

**University of Sussex**  
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**Brexit as Rupture? Voices, Opinions and Reflections of EU  
Nationals from the Liminal Space of Brexit Britain.**

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## **Abstract**

By deploying the key concept of a ‘rupture’, this paper seeks to explore the voices, opinions and reflections of EU nationals living in Brighton and Dorset, situated within the liminal space of a pre-Brexit Britain. The analysis is based on 17 one-to-one in-depth interviews and is achieved by exploring three interconnected themes: migratory motivations, the affects and atmospheres of Brexit, and the significance of connections to people and places in regards to the future. The paper provides insights into the diversity of opinions and attitudes towards Brexit and likewise demonstrates that personal connections interwoven with the political and symbolic rupture of Brexit in complex and varied ways. From this research the immediate rupture of Brexit was undoubtedly an affective event and recognised as a potentially disruptive border, thus generating uncertainty of future conditions in the UK. However, situated within the liminality of Brexit two years on, the crux of this research suggests Brexit-related uncertainties or anxieties were not the defining feature of ‘what next’, but rather a consideration amongst many.

## **Keywords**

*Atmosphere; Brexit; EU; liminality; migration; rupture.*

## **Introduction: on hearing the result and liminal space**

One morning in October last year (2017), when I was lost in thought with the radio on in the background, Rabbi Dr Naftali Brawer brought my attention back into the room. On ‘Thought for the Day’ he spoke of the power and danger of liminality. He made reference to ritual and ceremony in which space is framed between two states of being. Where a previous identity dissolves, and while there is ambiguity and disorientation, there is potential and possibility in the forming of future identities. He acknowledged that liminality cannot be maintained; such spaces can be disabling; they are not spaces of indefinite residence, rather they are spaces through which we transition into something new. When Brawer spoke of a collective liminal space, triggered by Article 50, I understood what he imagined when he proposed that conceived of, and used as a tool, liminality can be ‘vital to positive (self)-transformation’ (Brawer 2017). On a conceptual level, for me, liminality represents a sense of mobility, a sense of freedom to move between states. If we apply the concept of liminality to mobility within migration, perhaps the disorientation and ambiguity, but more importantly the freedom to move between physical states, then Brexit represents a potential rupture, thus a liminal space, and likewise the possibilities of new identities and new transitions.

On hearing the result of the British referendum on the morning of 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016, I was shocked, confused and dispirited. Trying to make sense of it all, I spent the next few weeks reading articles, blogs and political commentaries. Some focused on British class wars and inequality, others veered to critical failures and flaws in EU bureaucracy, and yet others referred to an anti-capitalist and anti-globalisation revolution. And of course sovereignty and immigration came up frequently. In those weeks, I learnt much about the European project, British history and current societal fractures. Despite the moral haze, what was clear was the shock that I felt on hearing the result was product of these echo chambers that we manage to live in, unable to see and understand all varied facets of British society for ourselves, let alone that of Europe. Zadie Smith, in ‘Fences: A Brexit Diary’, expressed

this perfectly; she notes that ‘one useful consequence of Brexit is to finally and openly reveal a deep fracture in British society that has been thirty years in the making’ (Smith, 2016). Whilst I am still making sense of Brexit, intermittently feeling like the EU unites us, whilst simultaneously dividing us, I ideologically believe in the concept of a united continent over individual countries. Whilst problems within the EU are complex, if we are to change Europe, Britain should actively and positively participate in this transformation through liminal space.

In those weeks of personal inquiry, I knew then that the ‘affect’ of Brexit was something I wanted to explore further. The motivation and interest for this paper<sup>1</sup> comes from a genuine space of empathy and interest for those who found themselves unwillingly at the core of much of the campaigning: migrants. By engaging with individuals who represent one of the symbolic and physical social bodies who found themselves in this space, perhaps this paper will offer some clarity in Brexit’s liminality.

My paper will unfold as follows. I begin by contextualising my project temporally and spatially, and outlining my key research questions. Secondly, I offer a literature review in the wider fields relating to my research questions: mobilities within the European Union, presenting Brexit as a potential rupture to these, and finally transnational connections. Next I provide a concise description of my research methods, process and participants. Following this, I use my primary research in the field to analyse the key themes discussed in my literature review. The discussion specifically focuses on personal migratory motivations, the affects and atmospheres of Brexit and the significance of connections to people and places in regards to the future. By doing so, this paper seeks to examine the affects of Brexit by deploying the key theoretical concept of a rupture. The paper concludes that the immediate rupture of Brexit was undoubtedly an affective event, recognised as a potentially disruptive border, thus generating uncertainty in future conditions in the UK. However, the crux of this research suggests Brexit-related uncertainties or anxieties were not necessarily the defining feature of ‘what next’ for participants in this research.

