to the possibility of Brexit.

The perspective of the UK's leaving the EU brought to the fore the thus far largely ignored sphere of the legal integration of intra-EU migrants. The change in the legal rules of stay concerning EU citizens who have migrated to the UK and also their family members such as aging relatives (see Radziwinowiczówna, Kloc-Nowak and Rosińska 2020) and partners of various nationalities (including non-EU) means that keeping one's options open, leading a translocal life and maintaining ties in both countries may no longer be possible. Securing the right to live a normal life in the UK (including work and welfare rights) requires obtaining confirmation of one's settled status. Even those who have so far displayed their preference for transnational living and who have not intended to settle in the UK permanently may have incentives to prolong their stay and invest their time in obtaining tangible proof of their ties to the UK – a permanent residence certificate or citizenship (McGhee *et al.* 2017). This complicates the interpretation of migrants' intentions regarding their length of stay in the UK, as the declaration of prolonging the stay may display a wish to secure legal status and not necessarily to settle permanently.

Incorporating Brexit into the push–pull framework

In line with Lee's (1966) push–pull framework, later used and modified by many scholars (for example, Bodvarsson and van den Berg 2009; de Jong and Fawcett 1981; Fihel 2018), the factors influencing migrants' decisions can be divided into: factors associated with the area of origin and/or with the destination; intervening obstacles (such as distance, costs of transportation and physical or political barriers, such as access to legal

residence and work); and personal factors (such as age, level of education or the stage of the life cycle) which frequently moderate the influence of the first three factors. On both the origin and destination sides, ‘plus’ and ‘minus’ factors operate (termed by scholars variously as ‘pull’, ‘retain’, ‘stick’, ‘stay’ or ‘push’, ‘repel’ factors – Carling and Bivand Erdal 2014; Chebel d’Appollonia and Reich 2010). Migrants respond to their own perceptions of these factors, as nobody holds full information about the conditions at origin and, especially, at destination.

Before Brexit became an issue, a large body of literature explored the factors which influenced the decisions of Polish migrants to the UK. Economic factors, especially unemployment, low wages and, somewhat later, precarious work conditions – such as contracts without health and old-age insurance – seem to have been the dominant push factors making migrants leave Poland (Jończy 2010; Okólski and Salt 2014). On the pull side, the list of factors seemed somewhat more diverse. Economic factors, such as the availability of employment and high wages, were key (Jończy 2010; Milewski and Ruszczak-Żbikowska 2008; Okólski and Salt 2014). However, many studies demonstrated that, especially for the young and well-educated, cultural factors such as wanting to learn English, live in a global metropolis or experience multiculturalism were also important (Isański, Mleczko and Seredyńska-Abu Eid 2014; Luthra, Platt and Salamońska 2018; Salamońska 2012). These factors, as well as social factors such as the presence of family and friends in both the origin and the destination countries, were important at the moment of the initial decision, as well as on every following day, when the migrants again chose to either remain where they were or to depart. Some scholars have also pointed out that life stage is important in the migrants’ decisions, especially since many have gone from being twenty-something and single to having families and children, which proves to be a strong factor keeping migrants in place (Ryan 2015; Ryan and Sales 2013; Trevena 2013, 2014; White 2010). Overall, there are many factors proven to impact on migrants’ perceptions of life in the UK, of which Brexit should be considered as another, albeit new, influence.

We therefore construct our hypotheses regarding Brexit’s impact on respondents’ perceptions by relying on previous findings about the factors that push and pull migrants towards and out of the UK. We expect that, while push and pull factors at origin and at destination still operate, Brexit and the resulting legal changes will have an uneven influence on the various groups of migrants and, thus, should lead to different perceptions. Nevertheless, since the opening of the labour market post-EU accession (and all the related rights) was the impulse for the massive inflow of Poles to the UK, we do expect that most migrants will perceive Brexit as a significant change for the worse. Hence we hypothesise that:

(H1) Brexit is an important factor discouraging a large share of Polish migrants from staying in the UK.

We assume that the varying impacts of Brexit on migrants depending on their characteristics will translate into different propensities for those migrants to consider Brexit as a factor discouraging them from staying. We devoted particular attention to the individual characteristics which we believed to be the strongest shields against the negative impact of Brexit: legal status and the acquisition of locally recognised qualifications or education.

(H2) For those for whom the legal situation would not change – for example, because they already had British citizenship or another status allowing them to remain indefinitely – Brexit would not be a factor discouraging them from remaining in the UK.

(H3) For people who had invested into their human capital in the UK, by finishing secondary or post-secondary education, studying for a degree or taking part in long professional courses Brexit would be

unlikely to discourage them from remaining in the UK, as their increased human capital investment anchors them to the specific British labour market and protects them from changes in British immigration regulations.

We also consider that strong anchors and ties to the UK would give migrants both the motivation and means to guard against the negative impact of Brexit, making them less likely to perceive Brexit as a discouraging factor. We addressed such potential anchors through indicators related to the various dimensions of integration for the following hypotheses:

(H4) Those who had attachments in the UK – such as living with a spouse or partner who has British citizenship, owning real estate in the UK or belonging to an organisation or club – would be less likely to point to Brexit, or other factors, as discouraging.

(H5) On the contrary, those who did not have such attachments (evident in their failure to learn English very well) or who still had attachments in Poland (evident in remittances), would be more likely to point to factors, especially Brexit, discouraging them from staying.

Last but not least, we expected that people's economic situation in the UK may affect the impact that Brexit might have on them and thus their perception of Brexit. Given that most of the initial economic pull factors, as described in the literature, remain in force, we hypothesised that:

(H6) Those who were in a poor or unstable economic situation in the UK, for example people without permanent contracts, those performing low-skilled jobs or those who were welfare recipients, would be more likely to perceive Brexit as a factor discouraging them from staying in the UK, as it could negatively affect their situation more than that of other groups.

Methods

Data and survey structure

This paper presents the results from a survey of long-term Polish migrants in the UK conducted between June and September 2018 by the Centre of Migration Research (CMR), University of Warsaw. All the respondents had to be Polish citizens and long-term migrants, meaning that they arrived in the UK as adults between 1 January 2000 and 1 January 2014 and had been living in the UK at least for 4.5 years before the date of the survey. This means that the youngest respondent could be 22 years old as the study was conducted in mid-2018, and the oldest respondent 44 years old (migrants in this age bracket are the majority of the Polish-born population of the UK – ONS 2018).

To obtain as representative a sample as possible, the CMR survey used geographically and age-stratified quota sampling, analogous to that devised by the National Bank of Poland (NBP) for its biannual survey of Polish migrants (for details see Chmielewska, Dobroczek and Strzelecki 2018). The quotas were calculated based on the migrant population structure derived from the 2011 UK census. The UK was divided into eight geographical regions within each of which the quotas reflected the age structure of the study population in that region. Additionally, overall sample quotas were imposed to ensure the gender balance (the percentage of women had to be between 40 and 60 per cent), the focus on working migrants (at least 75 per cent of the sample

had to be working, even if only for a few hours a week) and the professional group diversity (each of the four professional groups¹ constituted at least 10 per cent of the sample). In sum, the sample design guaranteed that respondents' profiles were diverse. Overall, the CMR survey included 472 respondents.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face using CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviews). To ensure diversity and guard against interviewer-induced bias, recruitment through snowballing was prohibited and the number of interviews per interviewer and per location was capped. Using CAPI enabled confirmation of the geographical location of the interview and selective telephone post-verification (and in a few cases clarification) of the responses. Control over the fieldwork is a strength of this survey, compared to recent quantitative studies of Polish migrants in the UK which were self-administered online on a population targeted via Polish diasporic media (cf. Łużniak-Piecha, Golińska, Czubińska and Kulczyk 2018; McGhee *et al.* 2017). Another strength is that the interviewers spoke Polish fluently and the whole questionnaire was in Polish, which enabled all Polish migrants to participate. The survey did not raise significant ethical concerns, because it was anonymous, only adults could participate, and only after expressing their informed consent to the interviewers. The most sensitive areas, such as their economic situation allowed the respondents to refuse an answer. The dataset we received for analysis was anonymised. Based on the sampling and fieldwork approach, we believe that our survey offers a quite reliable cross-section of the Polish economically active long-term immigrant population in the UK of reproductive age.

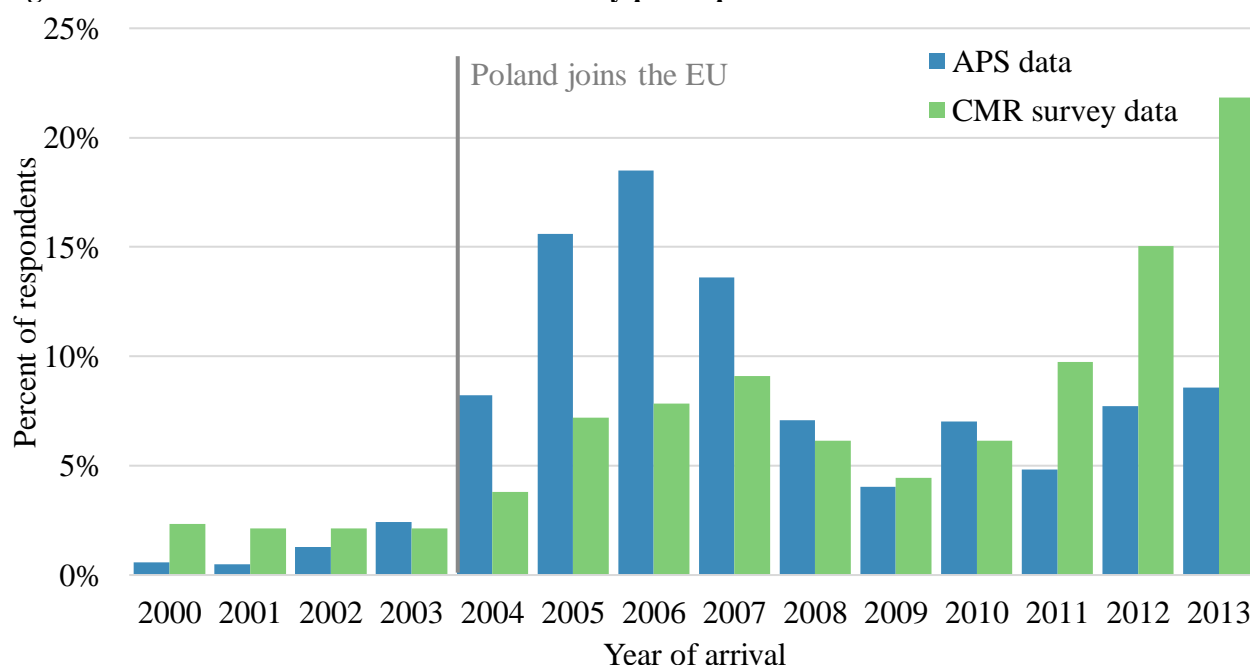
The survey data in comparison

Following McGhee *et al.* (2017) we evaluate the representativeness of our sample by comparing its descriptive statistics with those from the Annual Population Survey (APS, data from January to December 2018). The APS combines data from the UK's Labour Force Survey to provide estimates of crucial variables in between the censuses. While the APS has its limitations, it is currently the best source of data for comparison. In the 2018 APS data, 1 410 respondents match the scope of our survey (i.e. they have a Polish passport, are aged 22–44, came to the UK for their current stay between 2000 and 2013 and were already 18 years old when they arrived). Table 1 compares the characteristics of the two samples while Figure 3 focuses on the year of arrival in both studies. The general trend in Figure 3 is similar for both studies, with a large number of respondents who arrived shortly after 2004, followed by a dip, and then a gradual increase due to those who came more recently. However, the first rise is more pronounced in the APS sample so, similarly to McGhee *et al.* (2017), Poles included in it arrived in the UK on average earlier than those in the CMR study. These latter participants were on average two years younger, less likely to be married and more likely to have a post-secondary education than those in the APS sample.