### **Project context and research questions**

This research explores the voices, opinions and reflections of EU nationals living in Brighton and in Dorset in the pre-Brexit moment. I have chosen these two regions for two important reasons. First and foremost, these places present a contrasting vote in comparison to each other in regards to Brexit. Brighton and Hove voted heavily to remain in the EU; there was a 74% turn-out in which 69% voted ‘Remain’ and 31% voted ‘Leave’. West Dorset’s vote was very similar to the national-level referendum result, but different to Brighton. With a slightly higher turn-out, West Dorset voted to leave the EU by a majority of 51% to 49%. Secondly, these two geographical locations are places in which I have personally experienced Brexit and places where I have friends and work colleagues from various EU countries who are also experiencing Brexit.

I wanted to map and unpack participant subjectivities and perceptions about the places and spaces they inhabit within the context of Brexit. Likewise it has been important for my research objectives to listen attentively to the affects of Brexit and participants’ migration experience within it. It was interesting to explore the rural, largely conservative,

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<sup>1</sup> Editor’s note: this paper is an edited version of the author’s BA thesis in Geography, which won the RGS/IBG Population Geography Research Group Joanna Stillwell prize for the best undergraduate dissertation in the field of population studies, 2018.

less affluent, monoculture of Dorset juxtaposed against the urban, largely liberal, more affluent and culturally diverse location of Brighton, and to see whether these differences impacted the feelings, reflections and experiences of EU nationals in a pre-Brexit Britain.

Temporally, my research is situated in the period 18 months after the referendum result. A liminal time-space: the time between ‘what was’ and ‘what will be’, a moment between the familiar and the unknown, and a place of potential transition and waiting. The rights and status of EU nationals have yet to be formally agreed, so my research sits within this period of uncertainty in which Britain negotiates its exit. Although my sample size cannot be generalised and is thus not representative, the recency of this geopolitical moment in European history makes the content of my research original; likewise the contemporary atmospheres and discourses centred around Brexit have enhanced the relevance of my research.

### **Key research questions**

Using Brexit and what it may represent, I have explored migrant mobilities, how these fluid mobilities sanctioned in EU law contribute to one geographical aspect of participants’ transnationalist identities and connections. My ultimate aim is to map and unpack participants’ subjectivities about affective experiences, feelings and reactions in the liminal space of a pre-Brexit Britain. I achieve these broad objectives by probing deeper into three key interrelated empirical questions:

- What were the main motivations for migration?
- How has the ‘rupture’ of Brexit been felt and experienced by migrants in Brighton and Dorset?
- What is the significance of connections to people and places and how does this impact plans to remain in the UK or move elsewhere?

### **Migrant mobilities, the rupture of Brexit and transnational connections**

#### *Migrant mobilities in an integrated Europe*

European citizenship can be envisaged as a symbolic participatory belonging based on constructions of identity. Yet these identities are not simply symbolic, they have ‘both economic and political aspects, and carry with [them] valuable legal rights’ (Ashcroft and Bevir 2016: 356). The formalities and legalities of European citizenship, albeit only one dimension, serve as the legal framework for the freedom of movement within the European Union as a status that ‘is automatically conferred on every person holding the nationality of an EU Member State’ (González 2016: 797). European citizenship was introduced by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and formally established in 1993. Granting Union citizenship to every person holding the nationality of a Member State, it complemented national citizenship but did not replace it. Amongst various rights and protections, this citizenship ‘confers upon nationals of the Member States the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States’ (González 2016: 797).

In the context of migration, mobility ‘entails the freedom to seek opportunities, to improve living standards, health and education outcomes, and/or to live in safer, more responsive communities’ (UNDP 2010). Likewise mobility encompasses the capacity to

seek new life experiences, dimensions and reflections through work, study, love and friendships. Freedom of movement within the EU, ‘consisting of free movement of persons, residency and equal treatment’ (Kilkey 2017: 797) is a highly valued ‘privilege’ of European citizenship. The institutional arrangements in the EU engendered the ease of travel within the member states and the fluidity in migrant mobility that characterises much of Europe today. Brexit, however, represents an institutional as well as a symbolic rupture to these ‘privileges’, rendering geographical mobility and citizenship exposed, debated and vulnerable.

The atmosphere of Brexit created ‘affective nationalisms’ (Closs-Stephens 2016a) which, in the immediate climate afterwards, sparked uncertainty-related anxieties about immigration status, future deportations and harder borders as well as invoking a rise in xenophobic incidents and racial hostilities (Bulman 2017). Although the rights of EU migrants in the UK are yet to be fully agreed, it is with conviction that the ‘UK’s migration regime, and the experiences of those governed by it, will be transformed in the context of Brexit’ (Kilkey 2017: 799). Despite the triggering of Article 50, there is much speculation in how this will take shape in policy and practice but ‘given that politics is about symbolism, rhetoric, atmospheres and feelings as much as it is about laws, decisions, policies and violence’, Angharad Closs-Stephens argues ‘that “Brexit” has already begun’ (Closs-Stephens 2016b: 11).

### *The rupture of Brexit*

Political commentaries have proposed that Brexit rhetoric and its populist narratives have breathed new life into separatism in Europe. In 2003, writing an appeal and analysis about ‘What Binds Europeans Together’, Jürgen Habermas argued that ‘in the framework of the future European constitution, there can and must be no separatism’ (in Habermas and Derrida 2003: 292). Thirteen years on, the British public, in a small majority, voted to leave the European Union: 51.9% voted to leave whilst 48.1% opted to remain. Over 33 million votes were cast across the country, making the 2016 referendum one of the largest exercises in democratic decision making that Britain has ever seen (Goodwin and Heath 2016: 235). Dominating news and media coverage, the two official campaigning parties, ‘Vote Leave’ and ‘Britain Stronger in Europe’ were rooted in two key political agendas; immigration versus the economy. In ‘The Brexit Vote: a divided nation, a divided continent’, Sara Hobolt argues the messages were clear: ‘Vote Remain to avoid the economic risk of a Brexit or Vote Leave to regain control of British borders, British law making and restrict immigration’ (Hobolt 2016: 1262).

Despite a sense of disbelief and shock at the result, analysts claim the outcome was no surprise, since the ‘British public has consistently been the most Eurosceptic electorate in the EU ever since it joined in 1973’ (Hobolt 2016: 1260). In contrast to the pro-EU position of many member states, the literature suggests public support in the UK for ‘European political integration’ and the ‘European project’ ideologically has been significantly lower than in virtually all other EU countries (Díez-Medrano, 2003). Political figures in the Conservative party brought the Eurosceptic sentiment into the mainstream, and the anti-establishment message capitalised on political grievances making the right-wing populist calls for Brexit a success. The referendum’s divisive campaigning exposed a deep vacuum in which a revitalised right-wing English nationalism was able to brew. Closs-Stephens argues that this revitalised nationalism was ‘nostalgic for Britain’s greatness,

melancholic for a purer British society, and defensive about the privileges that it enjoys and the extent to which it might share those with others (Closs-Stephens 2016b: 3).

In a late-1990s study exploring cognitive frames with respect to European integration, Juan Díez-Medrano highlights the ‘most distinctive aspect of the British respondents’ way of thinking about European integration was the significant role played by sovereignty and, more significantly, national identity’ (Díez-Medrano 2003: 178). This study was conducted before the EU eastern enlargement and the pre-securitisation rhetoric resulting from 9/11. It therefore indicates that the fears generated by the potential of political integration within the EU have been longstanding, based on anxieties about ‘losing the nation’s identity, culture and way of life’. The 2016 Leave camp’s rhetoric and subsequent victory highlighted these longstanding public fears that were grounded in beliefs that the UK has ‘little clout in the decision making process of the European Union and would therefore be in no position to defend its national identity and culture if the EU increased its supranational character’ (Díez-Medrano 2003: 178).

Immigration, sovereignty and security were key factors within opinion polls during the period leading up to the referendum, arguably rooted in anxieties over European integration and expansion. Steven Vertovec reminds us that ‘vilifying immigrants and their traditions is nothing new’ (Vertovec 2011: 243). Instead these socio-political constructions that ‘immigrants erode the national culture’ (Vertovec 2011: 242) serve to ‘evoke conjectures regarding their putative impact on the receiving country’s self-defined identity and prospective integrity’ (Zolberg and Woon 1999: 8), thus generating deep anxieties about cultural losses. The Vote Leave mantra to ‘Take Back Control’ because ‘We Want Our Country Back’ seemed anchored in a manipulated fear about immigration, the perceived stress placed on public services, concerns over internal security and the fear of losing national identity and culture. Such narratives seemed based on a nativist interpretation of autochthonous belonging, by default imply a threatening ‘Other’ who does not belong, whose voice and status as an EU citizen is less entitled and whose mere presence stands in opposition to a revitalised nostalgia for English nationalism. Ashcroft argues that the Brexit vote was ultimately about ‘pluralism in culture, nationalism and citizenship’ (Ashcroft and Bevir 2016: 355). The Leave camp galvanised a powerful nationalist populism that legitimised and sanctioned belonging of some but acted to exclude and marginalise perceived ‘Others’, mainly migrants.