Table 1. Comparison of sample characteristics of the CMR survey with the APS 2018 data

		CMR Survey		APS 2018	
		No.	%	No.	%
Sample*	Polish nationals, aged 22–44, who came as adults to the UK for their current stay in 2000–2013	472	100.0	1 410	100.0
Gender	Female	281	59.5	779	55.2
Age groups	22–29	105	22.2	148	10.5
	30–39	262	55.5	958	67.9
	40–44	105	22.2	304	21.6
Age	Median	33		36	
	Mean (SD)	33.65 (5.95)		35.64 (4.59)	
	(min, max)	(22, 44)		(23, 44)	
Year of arrival	Median	2010		2007	
	Mean (SD)	2008.97 (3.69)		2007.48 (3.02)	
	(min, max)	(2000, 2013)		(2000, 2013)	
Marital status	Married	175	37.1	827	58.7
Education	Post-secondary**	216	45.8	535	37.9

Notes: * Only APS respondents who would qualify for the CMR survey are included in the comparative sample; ** For APS these were respondents with qualifications [HIQUL15D] categorised as ‘Degree or equivalent’ or ‘Higher education’.

Figure 3. Year of arrival of APS and CMR survey participants

Source: APS (2018); N = 1 410; CMR (2018) survey; N = 472.

Analysis

We focus on the CMR survey question ‘What, if anything, discourages you from staying in the UK?’, asked immediately after an almost identical one about what encourages them to stay. Each participant could choose 2 out of 13 encouraging factors, while, in the second question they could chose 2 out of 11 discouraging ones, as presented in Figure 4. Brexit was one possible answer but there were a number of others related to the economic situation, cultural preferences and social situation of migrants. We interpret our respondents’ declarations not as reasons for actual moves but, rather, as indicators of how migrants evaluate each location and explanation for their declared migration or settlement intentions. Choosing Brexit or any other discouraging factor from the list did not mean that the respondent planned to leave the UK but indicated a potential push factor which was taken into consideration in decisions on whether or not to move.

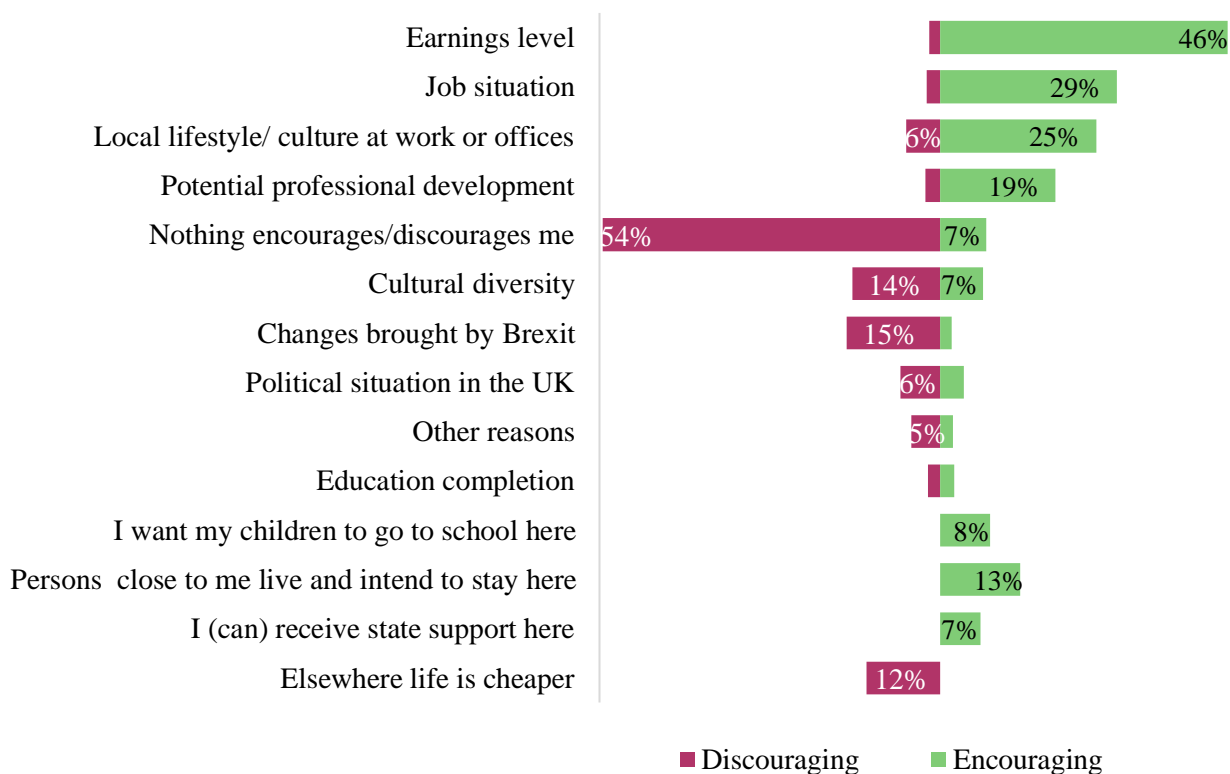
In this article, we conduct both a univariate and a multivariate analysis of the CMR survey data. First, we examine respondents’ Brexit-related answers to verify H1 and to provide a background for further analysis. Second, to verify Hypotheses 2–6, we perform a multinomial logistic regression with grouped answers to ‘What, if anything, discourages you from staying in the UK?’ as the dependent variable. Respondents who answered ‘Nothing discourages me’ serve as the reference category. In this context, we distinguish two groups of respondents: those who chose some discouraging factors (related to economic, cultural, familial issues etc.) but not Brexit, and those who chose ‘Changes brought by Brexit’ (possibly together with one other factor). The latter are the focus of our analysis. We distinguished them from the respondents who considered that nothing discouraged them and those who chose some discouraging factors, because we believe that they constitute contrasting groups in their reaction to Brexit and possibly to other future changes and we wanted to compare their characteristics. We calculated three multinomial regression models: the first includes only respondents’ demographics, the second includes demographics and non-economic integration-related variables, while the third model includes demographics and economic-integration variables. The choice of independent variables stemmed from our literature review and hypotheses. We recoded and/or regrouped independent variables to ensure that each category was large enough to provide a statistically sound model. We performed the multivariate analysis using the ‘nnet’ package in the R software.

Results: what our survey data show

The focus of this article follows the logic of the push–pull framework (Lee 1966) in which we asked respondents what encouraged/discouraged them from staying in the UK. Figure 4 shows that the most common encouraging factor was the level of earnings and the second was the job situation, followed by lifestyle/culture at work. The most common answer to the question about discouraging factors was ‘nothing’, chosen by over half of the respondents. Only 15 per cent (71 respondents) indicated changes brought on by the Brexit referendum, closely followed by respondents who were discouraged by the UK’s cultural diversity. Overall, 30.5 per cent of respondents (144 respondents) pointed to some factor(s) discouraging them from staying in the UK but did not point to Brexit. In a similar question about what encourages respondents to return to Poland and what discourages them from returning home, over half chose insufficient earnings, followed by the high cost of living and the difficulties in finding a job. We can therefore see that, while Brexit may have caused very emotional reactions, it is still one among many factors and it is the economic reasons which influence many migrants’ perceptions the most. On that front, the UK is still the right place to be for many migrants. Therefore, we find the first hypothesis (H1) not confirmed because, while changes brought by Brexit were the most common discouraging factor, only one in seven respondents indicated that it actually discouraged them, while those whom nothing discouraged constituted a majority.

The fact that most respondents said that nothing discouraged them from staying in the UK is surprising, as their legal status could change because of Brexit. However, Figure 5 shows that roughly one in three respondents agreed or strongly agreed with ‘I have concerns about my legal status allowing me to stay and work in the UK’, around one in five expressed ambivalence, while almost one in two disagreed. Overall, the survey participants seemed to worry little about their rights in the UK. We suspect that this lack of concern can stem from their being confident that they can ensure their right to stay (e.g. by applying for citizenship or a residence status certificate) or from planning to leave soon anyway.

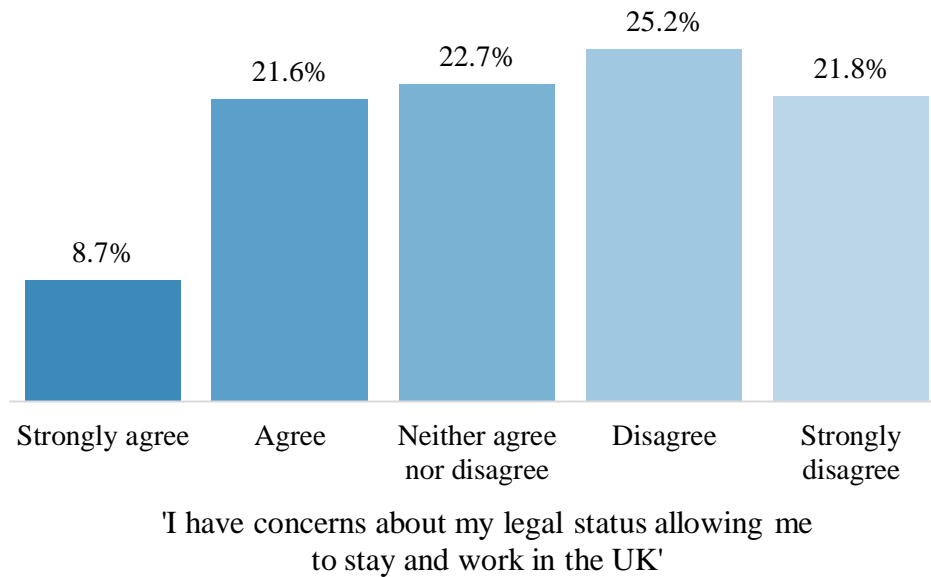
Figure 4. Factors chosen by respondents as encouraging or discouraging them from staying in the UK (%)



Source: CMR (2018) study; N = 472.

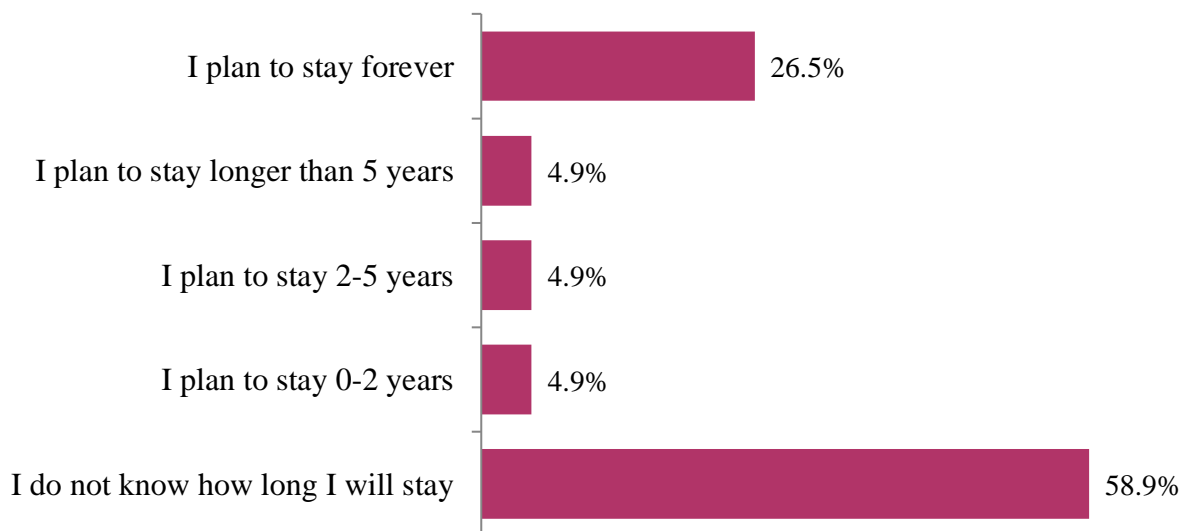
In order to verify this, Figure 6 shows how long the survey participants planned to stay in the UK. In line with the intentional unpredictability suggested by Eade et al. (2007), over half of the sample indicated that they did not yet know. The results of other surveys of Polish migrants in the UK (e.g. Chmielewska *et al.* 2018), leads us to suspect that, when the option ‘I don't know’ is hidden, many respondents merely estimate the length of any further stay, although other studies also show a high level of uncertainty about the remaining or leaving plans of migrants (Drinkwater and Garapich 2015). Aside from those respondents who reported no concrete plans, one in four indicated that they planned to stay forever, and only one in seven had a definitely planned date of return (or further migration). Overall, a lack of concrete plans to remain prevailed in our sample.

Figure 5. Respondents' reactions to 'I have concerns about my legal status allowing me to stay and work in the UK' (%)



Source: CMR (2018) study; N = 472.

Figure 6. Migration plans of surveyed respondents (%)



Note: The middle three answers (I plan to stay: longer than 5 years, 2–5 years, 0–2 years) are grouped categories from a precise answer on respondents' planned length of stay.

Source: CMR (2018) survey study, N = 472.

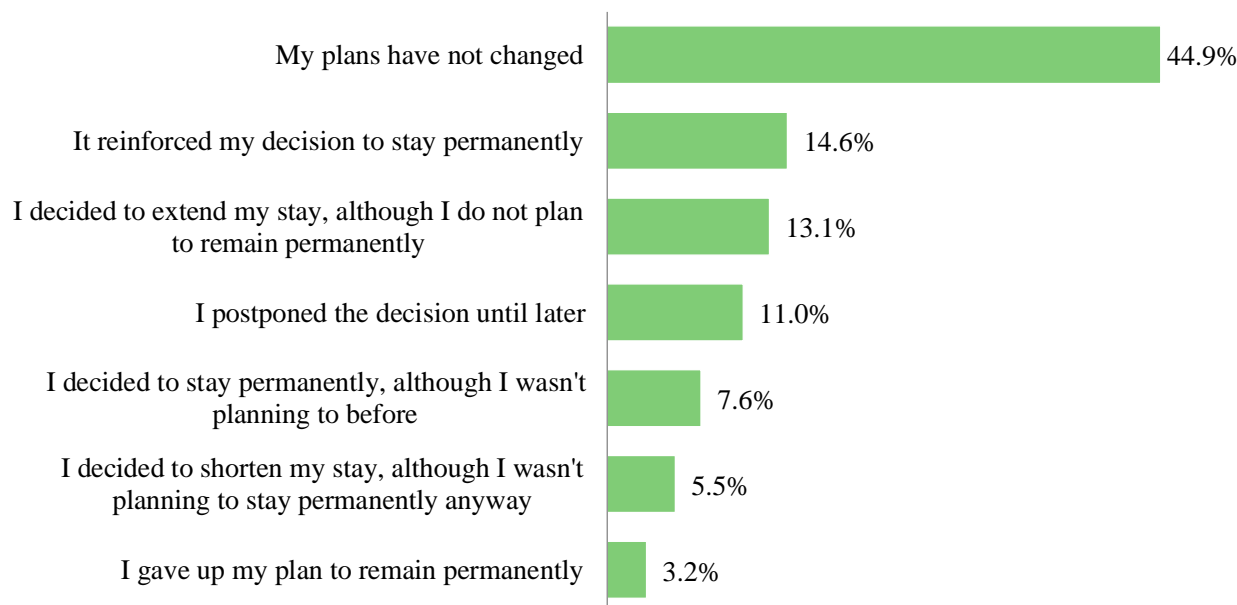
We now turn to gauging how Brexit influenced respondents' plans. Figure 7 shows that almost half of our respondents said that the Brexit referendum did not influence their plans while, for around one in ten, it made them postpone the decision over whether or not to remain in the UK. Surprisingly, more than one in three

respondents indicated that Brexit's impact on their length of stay was positive. This group declared that the referendum reinforced their decision to settle (14.6 per cent) and prompted them to stay longer (13.1 per cent) or permanently (7.6 per cent). In contrast, only 8.7 per cent of the sample shortened their planned stay or decided not to stay permanently due to the referendum. This confirms the refutation of our first hypothesis. Respondents' declarations, together with citizenship and inflow/outflow data suggest that the referendum, if anything, prompted people to rethink their options. Some decided to shorten their stay (among whom a number had already left) but a significant number chose to remain longer, sometimes even forever, or at least long enough to ensure their right to do so.

Which migrants are discouraged by Brexit?

The Brexit referendum induced different reactions and, as we hypothesised, had an uneven influence on migrants' perceptions, which were associated with their individual situations and characteristics. Therefore, we deepen our analysis in order to verify our expectations. Tables 2, 3 and 4 show the results of three multinomial regression models, the first of which (Table 2) includes only basic demographic variables, the second (Table 3) adds non-economic integration indicators and the third (Table 4) contains demographic variables and economic-integration indicators. All the models try to distinguish between respondents who pointed to Brexit as a discouraging factor (15 per cent of the sample), those who indicated that they find some factors – but not Brexit – discouraging (30.5 per cent of the sample) and the 54.4 per cent who declared that they find nothing to discourage them from staying in the UK. The latter group acts as the reference category.

Figure 7. Respondents' answers to 'How did Brexit influence your plans?' (%)



Source: CMR (2018) survey; N = 472.

The first model, shown in Table 2, suggests that traditional demographic variables such as gender, age, educational attainment or marital status cannot explain which respondents found Brexit discouraging. Even the length of stay in the UK, a variable typically crucial for all migration-related outcomes, has in this basic model a marginal and potentially random effect. Interestingly, another aspect of the respondents' migration

histories influenced the predicted odds. Those respondents with experience of migration to countries other than the UK were more likely to point to Brexit, but not necessarily to other factors, as discouraging. To be more precise, Model 1 estimates that those with experience of multiple migration (other things held constant) were 2.65 times more likely to choose Brexit as the discouraging factor than those who had migrated only to the UK. Possibly, respondents experienced in multiple relocations were able to compare their situation in the UK to that found in other countries and were more open to another relocation if the UK became comparatively less attractive.

Table 2. Coefficients of multinomial logistic regression

Model 1	Something (not Brexit) chosen as discouraging			Brexit chosen as discouraging		
	Odds Ratio	CI	p	Odds Ratio	CI	p
Predictors						
(Intercept)	0.88	0.26–2.99	0.831	0.2	0.04–1.00	0.049
Duration of stay in years	1.04	0.98–1.11	0.207	1.06	0.98–1.15	0.166
Female	0.92	0.60–1.42	0.716	0.91	0.52–1.59	0.741
Age in years	0.97	0.93–1.01	0.116	0.98	0.93–1.04	0.539
Migrated to countries other than the UK	1.63	0.80–3.33	0.179	2.65	1.20–5.87	0.016
Educational attainment: post-secondary	1.34	0.88–2.04	0.176	1.48	0.86–2.56	0.16
Married	1.45	0.93–2.25	0.105	1.39	0.79–2.46	0.256
N	468					
Nagelkerke R ²	0.060					

Notes: The dependent variable is based on answers to ‘What, if anything, discourages you from staying in the UK?’ The reference category for the dependent variable is ‘Nothing discourages me’.

The second model incorporates demographic controls and indicators related to non-economic integration. The coefficients shown in Table 3 confirm H2 – that those with a secure legal situation were less likely to answer that Brexit was a factor discouraging them from staying in the UK. However, we find H3 not confirmed – the variable reflecting whether someone completed a professional course lasting longer than 6 months or finished secondary/post-secondary education in the UK, had little influence on the predicted probabilities. Even when, in other models, we considered more narrowly only those who had studied in the UK, the impact was still negligible. It seems that investing in human capital in the UK only had a small influence on respondents’ perceptions of Brexit.

Attachments to the UK or integration into British society was an important hypothesis. H4 states that those who created attachments – or rather, those who seem to have done so, as we have only some indicators of these – would be less likely to consider Brexit a discouraging factor. The results – as shown in Table 3 – are mixed. In line with the hypothesis, respondents living with a partner or a spouse who had a British passport were more likely to find nothing discouraging them from staying in the UK. Nevertheless, this association was strong only when comparing those who chose ‘nothing’ with those who chose ‘something other than Brexit’ as discouraging. Having real estate in the UK seems to have no statistically significant impact, contrary to our predictions. Furthermore, while belonging to an organisation, association or club did influence predicted probabilities, this influence went in the opposite direction. When comparing those who chose ‘nothing’ with those who chose Brexit as a discouraging factor, belonging to an organisation, association or club more than doubled the odds of finding Brexit discouraging. Thus, we find H4 not confirmed.

Hypothesis 5 focused on indicators suggesting a difficulty in making attachments to the UK or keeping strong attachments to Poland; we expected these to increase the chances of finding something – and Brexit in particular – discouraging. We find H5 partially confirmed. Knowing English badly or not at all after a more than four-years stay in the UK, had a weak relationship to finding Brexit discouraging, but did correspond with a higher predicted probability of finding something (not Brexit) discouraging Poles from staying in the UK. Table 3 also confirmed that sending remittances to Poland strongly increased the odds of choosing both something and Brexit as discouraging.