### *Transnational connections*

The movement of peoples, the perceived ‘uprootings and (subsequent) regroupings’ (Ahmed et al. 2003), in the process of migration has been a key focus in studies in many different disciplines. Anthropologists use relational theoretical frameworks to investigate the role of migration in cultural change and identity, whilst economists adopt a rationalist, cost-benefit analysis to explain propensities to migrate. Scholars of law examine how policies and legal frameworks influence migration from an institutional perspective, whilst geographers often explore the socio-spatial patterns in migration phenomena (Brettell and Hollifield 2014). For a more holistic approach to lived experience, despite a different focal point in migration studies, scholars led by Glick Schiller have advocated for a new analytical framework that focuses on transnationalism (see Glick Schiller et al. 1992). Such a perspective is the result, recognition and engagement with an increasingly globalised world, bounded by global capitalist systems that maintain core and peripheral states, which regulate and are regulated by the movement of people, capital, goods and services.

In *Nations Unbound*, transnationalism is defined by the processes through which people 'forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement' (Basch et al. 1994: 7). The literature suggests that it is both an ongoing process of movement and a form of identity (albeit not fixed and usually not self-ascriptive). This framework recognises that migration does not constitute a permanent rupture or abandonment. Rather transnationalism is a process by which people 'build social fields that cross geographical, cultural and political borders... maintaining multiple relationships – familial, economic, social, organisational, religious and political' (Basch et al. 1994: 7); and which by their very nature transcend traditional conceptions of bounded nation states. Hence a multiplicity of systems, involving political, social, cultural and economic relations, operate in both the national and societal arenas of 'host' and 'home'.

In their landmark paper 'Towards a transnational perspective on migration', Glick Schiller et al. (1992: 11) propose that 'transmigrants draw upon and create fluid and multiple identities, [living] in several societies simultaneously'. They do this by reflecting, observing, action-taking, decision-making and developing 'subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation-states' (Basch et al. 1994: 7). An increasing number of these networks of relations – economic activity, cultural practice and performance, some formal and others informal, some based on identity and others on interest – are creating an interesting and interconnected web that covers Europe (Kastoryano 2003). Connections in Europe are complex; they are varied, transnational and multi-dimensional. The emotional and physical connections that migrants make and take in an integrated, albeit changing Europe, are potentially disrupted and threatened by Brexit.

## **Research methods**

### *Research approach*

Given the nature of the aims and objectives of this relatively small-scale project, qualitative research methods were adopted to explore the opinions and experiences of EU nationals living within the 'liminality' of Brexit. The analysis is based on 17 one-to-one interviews with EU nationals/migrants living in Brighton and Dorset conducted between January and April 2018. According to a semi-structured and open-ended approach, the interviews were informal and in-depth. This created an atmosphere in which participants could express attitudes and opinions in a non-judgmental and non-intimidating locality. In addition it allowed a degree of flexibility to deviate from the list of semi-structured interview prompts (see Box 1). This brought about intriguing conversation, and an atmosphere of genuine interest and openness, thus generating greater insights into participants' life experiences.

This research design was appropriate as it allowed me to listen to subjective thoughts, feelings and experiences of 17 individuals as they navigate 'Brexiting Britain'. The strengths of this research technique include in-depth understanding of individual experience and 'greater flexibility to explore specific issues in depth' (Kitchen and Tate 2001: 219-220). However, this approach does not seek to be representative of wider reactions, rather it is an illustrative sample. I have also situated my primary research within an analysis of secondary resources (primarily academic literature, policy documents, statistics, newspaper articles and popular culture) to produce holistic considerations and analytical narratives about my research aims and objectives.

**Box 1: Semi-structured interview prompts**

**Semi-structured informal interview prompts**

General follow up questions to use throughout:

- (1) *How do you feel about that?*
- (2) *Why do you think it happened in that way?*
- (3) *Would it have been different somewhere else? (England/origin country).*
- (4) *What if? .... Consider specific country **politics, economic conditions and historical** ties/events with Europe. Review up to date information about visa and citizenship in the UK for my own awareness e.g. settles status?*

**General subject areas to cover; migration process, motivations and experiences – examining this in the context of Brexit:**  
*Focus on motivations, expectations and anticipations before the move; investigate feelings on arrival, and notions of 'otherness', and difficulties or struggles in language and cultural barriers.*

*Cover enough background about participants personal history.*

*Highlight important or interesting aspects of participant's culture of origin country.*

*Try to uncover why he/she migrated?*

*Discuss some experiences in Brighton and Bridport before and after the Brexit vote.*

*Discuss plans for the future.*

**Getting some background information:**

Where were you born, where did you grow up?

What was life like there? What was the neighborhood like?

How old were you when you moved, and approximately what year was it?

Had you always thought that you would move? What about your parents/grandparents?

**The move:**

Why did you come to the UK? What motivated you?

When did you come? How was it?

What did you expect/anticipate?

Was it an easy decision? Had you been planning it for a while?

What do you think of the new country? What's much better? What's much harder?

What do you think of the old country? What do you miss/not miss?

**Brighton/Dorset specifically:**

Have you lived anywhere else in Europe?

Have you lived anywhere else in the UK? How does it compare to Brighton/Dorset?

Why Brighton/Dorset what do you think of it?

What do you particularly like? Or not like?

What sort of demographics (friends) do you mostly interact with in Brighton/Dorset?

How do opportunities compare here (in Brighton/Dorset) to your country?

**Employment, social networks and housing:**

English language?

Cultural/social barriers, challenges and surprises?

Is your job here similar to what you have done in the past? (up-skilling and de-skilling?)

How was it finding a job? Had you set up links beforehand?

How was it finding a house? Did you use social networks? Who do you live with?

**Brexit:**

In the UK before the Brexit vote?

What do you think about the vote?

How did you experience the campaign? Before/After?

How do you remember the result? How did this make you feel?

How do you feel about Brexit? Have things changed?

Did it make you feel differently in/about the UK – Brighton/Dorset specifically?

Did you experience any new reactionary events afterwards?

**Belonging?**

Connection to origin country?

If so, how is connection/identity maintained?

Do you feel connected or welcome in the UK?

Has/how migration altered feelings of belonging, identity?

Do you think differently about citizenship?

Feelings of a pan-European identity?



**Hopes/plans for the future:**

Do you plan to stay in the UK for a long time? Children?

Brexit as a consideration for the future?

Maybe somewhere else in Europe/world? Discuss my short-term plan?

Do you think you would permanently move back to your original country? Why/why not?

### *Participants, sample size and sampling methods*

The sample size consists of 17 individuals (see Table 1). An important part of the sampling was to get ‘as-even-as’ possible geographical/gender ratio. All participants were accessed through my personal networks, predominantly through my current part-time job in Brighton and former jobs in Bridport, Dorset; others are the partners of those, and friends of mine. The initial proposal planned for a sample size of 20, but due to time pressure and the geographical distance between locations, 17 interviews were successfully carried out. All participants were ‘very happy’ to be involved; however a couple of people approached did not want to be interviewed or were not available.

The sample does not focus on specific nationalities, rather the aim was to explore a mix of nationalities using a ‘purposive/non-random sample’ (Flowerdew et al. 2005: 84). The sample size is relatively small due to reach and time constraints, but this allowed for in-depth and reflective analysis of my transcripts. Due to sample size and sampling methods, my analysis cannot be generalised; my approach does not seek to be representative as participants are not necessarily statistically typical of the target population with respect to key characteristics (Flowerdew and Martin 2005: 84). The analysis is situated within an emerging research agenda focusing on the consequences and affects of Brexit for EU nationals (see for instance Lulle et al. 2019) suggesting the need and scope for further research as we move closer to 29 March 2019 – the official date for the ‘exit’ to be formalised.

Scrutinising the detailed data in Table 1, we can sum up the broad characteristics of the 17-strong sample of interviewees. Nine participants were interviewed in Brighton, eight in Bridport/Dorset. There were nine females and eight males. Mean age was 33 years, with 11 out of the 17 aged in their 30s. The average time spent in the UK at the time of the interview was 5.5 years, and 12 of the 17 had been in the country for between three and eight years. This meant that most (14 out of 17) arrived within the time period 2006-2015, i.e. the decade before the Brexit referendum. The national origins included both member states of the ‘old’ EU (French, Italian, Spanish, Greek) and the ‘new’ countries which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 (Polish, Hungarian, Romanian), in addition to two Albanians one of whom had onward-migrated to the UK from Greece (cf. Karamoschou 2018). The participants’ occupations are not a representative cross-section of employment roles fulfilled by EU migrants in the places of interviewing, since they reflect my personal networks in both places and my history of part-time work in the restaurant trade.

### *Research ethics*

Throughout the research process – recruitment, the interview itself and follow-up messages/contact – it was imperative to create a safe and comfortable atmosphere in which ideas were explored for the purpose of this project to fulfil the research objectives. I maintained a high level of transparency and honesty to participants so they were aware for what and why I conducted this research (for an undergraduate thesis), therefore enabling

them to give informed and voluntary consent. All names have been changed to protect identity and preserve a level of confidentiality and privacy. The research was approved through the University of Sussex ethical review process.

### *Interview process, recording and transcribing*

The interviews varied in length from approximately 20 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes: the average length was around 40 minutes. Fourteen took place at mutually agreed upon locations (coffee shops/bars); three interviews with females were conducted at their homes. The semi-structured set of prompts guided the informal interviews, which were all carried out in English and subsequently transcribed for analysis. In addition I kept an interview journal, noting any issues or complications about the interview process itself and interesting and/or relevant information said before/after the 'formal' interview. The interviews and recordings were subject to informed consent and participants were provided with an information sheet about the research.