Table 3. Coefficients of multinomial logistic regression

Model 2	Something (not Brexit) chosen as discouraging			Brexit chosen as discouraging		
	Odds Ratio	CI	p	Odds Ratio	CI	p
<i>Predictors</i>						
(Intercept)	0.61	0.16–2.26	0.458	0.2	0.03–1.09	0.063
Duration of stay in years	1.06	0.99–1.14	0.084	1.1	1.00–1.20	0.04
Female	1.04	0.67–1.63	0.85	0.97	0.54–1.73	0.911
Age in years	0.96	0.92–1.00	0.082	0.97	0.92–1.03	0.339
Migrated to countries other than the UK	1.66	0.78–3.51	0.187	2.33	1.01–5.39	0.048
Educational attainment: post-secondary	1.46	0.91–2.35	0.119	1.77	0.97–3.23	0.062
Married	1.44	0.89–2.31	0.134	1.31	0.72–2.40	0.377
Has permanent residence document or British passport	0.81	0.50–1.30	0.378	0.47	0.25–0.90	0.023
Completed professional course lasting 6+ months or has secondary/post-secondary education in the UK	1.5	0.87–2.59	0.14	0.7	0.33–1.48	0.356
Knows English badly or not at all	1.92	1.05–3.52	0.035	1.41	0.64–3.11	0.4
Lives with partner/spouse who has British passport	0.27	0.11–0.63	0.002	0.7	0.29–1.73	0.442
Belongs to an organisation, association or club	1.65	0.85–3.19	0.14	2.34	1.07–5.12	0.034
Has real estate in the UK	1.05	0.59–1.87	0.866	1.06	0.52–2.17	0.87
Remits to Poland	2.26	1.38–3.72	0.001	2.0	1.06–3.78	0.032
N			468			
Nagelkerke R ²			0.151			

Notes: Respondents who chose ‘Nothing discourages me’ act as the reference group. The dependent variable is based on answers to ‘What, if anything, discourages you from staying in the UK?’. Model 2 incorporates demographics and non-economic integration indicators.

The third model, shown in Table 4, incorporates not only demographic variables but also indicators of economic integration. Hypothesis 6 stated that those in a poor or unstable economic situation in the UK would be more likely to perceive Brexit as discouraging. Here, again, the results are mixed. The predicted odds for those performing jobs that require high qualifications – e.g. specialists, doctors, engineers, technicians – differed only slightly from the odds for those who performed simple jobs. In contrast, those in median-level jobs, such as industrial workers, machinery and equipment operators or office and qualified service employees, were less likely to find Brexit discouraging. This was perhaps because those performing simple jobs, together with

the elites, could transfer their skills elsewhere, while those performing median-level jobs had acquired qualifications recognised mainly in the UK, so for them leaving would be costly. Respondents working on permanent contracts were less likely to choose a factor (but not Brexit) as discouraging them from staying in the UK than those without permanent contracts. The relationship with choosing Brexit went in the same direction but was much weaker. Finally, the odds for receivers of welfare benefits to indicate Brexit as a discouraging factor were 2.18 times the odds of those not receiving benefits, in line with our hypothesis. Thus, the expected relationship was strongly visible only among those respondents who rely on state support, which might be limited by Brexit, directly impacting those migrants' incomes. In general, out of the three models presented, this last one has the highest predictive power (with a modest Nagelkerke's R^2 of 0.237), implying that respondents' economic situation plays a role in shaping their perceptions of Brexit.

Table 4. Coefficients of multinomial logistic regression

Model 3 <i>Predictors</i>	Something (not Brexit) chosen as discouraging			Brexit chosen as discouraging		
	Odds Ratio	CI	p	Odds Ratio	CI	p
(Intercept)	1.8	0.43–7.61	0.422	0.87	0.14–5.54	0.883
Duration of stay in years	1.05	0.98–1.12	0.177	1.06	0.97–1.15	0.224
Female	0.85	0.53–1.37	0.509	0.74	0.40–1.36	0.327
Age in years	0.96	0.92–1.01	0.103	0.97	0.91–1.02	0.234
Migrated to countries other than the UK	1.68	0.80–3.52	0.168	2.70	1.18–6.18	0.019
Educational attainment: post-secondary	1.53	0.94–2.47	0.084	1.33	0.71–2.48	0.367
Married	1.35	0.84–2.19	0.217	1.18	0.64–2.21	0.592
Type of work: industrial workers, machinery/equipment operators or office/qualified service employees	0.86	0.47–1.55	0.608	0.4	0.19–0.84	0.015
Type of work: highly qualified specialists, managers, technicians (e.g. doctors, engineers)	1.03	0.51–2.10	0.925	0.85	0.37–1.94	0.7
Type of work: I currently do not work in the UK	0.9	0.34–2.40	0.835	0.25	0.05–1.29	0.097
Works on permanent contract	0.36	0.22–0.60	0.0	0.57	0.31–1.07	0.081
Receives any welfare benefits	1.23	0.73–2.06	0.433	2.18	1.16–4.10	0.016
N	445					
Nagelkerke R^2	0.237					

Notes: The reference category for the dependent variable is 'Nothing discourages me', while for the 'Type of work' variable the reference category is: 'People doing simple jobs'. The dependent variable is based on answers to 'What, if anything, discourages you from staying in the UK?'. Model 3 incorporates demographics and economic integration indicators.

Discussion and conclusions

Many researchers and political commentators expected that the uncertainty introduced by Brexit and the atmosphere of anxiety and hostility towards foreigners would have a significant influence on departures and departure plans. However, only one in seven long-term migrants questioned here stated that they consider Brexit a factor discouraging them from staying in the UK. In general, the survey results interpreted within

a push–pull framework showed that economic factors such as earnings level, job situation and professional development, were more common in migrants' answers than Brexit itself. One of the reasons why respondents did not consider Brexit particularly discouraging might be that they seem to worry little about their legal status, suggesting that long-term migrants in the UK believe that they have ways to ensure further stay and work rights. Therefore, it is no surprise that 45 per cent of respondents reported that Brexit had no impact on their plans and, in fact, many said it actually convinced them to stay longer. Despite expectations, it seems that, for some, Brexit turned out to be a 'stick' or 'stay' factor, as termed by Lee's followers (Chebel d'Appollonia and Reich 2010; Herbst, Kaczmarczyk and Wójcik 2017). In general, our results support Kilkey and Ryan's (2020) conclusions that the referendum was an unsettling event. It was unsettling enough to prompt migrants to rethink their options and possibly secure their status but not necessarily to leave.

The official statistics support the interpretation that the Brexit referendum led both migrants and potential migrants to reconsider their plans. On the one hand, some migrants left and many others did not come, a reaction similar to the reaction to the Global Financial Crisis. On the other hand, unlike during the GFC, the number of Poles requesting and then being granted British citizenship spiked. Reconsidering one's options, however, does not necessarily mean making definite plans, as our survey results suggest that many long-term migrants still remain uncertain about how long they will stay. We do not know whether – in line with Eade *et al.*'s original conceptualisation (2007) – their unpredictability is still intentional or whether it has become somewhat unintentional and forced upon them by changing British regulations; nevertheless, as seen in many previous studies (Eade *et al.* 2007; Glorius *et al.* 2013; Moriarty *et al.* 2010), the lack of concrete plans to migrate or to remain was prevalent among our respondents.

Our results confirm that holders of British citizenship or permanent residence documents were less likely to perceive Brexit as a factor discouraging them from staying in the UK. However, this relationship might stem from two sources. First, those who already have ensured their right to legally remain feel (partially) immune to Brexit's negative consequences for immigrants. Second, those previously concerned about Brexit had been more likely to apply for both citizenship and other statuses which would ensure their right to stay and ease their concerns. Nevertheless, respondents' legal integration went hand-in-hand with their being less likely to perceive Brexit as discouraging.

Belonging-oriented perspectives (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018; Ryan 2018), as well as integration and transnationalism theories (e.g. Carling and Pettersen 2014) suggest that migrants who created multiple attachments that keep them rooted in the UK would not get easily discouraged from remaining there. However, our results indicate that only some such attachments lead to lower odds of perceiving Brexit, or another factor, as a discouragement to staying in the UK. Investing in education or having real estate in the UK had a negligible impact on the respondents' perceptions of Brexit as discouraging. Respondents working on permanent contracts and those living with a partner/spouse with a British passport were less likely to point to a factor discouraging them from staying; those who still knew English badly or not at all, and those who remitted to Poland were, on the contrary, more likely to find something discouraging. Thus, we can see that, among many personal characteristics, only some mattered. The odds of choosing Brexit (in comparison to choosing nothing) as discouraging Poles from staying in the UK were lower for those working in median-level jobs (industrial workers, machinery and equipment operators, or office and qualified service employees) and higher for those who had previously migrated to other countries too, those who belonged to an organisation, association or club, those who remitted to Poland, as well as those who received welfare benefits. Overall, there are some simple patterns – e.g. those economically dependent on British welfare benefits were more prone to feel discouraged, perhaps because they were worried about losing their financial security. Other patterns were mixed or nuanced, suggesting the need for further research into what influences migrants' perceptions.

In general, economic indicators gave us the best predictions of who would be discouraged by Brexit (the regression model incorporating economic variables had the highest predictive power, albeit still a modest one). Furthermore, interviewees the most often pointed to high earnings, a good job situation, the work culture and the potential for career development as factors that encouraged them to stay in the UK. This suggests that, while Brexit elicited a very emotional reaction from migrants, it did not (yet) overshadow the pull factors the most important to them, which seem to be economic in nature. Therefore, we suspect that, as long as the UK offers Polish migrants satisfying economic opportunities, many will decide to stay, despite the negative emotions and atmosphere following the Brexit referendum and its impact on migrants' quality of life. However, if Brexit or another factor affects the economy, if earnings fall, job options become limited and the potential for development decreases, we can expect these changes to push migrants to search for better opportunities elsewhere.

Nevertheless, our study has its limitations. It is important to stress that the sample consisted of migrants who were still living in the UK two years after the Brexit referendum. Thus, in interpreting the results we have to bear in mind the statistics presented in the section on inflows and outflows of Polish citizens to and from the UK before our study took place. It is possible that those migrants who were the most afraid of Brexit reacted very swiftly and left before our survey. Qualitative research could complement our study and reveal the more complex processes influencing migrants' perceptions and decisions – for example, the extent to which they evaluate Brexit's consequences for them as immigrants or as British residents, entrepreneurs or taxpayers. The region of residence, sector of employment, political views or even psychological characteristics in reaction to uncertainty could differentiate migrants' responses to this political challenge. Longitudinal surveys, random sampling and larger samples would allow for the verification and a better understanding of the patterns found here and the way in which they may unfold over time, as the changes caused by Brexit materialise in the UK.

Notes

¹ A division into four work type / professional groups was used: (1) people doing simple jobs; (2) industrial workers, machinery operators; (3) office and qualified service employees; and (4) highly qualified specialists, managers, technicians (e.g. doctors, engineers). Those without work were categorised into a fifth group, who could potentially constitute up to 25 per cent of the sample: 'I currently do not work in the UK'.

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Conflict of interest statement

No conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Annex

Table A1. Detailed statistics; numbers and percentages

What, if anything, encourages or discourages you from staying in the UK? Choose up to two factors	Encouraging		Discouraging	
	No.	%	No.	%
Earnings level	219	46.4	8	1.7
Job situation (easy or difficult to find a job)	135	28.6	10	2.1
Local lifestyle/culture at work or offices	119	25.2	26	5.5
Potential professional development	88	18.6	11	2.3
Cultural diversity	33	7.0	67	14.2
Changes brought by Brexit	9	1.9	71	15.0
Political situation in the UK	18	3.8	30	6.4
Education completion	11	2.3	9	1.9
I want my children to go to school here	38	8.1	-	-
Persons close to me live and intend to stay here	61	12.9	-	-
I (can) receive state support here	31	6.6	-	-
Elsewhere life is cheaper	-	-	56	11.9
Other reasons	10	2.1	22	4.7
Nothing encourages or discourages me	35	7.4	257	54.4

Source: CMR (2018) survey; N = 472.

Table A2. Detailed statistics; numbers and percentages

What, if anything, encourages or discourages you from returning to Poland? Choose up to two factors	Encouraging		Discouraging	
	No.	%	No.	%
Earnings level	13	2.8	244	51.7
Job situation (easy or difficult to find a job)	10	2.1	144	30.5
Local lifestyle/culture at work or offices	39	8.3	62	13.1
Potential professional development	8	1.7	57	12.1
Cultural diversity (small number of migrants)	56	11.9	12	2.5
Political situation in Poland	5	1.1	122	25.8
I (don't) want my children to go to school and grow up there	46	9.7	20	4.2
I miss my town/country/persons close to me	217	46.0	-	-
State support there	9	1.9	38	8.1
Elsewhere life is cheaper/more expensive	35	7.4	145	30.7
Other reasons	8	1.7	8	1.7
Nothing encourages or discourages me	164	34.7	72	15.3

Source: CMR (2018) survey; N = 472.

Table A3. Summary statistics for the response variable and demographic variables included in all models

Variable	Stats/Values	No.	%
What, if anything, discourages you from staying in the UK? (choose up to two factors)	Nothing discourages me	257	54.45
	Chose at least one factor, but not ‘changes brought by Brexit’	144	30.51
	Chose ‘changes brought by Brexit’ (and maybe one other factor)	71	15.04
Demographic variables			
Duration of stay in years	Mean	9.2	
	Standard Deviation	3.7	
	Minimum	4.6	
	Median	8.2	
	Maximum	18.7	
Gender	1. Male	191	40.5
	2. Female	281	59.5
Age	Mean	33.65	
	Standard Deviation	5.95	
	Minimum	22	
	Median	33	
	Maximum	44	
Migration type	1. First and only migration	369	78.2
	2. Multiple migrations, always to the UK	57	12.1
	3. Multiple migrations, different countries	46	9.8
Educational attainment	1. Lower-secondary or basic vocational	70	15.0
	2. Upper-secondary vocational or general	182	38.9
	3. Post-secondary non-tertiary	50	10.7
	4. Tertiary	166	35.5
	Missing	4	
Marital status	1. Single	136	28.8
	2. Married	175	37.1
	3. In a relationship	126	26.7
	4. Single and divorced/widowed	35	7.4

Source: CMR (2018) survey; N = 472.

Table A4. Summary statistics for the non-economic integration indicators included in Model 2

Variable	Stats/Values	No.	%
Non-economic integration indicators			
Legal status	1. Does not have permanent residence document or British passport	301	63.8
	2. Has permanent residence document	141	29.9
	3. Has British passport	30	6.4
Completed professional course lasting 6+ months (incl. secondary or studying or any post-secondary education in the UK)	1. No	361	76.5
	2. Yes	111	23.5
English level	1. Knows English badly or not at all	70	14.8
	2. Knows English well	210	44.5
	3. Knows English very well	192	40.7
Lives with partner or spouse who has British passport	1. No	418	88.6
	2. Yes	54	11.4
Belongs to an organisation, association or club	1. No	411	87.1
	2. Yes	61	12.9
Has real estate in the UK	1. No	374	79.2
	2. Yes	98	20.8
Remits to Poland	1. No	355	75.2
	2. Yes	117	24.8

Source: CMR (2018) survey; N = 472.

Table A5. Summary statistics for the economic integration indicators included in Model 3

Variable label	Stats/Values	No.	%
Economic integration indicators			
Type of work	1. People doing simple jobs in industry and services (e.g. packers, sorters, loaders, cleaners, agricultural workers etc.)	114	24.1
	2. Industrial workers, machinery and equipment operators (e.g. welders, machinists, drivers, forklift operators, masons etc.)	111	23.5
	3. Office and qualified service employees (e.g. secretaries, cashiers, salesmen, hairdressers, beauticians, cooks, waiters, receptionists etc.)	113	23.9
	4. Highly qualified specialists, managers, technicians (e.g. doctors, lawyers, engineers, nurses, accountants, store managers, programmers etc.)	105	22.2
	5. I currently do not work in the UK	29	6.1
Works on permanent contract	1. No	169	35.8
	2. Yes	303	64.2
Receives welfare benefits	1. No	319	71.0
	2. Yes	130	29.0
	Missing	23	-

Source: CMR (2018) survey; N = 472.

The Impact of Brexit on Young Poles and Lithuanians in the UK: Reinforced Temporariness of Migration Decisions

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The main aim of this paper is to assess the extent to which the 2016 Brexit referendum impacted on the decisions of young Polish and Lithuanian migrants to stay in the UK or return to the country of origin. We analyse information from 76 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Lithuanians and Poles living in the UK, as well as those who have returned to Lithuania and Poland since June 2016. We find that, for our interviewees, the referendum had little impact on the decision to stay in the UK or return to the country of origin, giving way, instead, to work, family and lifestyle considerations. Only for a select few did it act as a trigger, either adding to other reasons which eventually prompted the return to Lithuania or Poland, or motivating people to secure their rights in the UK and delay plans to leave the country. We conclude by discussing our results together with existing research on transnationalism and life-course migration theory: regardless of interviewees' decisions to stay or return, these were never final, stressing the fluid nature of migration and the desire of our interviewees to maintain ties across multiple places.

Keywords: return migration, transnationalism, Brexit, Lithuania, Poland

Introduction

On 23 June 2016, the UK voted to leave the European Union (EU). In a referendum surrounded by heated debates on immigration, the message was clear: the UK has too many immigrants. While the vote had wide-ranging consequences for the British economy, politics and people, this article explores how the referendum impacted on the decisions of young Polish and Lithuanian migrants to stay in the UK or return to their country of origin.

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We focus on Poles and Lithuanians because the former quickly became the largest migrant group in the UK and the latter come from one of the countries the most affected by emigration in the EU (Eurostat 2019: 3).

Brexit has attracted a great deal of research on migrant experiences in the UK following the 2016 referendum. However, the majority of studies analyse how Brexit affected migrants' experiences of living in the UK or their future mobility intentions rather than their actual decisions. We take the existing literature on the effects of Brexit a step further by interviewing migrants who, since 2016, have returned to their country of origin and those who have since decided to stay in the UK. In total, we conducted 76 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Lithuanians (36) and Poles (40) living in the UK (66), as well as with those (10) who have returned to Lithuania and Poland since June 2016. We carried out the interviews in 2019, which would have given the interviewees enough time to act on their decisions. In this respect, we hope that our findings can be considered more robust since they are based on an actual rather than an intended return or stay. Specifically, this paper aims to answer four research questions.

1. How did the Brexit referendum results affect the migrants' decisions to stay in the UK?
2. How did the Brexit referendum results affect Poles' and Lithuanians' decisions to return to their country of origin?
3. What are other, non-Brexit factors that play a role in migrants' decision to stay in the UK?
4. What are other, non-Brexit, factors that play a role in migrants' decision to leave the UK?

We organise the paper as follows. We begin by engaging with some theoretical literature on intra-European transnationalism, the life course and youth transitions, return migration and Brexit, as relevant to our investigation presented here, after which we briefly outline our methods. Then, bearing in mind our research questions, we present our findings in four empirical sections, one for each question. We conclude by discussing our results in the light of the ongoing conceptual debates referred to above.

Theoretical framework

Given that our research questions present staying and returning as two dichotomous categories, we engage with the literature on transnationalism which nuances these terms. There now exists a large body of literature that deals with the post-2004 transnationalism of Central and East European migrants in Western Europe (Eade, Drinkwater and Garapich 2007; Engbersen, Leerkes, Grabowska-Lusinska, Snel and Burgers 2013; Moskal 2013; Pollard, Latorre and Sriskandarajah 2008). These studies have resulted in the widely accepted definition of Central and Eastern Europeans as transnational migrants in all known respects: actual cross-border mobility, transnational practices and increasingly transnational identities (Burrell 2009; Eade *et al.* 2007; Morokvašić 2004). Transnational migrants create and maintain simultaneous multi-stranded relationships between their countries of origin and immigration (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc 1995). Since the 2004 EU accession, Central and Eastern European migrants' transnationalism has taken an even-more-intense form thanks to the privileges of becoming EU citizens and being able to move freely within Europe. Due to cheap airlines, short distances, modern technological advances and the variety of ways available to them to exchange goods, services, ideas and visits across fading intra-EU borders, CEE European migrants have quickly earned the names of 'easy transnationalists' (cf. Ryan, Klekowski von Koppenfels and Mulholland 2015: 199), 'middling transnationals' (Conradson and Latham 2005), and 'liquid' or 'fluid' migrants (Engbersen *et al.* 2013).

Return migration is one of the strands of transnationalism which, in the context of fluid post-accession mobility experiences, has given way to terms such as multiple returns, circular migration, temporary migration

or open-ended migration. Transnational theories argue that, in a globalised world, national borders no longer prevent migrants from maintaining cross-border relations (Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt 1999: 219). On the contrary, whether migrants decide to return to their country of origin, stay in the country of immigration or move to yet another country, their transnational relations continue to flourish, which often leads to re-migration or double return migration (White 2014). Our paper advances these transnational theories by exploring whether migrants understand their post-Brexit referendum decisions to be permanent or temporary.

This transnational way of life is particularly widely adopted among young migrants. The variety and multiplicity of migration experiences among young people entering adulthood these days leads to the creation of the term ‘mobile transitions’ (Frändberg 2013; King 2017; Raffaetà, Baldassar and Harris 2015; Robertson, Harris and Baldassar 2018). The concept highlights the fact that, for young people, key life events – such as starting their education or employment, a partnership or children – take place ‘on the move’ (Blachnicka-Ciacek, Grabowska, Hekiart, Pustulka, Sarnowska, Trąbka, Werminska-Wisnicka, Barcevicus, Budginaite-Mackine, Jonaviciene, Klimaviciute, Vezikauskaite and Parutis 2019). Migration can be used as a kind of ‘rite of passage into adulthood’ or cutting of the umbilical cord (King, Lulle, Moroşanu and Williams 2016), or a way of leaving the parents’ shadow (Moroşanu, Bulat, Mazzilli and King 2018). As it has been shown with post-accession Central and East European young (especially highly educated) migrants, migration can offer an opportunity for personal self-development and individualisation as well as career progression (King, Lulle, Parutis and Saar 2017). Migration for this group can act not only as an escalator to career development and income but also as an ‘adventure’ and a way of accelerating the youth-to-adult transition (King *et al.* 2017: 5). To highlight these experiences, our sample focuses on the youth, on which we elaborate further in the Methodology.