My strategy of maintaining an open, conversational style in the interviews allowed participants to 'explain their experiences, attitudes and opinions' (Kitchen and Tate 2001: 219) depending on the depth and breath they felt willing. For me as a neophyte researcher it was an invaluable learning process; I learnt much about myself, including the ways in which questions should be asked and responses acknowledged. Listening carefully and reflectively allowed additional scope for understanding and analysis. All interviews were transcribed in a relatively 'purist and realist form' and checked against the recording to ensure an accurate account of conversations. This process is important, with particular reference to listening for 'nuances of emphasis, hesitation and inflection' (Jackson 2001: 203). I used the transcripts to group and highlight themes for the discussion and analysis.

### *Positionality*

Through training in research methods I have been made aware, both analytically and ethically, of the need to remain attentive with regards to positionality, as I am directly implicated within the research as the primary data collector, sole interpreter and author. Having a reflexive awareness of my position and behaviour has thus been important. Feminist scholars advocate a more balanced approach to research in the social sciences, proposing that we write ourselves into our own research (Butler 2001; Rose 1997), which is what I do in this study. I am implicated in the research through spatial-social locality in terms of interviews and sampling methods, but also as a friend with past, present and shared relationships with participants. These relationships themselves are important; they are key for recruitment and maintaining trusting and open relations before, during and after the interviews. Overall, these pre-existing relationships constituted an advantage for my research, making for more comfortable interaction.

As a mid-twenties, white, British, third-year female Geography and International Development student, my position within the research project arguably occupies a landscape of power. Scholars have argued that these geographies of power with 'the researched may often be reciprocal, asymmetrical, or potentially exploitative' (England 1994: 82). I felt a deep responsibility to approach my research with these considerations in mind and never perceived participants as 'mere mines of information' (England 1994: 82). The research was not an information extraction exercise but rather a distinctive conversation between two people with a research purpose. Embodying the role of researcher, however,

required a slight readjustment to my erstwhile relationships with participants, which I think both parties found interesting to navigate initially. A certain level of detachment was necessary to allow a degree of ‘objectivity’, to suppress any assumptions I may have had about the participants given our relationships outside the ‘field’.

Nevertheless, due to the relationships and shared experiences that I have/have had with participants, there was a level of trust and mutual respect which I believe allowed participants to be more open about their thoughts and experiences. This research is idiographic and illustrative and the analysis is interpretative. My textual analysis of relevant discourse extracts has framed my research and I have analysed my transcripts using interpretative methods and content analysis to draw out key themes and perspectives.

*Table 1: Participant sample*

Pseudonym	Current residence	Gender	Nationality	Age	Occupation	UK Arrival	Years in the UK – > 5 years & < 5 years	Lived somewhere else	Other
Maria	Brighton	Female	Romanian	30	Chef	2015	3 years	YES	
Luana	Brighton	Female	Greek*	22	Waitress	2017	1 year	YES	
Agnieska	Brighton	Female	Polish	32	Chef	2013	5 years	NO	
Sofia	Brighton	Female	Spanish	36	Waitress	2015	3 years	NO	
Giannis	Brighton	Male	Greek*	52	Waiter & Driver	2015	3 years	YES	1 child (born in EU)
Tarek	Brighton	Male	Albanian	35	N/A	2014	4 years	YES	1 child (born Albania)
Manos	Brighton	Male	Greek	38	Waiter	2015	3 years	NO	
Mateo	Brighton	Male	Spanish	28	Chef	2015	3 years	NO	
Zef	Brighton	Male	Albanian	35	Restaurant and Shop Owner	2000	18 years	NO	2 children (Both born in UK)
Camilla	Bridport	Female	Spanish	33	Sales assistant	2009	9 years	YES	
Regina	Bridport	Female	Spanish	23	Waitress	2015	3 years	NO	
Adele	Bridport	Female	French	39	Furniture finisher	2011	7 years	YES	1 child (born in French Caribbean)
Giulia	Bridport	Female	Italian	30	Cheese business owner	2010	8 years	NO	3 children (all born in the UK)
Nora	Dorset - Farm	Female	Hungarian	24	Chef, Gardener	2015	3 years	YES	
Arthur	Bridport	Male	French	37	Waiter	2011	7 years	YES	1 child (born in French Caribbean)
Pasquale	Bridport	Male	Italian	29	Bartender	2016	2 years	YES	
Jakub	Bridport	Male	Polish	34	Chef	2008	10 years	YES	1 child (born in UK)

All participants' names have been changed to protect identity; Pasquale and Luana were the only two participants that arrived after the 2016 British referendum. \*Self-identified nationality (given dual nationality)

## Discussion and analysis: motivations, ruptures and connections

By deploying the key theoretical concept of a ‘rupture’, this discussion seeks to explore the ‘uncertainty, tension and confusion’ (Hörschelmann 2011: 381) created by the referendum through the personal dimension of migrant narratives. The ultimate analytical aim is to map and unpack participants’ subjectivities about their affective experiences and embodied reflections situated within the liminal space of a pre-Brexit Britain.