Life-course theory also stresses the fluidity of migration and suggests that migration correlates with major life events (King, Thomson, Fielding and Warnes 2006). Migrants can move abroad for study and work to establish themselves financially and then return home when family considerations and the desire or need to spend more time with the parents takes priority (King 2017). Life courses are not always linear (Worth 2009) and can be ruptured by illness, redundancy, the failure to pass exams, breakups or divorce, each of which might cause migration or return (Hörschelmann 2011). The life-course approach suggests that migrants remain open and move to maximise opportunities in different places and at different times (du Bois-Reymond and López Blasco 2003). Such flexibility is associated with broader trends like the destandardisation of work and education (du Bois-Reymond and López Blasco 2003), individualisation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002) or a delay in marriage and parenthood, and can be enabled or limited by geopolitical and economic events like the EU enlargements, financial recessions or Brexit (Kilkey and Ryan 2020; King 2017). Our paper, therefore, considers various factors – related or not to Brexit – to see whether migrants make their decisions depending on the stage of their lives that they are in.

Methodology

The data used in this paper came from 66 semi-structured interviews conducted with migrants in the UK and 10 conducted with those Poles and Lithuanians who returned from the UK to their countries of origin after June 2016. All our interviewees were aged 19–36. We focus on young people to explore the implications of our research to transnationalism and life-course theories, which are particularly relevant for migration that occurs in youth. Our interviewees arrived in the UK after 2004 and lived there for at least three years. Participants were recruited through social media sites and a snowballing approach. Interviews were conducted via Skype, phone, Messenger or face-to-face. We gathered information on reasons for migration and return, social

anchors in the UK and in the country of origin, perceived risks and plans, participants' opinions and experiences regarding Brexit and key socio-demographic data. Fieldwork was conducted from February to May 2019 (for a detailed methodology, see Blachnicka-Ciacek *et al.* 2019). To ensure respondent confidentiality, names used in this paper have been changed and we do not present any identifying information.

A few points about our sample are important to note. We recruited fewer returnees than migrants in the UK because some migrants were delaying making their decision until the Brexit details were clear, and we wanted to capture the effect of this uncertainty on their decisions. Even with few returnees, however, we are able to showcase the diversity of factors that influenced their decisions, including the impact of the Brexit referendum. The skewness might nevertheless affect our results in that decisions for return might not be explored in as much depth as decisions to stay. Furthermore, the emphasis on youth allows us to explore how migrants navigate migration decisions in light of other important events such as career-building and family planning. However, such a focus also poses the danger of overstating the risks associated with Brexit given that we did not interview older migrants in the UK who might have been more established and hence less affected by the referendum. Our sample is also skewed more towards women (47) than men (29) and those with a Bachelor's degree or higher (59) compared to people with secondary education (13) or those studying for a BA (4). The distribution resulted from convenience sampling, as women and those with higher levels of education are more likely to agree to participate in research. Given that the views of men and those with less education might be under-represented in the study, we spend more time analysing their data in this paper. Less than half (32) of the respondents live in London, with the remaining 44 residing across the UK, with the exception of Wales.

Brexit and its impact on transnationalism and the return-migration decision

In this article we explore the extent to which Polish and Lithuanian migrants' decisions to return to their country of origin or stay in the immigration country have been affected by the Brexit referendum results and anticipated withdrawal of the UK from the EU. While there is now a rapidly expanding body of literature on the effects of Brexit on migrant populations in the UK, including Central and Eastern Europeans, previous studies tended to focus on other aspects of migrants' experiences and only mention in passing the effects on their decisions to leave or remain.

In the immediate aftermath of the referendum, researchers explored the potential negative impact of Brexit on migrants' rights and welfare entitlement (Currie 2016; Kilkey 2017) and migrants' initial emotional reactions to the results of the referendum and the anxieties associated with it (Lulle, Moroşanu and King 2017). The uncertainties stemming from the referendum results were claimed to affect both their everyday lives and their future plans (Kilkey 2017; Rzepnikowska 2019). Numerous studies have examined the disruptive impact of Brexit on EU migrants' sense of belonging to the local area, the UK and Europe (Botterill and Hancock 2018; Lulle *et al.* 2017; McGhee, Moreh and Vlachantoni 2017; Ranta and Nancheva 2018; Sime, Kakela, Corson, Tyrrell, McMellon, Kelly and Moskal 2017). Speculations about how CEE migrants have shifted their belonging practices has given rise recently to theories of anchoring (Grzymala-Kazłowska 2018) and differentiated embedding (Ryan 2018). A few studies have included migrants' discourses on future plans in relation to further migration or return to the home countries (Sime *et al.* 2017). Other recent studies have warned against generalising about the impact of Brexit for all EU migrants since the category hides diverse groups of individuals of variable vulnerability to post-Brexit changes (Lulle, King, Dvorakova and Szkudlarek 2018). For example, highly skilled migrants are believed to be more open to leaving the UK, while low-skilled ones face more-restricted future choices (Lulle *et al.* 2018).

Our study takes the discussion on migrants' intentions regarding settlement vs re-migration a step further by examining their actual decisions to return to Poland or Lithuania within three years of the Brexit referendum. Although studies on post-referendum migration are few, McGhee *et al.* (2017) argue that migration from the UK since 2016 has been impacted on by an awareness of one's rights and anxieties about the ability to maintain them. Others (Kilkey and Ryan 2020; Trąbka and Pustulka 2020) stress the importance of embeddedness in the places where migrants live and the life stages they are at when making the decision to stay in the UK. To add to these studies, we asked our interviewees to assess the extent to which their decision to stay in the UK or return to Poland and Lithuania had been affected by the referendum results. We hope that this approach allows us to produce more reliable findings than those obtained about migrants' intentions to return, as Drinkwater and Garapich (2015) have shown that intentions rarely align with actions. In examining this question, we also contribute to the literature, reviewed above, on intra-European transnationalism, the life course or youth transitions and return migration.

Results

Brexit as a trigger to establish the right to stay

None of the migrants interviewed for this project claimed that Brexit had a major impact on their decision to stay in the UK. However, the referendum did motivate many to secure their legal status in the UK as a direct result of possible post-Brexit difficulties for non-British citizens. At the time of interview, many of our participants in the UK had already applied for permanent residence or settled status in order to ensure that Brexit would not interfere with their lives after the UK leaves the EU. For example, Elena (Lithuanian – LT, 33, single, F, PhD), who works at a UK university and applied for the settled status early, concludes: 'There was no choice about it, everyone will need to have this, I had this opportunity to do it early, so I simply wished to take care of all this as soon as possible'.

A Polish interviewee (31, engaged, F, MA) who came to the UK because she could not find a job as a teacher in Poland and who was expecting a baby with her Polish partner, admitted that she needed to apply for permanent residence in order not to disrupt her family's life in the UK: 'I feel much more secure now, knowing that I am in their system'. Edita (LT, 32, partner, F, MA), who applied for settled status twice, having been rejected the first time a year earlier, also stresses the emotional security that permanent residence brings:

I have it [permanent residence] because Brexit really scared me. I never needed it before (...) but perhaps I will need some sort of proof that I was here before the end of March 2019. (...) In the coming two years, it [permanent residence] doesn't give anything, no privileges. (...) It helps me more emotionally that no, no one will tell me in a few months to 'pack your things and go because you have no proof that you were here before'.

Some of the Polish migrants already had a British passport, which is an ultimate guarantee for them that they will not be facing any undesirable treatment after Brexit. This is explained by Konstancja (Polish – PL, 33, partner, F, PhD) who currently holds a permanent residence card but is planning to apply for British citizenship: 'Why citizenship? Because I really do not trust the British people. (...) The Brits may not honour it [settled status]; citizenship is the safest option'.

Importantly, to acquire British citizenship remains a bigger problem for the Lithuanian migrants because Lithuania, unlike Poland, does not allow dual citizenship. For them, obtaining British citizenship means renouncing their Lithuanian nationality, which the majority of interviewees perceived as quite unacceptable; thus their only legal option at present is to obtain permanent residence in the UK while still holding a Lithuanian passport. Moreover, both Polish and Lithuanian passports were highly valued for enabling work and travel within the EU. Nevertheless, one Lithuanian couple was considering a strategy in which the husband would keep his Lithuanian citizenship, while his wife acquired British nationality; this would – at least in theory – simplify the settlement process in either of the countries if they had to choose.

The referendum also had a rather surprising effect on some of our highly skilled interviewees' return plans and migration decisions. A number of the highly skilled migrants in our sample, who either planned to return or to move to another country, are staying temporarily in the UK because of the referendum. Pursuing their international careers, they still wanted to keep their options open and if necessary, to be able to come back to the UK. They plan to move away as soon as they can formally secure their potential return to the UK, which safeguards their professional and personal transnationalism. For example, Modesta (LT, 24, single, F, BA) is worried about the restrictions that come with closed borders and the fact that she may find it difficult to visit Lithuania as often as she would like. She expects the UK labour market to be hit by an economic crisis after Brexit and so is exploring opportunities in other European countries. However, she admits that she has postponed all plans to leave the UK until after Brexit, when the situation is clearer.

Although safeguarding against any Brexit impacts in this way was important for all our interviewees, including young single migrants, it was especially important for families with children who felt a need to secure stability for their lives in the UK. This is the case for Witold (PL, 35, married, children, M, PhD), whose children had a hard time adapting to the new education system and new linguistic environment after they moved from Poland to London. Witold is an academic who, echoing other interviewees, feels safer in the UK, in contrast to Poland. He admits that his family has just started to enjoy their lives in the UK so, in order to not disrupt this process, he obtained permanent residence:

So far, we don't have plans for the future, I mean the plan is to stay here. It's more difficult to plan the future when there are four people compared to when there was one person. (...) the whole family found their place in the UK and achieved a good quality of life. (...) there are no reasons for this [any changes] right now.

A similar explanation about safeguarding their life in the UK through acquiring permanent legal status is given by another migrant with family and children (PL, 35, engaged, children, M, secondary school). Coming from a blue-collar background and having spent 14 years in the UK, he would not consider living elsewhere, possibly because his job opportunities elsewhere would be limited. He explains that the only impact of Brexit on him was that he became more politically involved. Interestingly, he was not the only interviewee who intensified his social engagement after the results of the Brexit referendum. While some joined the political parties clearly opposing Brexit, others participated in marches and regularly signed petitions against leaving the EU. It shows that CEE migrants are not only passive subjects of the ongoing political changes but also active agents, who attempt to co-shape the circumstances they live in. Such an approach is also reflected in the reappearing disappointment in our interviewees' discourses that migrants were not eligible to vote in the referendum.

For many migrants the legal precautions do not translate into their taking a decision to stay in the UK permanently. None of the migrants to whom we spoke admitted that they would live the rest of their lives in the UK. They all stressed the temporary nature of their stay in the UK, leaving themselves a multitude of other places to which they would like to move in the future, usually in Europe. For example, Ksenia (PL, 32, partner,

F, MA) had previously lived and worked in the US and still holds a valid US visa which, for her, is a back-up plan in case she decides to leave the UK. Another interviewee (PL, 32, partner, F, MA) has a Canadian partner and so is contemplating a possible move to Canada in the future. Aurelia (PL, 27, single, F, MA) works for an international company and would like to move to another country in the future. Her phrase sums up these plans and intentions well: 'It is very fluid for now'. This fluidity is made possible by our interviewees' young age, higher education and single (childless) family situation.

There are also several interviewees who adopt the 'wait and see' approach when it comes to applying for permanent residence or citizenship and who will not take any action on that front until they know exactly what will be required as a result of Brexit. They justify this lack of action because of the Brexit-related chaos and uncertainty about legal procedures which, in some cases, was confirmed by special consultations with legal advisors.

Nevertheless, in some cases the referendum caused a paradoxical effect with regard to the migrants' integration. Although many of them had formalised their stay or planned to do so, anchoring themselves institutionally, their emotional attachment to the UK weakened. For example, Edita (LT, 32, partner, F, MA), who holds permanent resident status, asserts that, after the shock of Brexit, she feels 'less British' and more cosmopolitan. There are, however, numerous accounts of migrants who received strong words of support from Britons and sincere apologies for their plight. It helped them cope with the challenging situation and mounting uncertainty, enabling them, with time, to return to 'normal life', as if Brexit were never going to happen.

Brexit as a trigger to return: a reality check?

Our interviews with Polish and Lithuanian returnees made it very clear that Brexit was not the main motivation for their return: only a few admitted that the 2016 vote had had any impact on their decision to return. Thus, it seems appropriate to talk, instead, of Brexit only contributing to and, in some cases, accelerating the return decision.

On the one hand, the unexpected results of the referendum made some migrants rethink their life strategies, which could have resulted in a decision to leave the UK – as was the case for Aurora (LT, 36, single, F, BA), for whom the referendum was a factor that made her stop and take a look at the bigger picture of her life:

Actually it [the referendum] did change the situation because I started thinking what I wanted to do. And I don't want to do jobs like this all my life. So it was like a reality check because time passes quickly and one does not notice how many years one spends there. From rent to rent, from one trip to another (...) there are many stimulating experiences to be had there. (...) And after some years you realise that you do not just want to stimulate yourself, and you start thinking how I would like to live my life and where I would like to live it.

Having taken stock of her life, Aurora decided that she did not want to continue living in London. In her precarious situation the additional uncertainty brought about by Brexit was the last straw which motivated her to end the liquidity of her migration and begin a settled adult life in Lithuania. She has her own flat in Vilnius which she feels attached to, has a job that she likes and friends that share her worldview. According to her, things are much simpler in Vilnius because it is a small city and because she can afford to be more flexible than before. Although she misses the rich cultural life in the UK and friendly conversations with strangers, she feels good in Vilnius for now. It is important to add that Aurora's migration to the UK always had a temporal nature, as she left Lithuania in order to escape the emotional aftermath of a personal tragedy and needed some

space and time to deal with her personal problems. So, for her, Brexit simply defined the end of that temporary stay abroad.

On the other hand, the consequences of the Brexit decision did not always lead to the redefinition of migrants' life goals but changed the structural conditions under which the migrants had to act. This, in turn, prompted their decision about return, as was the case for Amelia (PL, 29, single, F, MA). Amelia worked for a multinational company in London but, due to the risks of Brexit, her position in the company was no longer secure and she expected to be moved to another city in the UK – which she did not like. In the midst of this uncertainty and possible changes, Amelia considered returning to Poland, where she believed she would have a better quality of life than in the UK and would still be able to use her skills and competencies gained in the UK. Again, as with Aurora, she originally migrated with the intention of staying in the UK temporarily, as her goal was to gain access to specific health services that she needed at that moment in her life. By the time the referendum took place, her health problems were already resolved and she felt ready to return.

These two cases presented above do not, however, mean that the returnees are determined to stay in their home countries for good but that their return suits their current situation of single educated young women.

Brexit and business as usual: what really keeps migrants in the UK?

While, for some of our interviewees, the referendum encouraged their plans to return or establish residency, most of them felt that Brexit had no impact at all on their decisions. Although many interviewees felt shock, sadness, fear or anger right after the referendum, as time passed they adapted to the new situation and no longer took Brexit seriously. Edita (LT, 32, partner, F, MA), for example, felt a strong negative emotional response to the vote but now 'just lives like [she] lived before: work, friends, relationship'. The sentiment that nothing had changed was echoed particularly by interviewees who live in locations where Britons voted Remain, like London:

At the time when the referendum happened, in June, I was in Lithuania... from a distance and so on, you really get this fear that maybe everything is really bad, something changed. Then I returned to London... and realised that, no... if you want to live here, no one will bother you and you don't bother anyone (LT, Gediminas, 27, engaged, M, MA).

Moreover, some interviewees felt relatively safe and were almost sure that Brexit would not impact on them at all because of their long residence in the UK (echoing findings by Gawlewicz and Sotkasiira 2019), their contribution to the local labour market, tax payments and lack of a criminal record – in other words, because they are 'good migrants' (Anderson 2015). In their opinion, these aspects give them the right to live in the UK, regardless of what additional requirements Brexit will introduce, as discussed by Kornelia (PL, 34, partner, child, F, BA): 'We have been living here for several years. We have work here, we have a settled life, we perceive this place as our home and I think that Brexit more or less won't do us any harm'.

By contrast, migrants like Jolanta (LT, 35, divorced, now engaged, children, F, secondary school), living in areas where most of the people voted Leave, did encounter some episodes of hate speech – Jolanta's own daughter felt it. Interviewees also noted the rising cost of living, plummeting pound exchange rate, less-generous social benefits and uncertainty regarding business and employment. However, they decided to stay for one or a combination of the reasons discussed below.

The availability of jobs within interviewees' fields of specialty keeps many migrants in the UK. As Aneta (PL, 35, single, F, MA) argues, 'In the UK [I] can do anything [I] would like to do because possibilities in this area are limitless'. Aneta had previously considered moving to Poland but her boss offered her the opportunity

to work remotely. She can now spend a lot of time in Poland and feels that if she applied for a job there, she would have to limit her expectations. Vaiva (LT, 27, single, F, MA), too, likes her current job in the UK because it involves both helping others and developing herself. She does not exclude the possibility of return to Lithuania but is worried about finding a similar job to her current one. Finally, Klaudija (LT, 24, single, F, student) came to the UK to become an artist and thinks that London offers her more opportunities to realise her goal than cities in Lithuania.

Reasons to stay include not only migrants' career aspirations but their financial security more generally. Despite liking his town and colleagues, feeling like 'a member of the community', owning a house and gaining more respect from his employer than in Lithuania, Eiminas (LT, 34, married, M, secondary school) claims that 'only financial possibilities keep me attached... if there was the slightest chance of being able to live like that in Lithuania, near family, friends, I would go home'. A strong emphasis on financial opportunities might be a way to reduce cognitive dissonance. Eiminas has spent 14 years in the UK and is fully settled, so it is unlikely that he will return; however, he does not want to let go of the idea, as evidenced by the expressed desire to return in the future, arguing that he has 'always cared about Lithuania' and maintains transnational ties by voting in Lithuanian elections and visiting Lithuania twice a year. Financial opportunities are not something that Lithuania can fix easily – so they serve as an internal justification for staying while still giving space to assert one's Lithuanian patriotism.

In addition to higher wages, the UK's social benefits provide another source of financial security for migrants, as is the case for Kinga (PL, MA), a 30-year-old single mother. She is staying in the UK only because of her two-year-old child. According to Kinga, the benefits she receives enables her to have a decent life and in Poland her situation as a single mother would be much worse. Otherwise, Kinga is not attached to the UK: 'I have no choice – I have to stay here. Once my life here becomes unaffordable, I will go back'. The quote emphasises that staying is not always a free choice: Kinga feels forced to stay due to structural conditions – e.g. the worse financial support to single mothers in Poland – and not because she likes the UK. Her vulnerable economic situation also makes her susceptible to shocks like that incurred by the referendum. It is not that she stayed because the vote had no impact on her (in fact, she blames the referendum for making it harder to access social benefits) but because she had no choice, despite feeling unwelcome.

The decision to stay despite Brexit might also be influenced by family reasons, in particular with regard to children's education. Jolanta (LT, 35, divorced, now engaged, F, secondary school) finds the education system in the UK better than in Lithuania. Maja (PL, 30, engaged, F, secondary school) admits that her family would like to stay in the UK until her child finishes school. She and her partner both feel that providing children with a British education might be seen as an advantage in the future. Education aside, returning to the country of origin is seen as a potential negative shock for children who were born in the UK and spent their whole lives there. As Klementyna (PL, 34, divorced, now partner, F, secondary school) explains, her 'children would not be able to go back. They do not go to Poland; they would not be able to go and live there'. Remaining in the UK might be also perceived as an investment in children's future. Zosia (PL, 30, partner, F, MA) wants to have children in the UK in order for them to acquire two passports (Polish and British). She thinks that dual citizenship would give them many opportunities regardless of whether Brexit takes place or not.

The quality of life in the UK is frequently noted by migrants (both blue- and white-collar workers) as a strong argument for staying in the UK. Nonetheless, what quality of life means varies. While some stress the ability to earn a decent salary, others note a particular lifestyle. For example, when asked what makes her attached to London, Milda (LT, 31, partner, F, MA) responded that 'it is fun to live in London when you have a lot of money... we just started attending various private members' clubs... that kind of London is very cool, it is an absolutely cosmopolitan city where you meet all kinds of people'. Other interviewees also mentioned

a higher level of development in the UK, the broader choice of work and life opportunities, diversity and free-time activities.

It is interesting that some migrants want to stay in the UK because they feel attached to it whereas others stay because they do not feel attached to any other place. The former have their friends, jobs and favourite places in the UK – the potential move would entail starting everything from scratch. The latter stay in the UK because it is almost like a default option. As Stefania (PL, 25, partner, F, secondary school) argues, she ‘no longer [has] a home in Poland, so (...) as a consequence, it means it [the home] is here [in the UK]’.

For yet others, negative personal experiences in the countries of origin discourage thoughts about returning, as explained by Patrycja (PL, 35, partner, F, MA): ‘My home is here in England. I did not have good experiences in Poland. Many unpleasant things happened to me. Here I was given a second chance. In England, I could be myself’. This sentiment is also echoed by Klaudija (LT, 24, single, F, BA student):

Last summer I spent five weeks in Lithuania and I couldn't create [art]... it's just that my family is a bit negative and with problems and I just really missed London because I have a studio where I can create art, and I have friends, and work.

While we categorise the different reasons for staying – including those related to career opportunities, financial security, family, lifestyle and certain push factors away from the countries of origin – it is important to note that they often overlap, as evidenced by this last quote, in which Klaudija mentions multiple reasons for staying in London. Similarly, although we frame this section in terms of staying and leaving, many of our interviewees maintain a level of transnationalism. For example, although they reside in the UK, they hold strong ties with the country of origin – having a flat there, family, or visiting frequently. In the next section, we further explore whether or not migrants maintain ties with the UK after returning to their countries of origin, after first showing that Brexit had no impact on their decisions to return and discussing the factors that did.