### *Migratory motivations*

Acting upon the privilege of open borders, all but two (Albanian) research participants arrived through the free movement of labour constitution within the EU. Concerns over limited employment opportunities in their home countries, dissatisfaction with other aspects of the origin country, inclinations for new experiences/challenges, and prospects to learn English were widely narrated as key motivations. Narratives of economic insecurity and opposition towards 'closed' cultural attitudes in the origin country were widespread. Moses suggests that particular migration patterns can be seen as an extension of dissatisfaction with the origin nation-state and as such that we can 'interpret emigration as a surrogate indicator for dysfunction' (Moses 2017: 298). This personally perceived dysfunction may be socially, culturally, economically and politically situated, and reflective of the 'wider socio-cultural context of his/her epoch' (Findlay and Stockdale 2016: 13). Agnieszka (32), a Polish migrant who has lived in Brighton for five years, provides an example of this interpretation:

I really always wanted to move from Poland, because of the situation, about jobs... about the government... about mentality of the people, which is horrible, they are really racist... I always wanted to move to a different country.

Her account also illustrates her engagement with the freedom and flexibility granted by EU free movement provisions, making it possible for her to realise her aspirations for greater satisfaction with life in the UK compared to Poland. Likewise Maria (30), a Romanian migrant who has been living in Brighton for three years, and was living in Rome for the previous seven, acknowledged her long-standing aspirations for self-development, which in Romania she perceived as bounded by the poor socio-economic conditions of her family:

In Romania you can never save money! I said to my mum when I was young; I'm going to leave the country when I'm 18. My family was so poor, it's normal you know to leave, I want to have money, and I want to make something of my life.

Silvey argues that migrants' self-conceptions of their possibilities operate in conjunction with differentiated opportunities in labour markets as well as legal and juridical regulations to produce particular migration patterns, meanings and experiences (Silvey 2004: 499). This notion was evident in narratives of motivation. For many, the role of the financial crisis served as a key push factor. The financial crisis which started in 2008 crippled many European countries through a period of economic austerity. Manos (38), a Greek migrant working in Brighton, describes the austerity that has exacerbated poverty in Greece, along with his frustrations/dissatisfaction with the Greek government, whilst simultaneously expressing his love and longing for Greece;

Greece is dead... You cannot see this but they [the government] destroyed Greece. They stole all the money, and now they say that the people have not paid taxes. The people gave all their money for taxes and they don't have any more, they look to the rubbish to eat! I don't except this in my country because we are such a beautiful country with a very nice culture. And you know from the ancient years, we taught the world democracy and everything and we don't deserve this... Its just all the governments' fault – the last 40, 50 years. They destroyed everything but they

cannot take the sun and our souls. The sun will be always there in Greece, you cannot buy the sun! [smiles].

Narratives for migration reflected a varied degree of socio-economic realities and inequalities, with many directly linked to a level of dissatisfaction with the nature of politics at home (Moses 2017: 300). Others, however, were characterised by spontaneity. Desires for new experiences and imaginings of future possibilities illustrated a close interconnectedness with the EU, and recognition of the privilege that EU citizenship grants. Whether to continue this privilege of intra-EU mobility within Britain has been in dispute under the Conservative leadership, as it turns European citizens into immigrants within the British territory (Bhambra 2016). Undoubtedly, the prevailing rhetoric and media discourse on migration within branches of the Conservative Party has created a hostile environment. Although the referendum was ultimately about membership of the EU, ‘this xenophobia rests on sedimented layers of racism and racist policy making’ (Bhambra 2016). Decades in the making, Brexit can be conceived of as a culmination of this rhetoric, representing a potential rupture for individual and societal conditions.

### *Brexit as a rupture?*

The Leave camp constructed migrants as problematic. The socio-political rupture of Brexit transported the hitherto relatively invisible EU migrants into the public debate, rendering them visible and vilified. Despite varied migration trajectories and differing webs of relations within the UK, participants’ narratives on the immediate affect of Brexit were often characterised by a notion of ‘othering’:

I couldn’t believe that it was true... I was angry, I was upset... I didn’t want to speak with [her partner]; I didn’t want to go to the shop... I felt watched at the queue. For a couple of days I didn’t trust anybody, I felt really put on the side, in a corner... and I remember being surrounded by people [and I was] thinking, ‘What did you vote? (Giulia, 30, Italian).

I had the feeling after Brexit that people didn’t want me here... I just couldn’t believe that they could just get rid of me, like I’m sure I could stay somehow? (Nora, 24, Hungarian).

I’m just quite upset about Brexit...Why?... What have we done? I don’t know why this happened (Agnieszka, 32, Polish).