Brexit as separate from return: why they really returned to Poland or Lithuania

Most interviewees who returned to their home countries after the Brexit referendum said that the process of Brexit had a close to zero impact on their decision. Rather, their return coincided with a particular life stage. This was the case for Irma (LT, 32, married, children, F, BA) who, with her husband, decided to return to Lithuania before their children started school; they therefore made the move as their eldest son approached school age. Saulius (LT, 31, married, M, secondary school) and his wife returned to Lithuania after they had earned enough money in the UK to start a new phase in their life by getting some education (postponed because of emigration) and starting a career in a new field. Gabriel (PL, 31, partner, M, BA) also returned after he had accumulated enough capital to develop his own businesses in Poland, through which he expected to earn more than in the UK.

For some returnees, their home countries became ‘safe havens’ during stormy periods in their life course, even though they had had no prior plans to return. Adomas (LT, 32, partner, M, BA) decided to go back to Lithuania as a result of a ‘personal crisis’ caused by a mix of reasons – including a burnout at work, a breakup with a girlfriend and the end of his accommodation contract. He simply did not have the energy to start everything all over again in the UK and chose instead to return to Lithuania. Meanwhile, Konrad (PL, 36, partner, M, MA) who, a few years ago, had no plans to leave and had even considered buying a house in the UK, returned to Poland after realising that he faced a ‘glass ceiling’ in his company because he was not British.

Finally, some other migrants returned to their home countries almost by accident, drawn by good employment opportunities. Longin (PL, 33, partner, M, PhD) applied for jobs in various countries while still living in the UK. He applied to only one company in Poland and was offered the job. He is now happy to have returned

to Poland, with a new job in a global organisation in Warsaw. Linas (LT, 25, single, M), after gaining his BA and MA in the UK, returned to Lithuania primarily for work. He had not planned to return so soon, originally intending to stay in the UK until he was 27 or 28 in order to earn some money before going back but, while looking for a job in the UK, also applied for a position in Lithuania and was offered it. He does, however, emphasise the fact that a ‘good job’ is not enough to root him in Lithuania. For that to happen, he would have to find a partner and start a family. In Artur’s case (PL, 23, partner, M, BA), it was an interplay between personal and work-related reasons that made him return. He went to the UK to study and wanted to remain in London after graduation but, meanwhile, met a girlfriend who lives in Poland. After some time in a long-distance relationship, he accepted a very interesting job offer from a global company in Warsaw.

Despite a general satisfaction with their decision to return, many returnees are keeping their options open – including that of returning to the UK. Irma’s husband has remained in the UK to support the family until the youngest child starts kindergarten in Lithuania and Irma can begin working again. They also own a house in the UK and want to rent it out instead of selling it. Irma is ‘95 per cent sure she will stay in Lithuania’ though a little uncertainty remains. She still maintains a UK bank account – mostly for sentimental reasons but also as a ‘plan B’, in case she needs to move to the UK again. Similarly, Linas explained that he does not feel attached to Vilnius despite having recently bought an apartment there. He would not mind moving elsewhere, preferably to a German-speaking country. He, too, has retained his UK bank account. Although he does not plan to return to the UK, he kept the account open when he left in case he needed to return. Krzysztof (PL, 34, single, M, MA) believes that coming back to Poland is perhaps just a ‘stepping stone’ between successive stages of his life, as he enjoys living in both Poland and England; however, he also likes living in Madrid and Georgia, where he has previously lived. ‘Home’, he says, ‘may still be somewhere else’.

Many returnees emphasised how important free movement between the UK and the rest of the EU, including their home countries, is to them. As Saulius (LT, 31, married, M, secondary school) explained, ‘It would be nice to know that I can visit the UK anytime I want, to stay there. If I have to pay for a visa, I will most likely choose to visit another country’. He also wants to continue running his business (he buys motorcycles in the UK, fixes them and sells them in other countries, including Lithuania) and is worried that, because of Brexit, the borders might be closed and new taxes introduced, impeding his ability to trade. Meanwhile, Irma (LT, 32, married, children, F, BA) also fears that it might be more difficult for them to visit friends in the UK or go there to shop. Therefore, whether in terms of future plans or actual lifestyles, returnees maintain connections to the UK in the same way that many migrants maintain connections to their home countries.

Discussion and conclusions

The Brexit referendum is perceived by researchers as a crucial moment in the migration process of Central and Eastern Europeans (Blachnicka-Ciacek *et al.* 2019). The potential impact of the Leave vote on the latter’s mobility patterns in the UK was being investigated even before the announcement of the results (McGhee *et al.* 2017). Earlier research has shown that the vote was a critical, frustrating and negative event in the life course of many migrants (Kilkey and Ryan 2020; Lulle *et al.* 2018). However, it has not necessarily resulted in migrants changing their mobility plans (Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Kilkey and Ryan 2020; Tyrrell, Sime, Kelly and McMellon 2018). Through the theoretical lens of intra-European transnationalism, the life course and return migration, our paper investigated retrospectively the impact that the Brexit vote had on migrants’ decisions to stay in the UK or return to Poland or Lithuania.

Our research suggests that the referendum had some – but not a major – influence on their decisions. A similarly ambiguous effect is observed in other research (Guma and Dafydd Jones 2019; Tyrrell *et al.* 2018). In answer to the first research question on the impact of Brexit on the decision to stay in the UK, migrants

report that, by not leaving the UK, they intend to preserve stability in their professional and family lives. One strand of interviewees included highly qualified professionals who had worked hard to build their international careers and were therefore not willing to risk them by leaving the UK at this crucial time when immigration and employment policies are changing. They do, nevertheless, keep their hands on the pulse of the European labour market so that they can monitor employment prospects elsewhere in case the situation in the UK worsens. These findings echo those reported by Gmelch (1980), who argues that well-off migrants, like the highly skilled international professionals in our study, do not wish to give up their secure positions. However, it is not only the highly skilled who prefer to stay. Those who have spent more time in the UK more generally and are thus more embedded also seek to establish residence (Gawlewicz and Sotkasiira 2019). The referendum indeed motivated many to secure their residence status or avoid moving to another country at least until after the migration rules are clarified. This effect has already been observed in the literature but mostly regarding low-skilled workers (Engbersen 2012; Massey, Durand and Pren 2016), whereas our interviewees, from both high- and low-skilled backgrounds, were determined to not move outside the UK before being certain of their ability to return.

In answer to the second research question on the decision of returnees to return to the home country, the impact of Brexit was never described as a decisive factor but, rather, as a stimulus that reminded migrants of their originally temporary migration intentions. We did not encounter a single person who returned because of the 2016 vote. Rather, the referendum both encouraged migrants to reflect on their life goals and/or affected their possible employment prospects, both of which added to their reasons for return. One important factor that transpired in some interviews with returnees is that Brexit was the trigger encouraging them to take stock of their original migration goals – such as accumulating planned financial capital or resolving very specific physical and mental health-related problems. Earlier literature on return migration supports the link between original temporary emigration intentions and return decisions but only for those migrants who succeed in fulfilling their migration intentions (Bovenkerk 1974). Similarly, other studies show that the main reason for the return of short-term migrants is related to the accomplishment of the migration aim (Anacka and Fihel 2013). Some of our returnees certainly fell into this category of successful temporary migrants who, at the time of the Brexit referendum vote, felt that they had fulfilled their migration objectives and were ready to go back.

The third research question – on the non-Brexit-related reasons for remaining in the UK – resulted in many interviewees reporting that they chose to ignore Brexit and continue their lives in exactly the same manner as before. Their personal and professional life in the UK is treated by them as the default life option with which they are satisfied and which they currently see no reason to change. Highly skilled migrants, especially those working for multinational corporations, niche or art-related sectors, report staying for the better career prospects in the UK compared to Poland or Lithuania, while low-skilled migrants or those who struggled with job security in the past in their home countries tend to emphasise their current financial security in the UK which they do not wish to jeopardise. Financial motivation to stay is often related to the ability to afford a better quality of life in the UK – which includes access to numerous leisure activities which are often not available or accessible in their home countries. Some list specific anchors that keep them in the UK such as their favourite local places, routine activities and social circle. Those who have families, including the highly skilled, emphasise that their decision to live in the UK is grounded in the quality of education and better career prospects for the children, with some admitting that their children would struggle to adapt in Poland or Lithuania.

Finally, in answer to the fourth question about non-Brexit-related reasons for return, our returnees cited family or career considerations and, to some extent, disappointment with their lives in the UK. These motivations were starkly similar to reasons cited before 2016 and support the conclusions of some existing studies on the pre-2016 return migration to Poland and Lithuania. Although the main motivation for this migration was economic, the non-economic factors stood backed up the decision on return (Barcevičius and Žvalionytė 2012; GUS 2013), with family reasons cited the most often for the return of Polish long term-term migrants (GUS

2013). Family considerations in our interviews echo those quoted in previous studies (White 2009), which often refer to migrants wishing to bring up their children in the home country and cultural environment. This makes the timeframe for the return crucial in order not to disrupt the children's education.

A theme of temporariness emerged as a common factor for both stayers and returnees. Those who remained in the UK often cited the possibility of returning to the home country or maintaining transnational ties in other ways. Returnees, too, rarely considered their returns to be permanent, keeping open the possibility of moving back to the UK or elsewhere. Such a phenomenon is referred to in the literature as post-return transnationalism (Carling and Bivand Erdal 2014) – which, by not determining the direction of further movement, enables a minimisation of the risk of reverse exploration. Brexit threatens migrants' post-return transnationalism and therefore some choose not to leave the UK until they can do so safely – i.e. can retain the option of returning there freely. Whatever decision they have taken 'for now', they emphasise the controlled fluidity of their current situation, whereby they monitor the current conditions both where they are and also in other countries and keep their options open.

This flexible approach to migration seems to echo the main arguments of the life-course theories of migration and return (King *et al.* 2006). Our sample of interviewees included young Poles and Lithuanians who often migrated to start their adult life away from their parents' safety nets, to pursue better career and financial opportunities or to further their education. Some of them returned, often also making a career move or prioritising their family and lifestyle considerations. In this way, following the life-course approach, migrants move and continue to move in order to maximise the opportunities – both economic and non-economic – available to them in different places and at different times. At the heart of all these migration and return debates remains the attempt by young Central and Eastern Europeans to exercise their right to travel, work and live anywhere in Europe as long as this transnational experience helps them to develop as individuals and professionals and benefits them and their families.

To check whether initial migration, return and further movements are as fluid as we observed in this paper and to assess whether they are indeed associated with major life events, a larger sample is needed. To this end, the authors plan to launch a survey in 2020 with returnees to both Poland and Lithuania.

Our paper suggests that transnationalism is a crucial factor in the development of the young generation of Europeans, for whom it provides unprecedented opportunities for self-development, career-building, exploration, the exchange of various forms of capital and the building of their own sense of identity and home in the context of the rest of Europe. Poles and Lithuanians have only been privileged by this opportunity since 2004 and it is only recently that migrants from these post-accession countries have really embraced, in particular, the non-economic opportunities that come with being able to freely move between countries. It remains to be seen, however, whether post-return transnationalism, double return and circular migration remain possible without the unique opportunity structure and freedom of movement secured by the EU, which events like Brexit continue to threaten. Our interviews show that this rupture in 'easy transnationalism' is the main negative consequence of Brexit feared by Central and East European migrants in the UK (Vertovec 2004).

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