Migrant narratives described feelings of shock, anger and upset as well as a sense of rejection directly after the referendum result. The literature highlights, as do these excerpts, that EU migrants experienced a temporary ‘othering’, which heightened even more so following the Leave success, symbolic of the nature of exclusive indications of ‘affective nationalism’ (Closs-Stephens, 2018; Lulle et al. 2018). Participants were aware of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy that fanned the fire of the populist anti-immigrant sentiment embedded within the Leave campaign:

I think people voted on the impulse of fear which is what the government has implemented, I think it was really easy to feed society with this little fear... You know I don’t think people were that conscious of what it would really mean (Camilla, 33, Spanish).

Manipulation... I think it was manipulation... I don't think it's going to be good for this country because it's like all the countries, they want to go forward not back again, so I think the UK is going back again (Tarek, 35, Albanian).

I take Brexit as a big mistake... I think its based on ignorance, because I heard a couple of opinions on the Leave side about economics, like really well thought out [speaking cynically]...But that is not what the people that voted Leave mainly voted for, the public is not an expert [on political economy]... I think it was just based on ignorance and fear... that is the scary part (Giulia, 30, Italian).

Despite this initial feeling of 'othering' directly after the result, feelings and encounters with affective nationalisms have largely ceased 18 months on. Although I uncovered a variety of attitudes towards Brexit, over half of the participants suspected that British departure from the EU would ultimately constitute a negative outcome for all parties involved – themselves, fellow British and European citizens and for the various member states. Two interviewees discussed their personal perceptions of a deeply flawed union. Adele (39) spoke of a structural crisis in the French immigration system, disclosing that she would have 'voted out for hope' of a better more human-centered approach. Likewise Regina (23) admitted on a purely ideological basis that she fundamentally agreed with the concept of the EU, but drew an interesting parallel with Catalonia and Spain; the notion of states in an 'abusive relationship' and how we reconcile with perceptions of political abuse.

Four narratives, from both 'new' and 'old' Europeans (Polish, Romanian, Italian), largely Brighton-based participants, questioned the general British willingness to work in lower-skilled jobs. They acknowledged that EU nationals often filled these roles and questioned what might happen if EU labour rights were restricted in a 'Brexiting Britain'. Despite the potential rupture of Brexit for migrants' legal and juridical status, narratives revealed, 18 months on, a surprisingly homogenous impression of composure that 'nothing much' would change. Brexit would ultimately be 'a pretty bureaucratic thing' (Pasquale, 29, Italian), making mobility to, and status within, the UK more complicated and expensive, but not unthinkable. Interestingly I also uncovered a degree of indifference towards Brexit, as well as a level of understanding and partial positivity. Below are selected excerpts of these expressions:

I'm not involved in politics at all really... Yeah I watch the news and stuff, but I'm watching what and when I want you know...Its fine, I don't care, I got my own country to go back to you know... its not that I'm being kicked out of my own country you know... England is my country for the moment but it's not my actual [emphasis] country (Arthur, 37, French).

I think that you guys, English people they want to keep it British and I completely understand that because like I said before I'm Polish and we're very proud of who we are, our traditions and everything... Polish people are sort of nationalistic you know. So I totally get it, if English people want to do the right thing for their country and keep it British... There's so many people coming from around the world and bringing something with them... The country is changing (Jakub, 34 Polish).

I feel Brexit is something good for the UK and I feel Brexit is gonna be something good for me in the future too. I think you should leave... You are one of the most

richest and successful countries in Europe. Our world is fucked up man, but you have jobs, you have opportunities, you have everything! They want to have control over the people that are coming, and they want to know what the people are doing in the UK... and I understand this you know, completely (Mateo, 28, Spanish).

These narratives are interesting as they convey different attitudes towards Brexit. Dependent partly upon future expectations of belonging, they express different positions of power to negotiate mobility, socio-spatial status and an awareness of comparative nationalisms. It was common for participants to talk of the reassurance they felt from British friends and work colleagues who often apologised out of shame embodied by the referendum result and its divisive campaign. All participants in Dorset communicated these behaviours, whereas only one participant in Brighton reported experiencing this surge in British apology. This comparison could be understood by thinking about demographics and community size. Far fewer EU nationals live in Dorset, making migrants more visible and distinctive in comparison to the potential ‘invisibility’ of migrants in the more culturally diverse population of Brighton. Moreover the community in Bridport is much smaller resulting in the possibility of greater social cohesion and recognition within political ‘rupturing’. But we should also hold in mind the small sample size, which is not a basis for robust comparisons.

An element of vulnerability was palpable in some narratives when discussing negative sentiments about migrants, racism and heightened hostilities in the aftermath of the vote. Given the public voting outcomes of the geographical regions of research, one of my research assumptions had been that participants living in the monocultural, largely conservative areas of Dorset would be more predisposed to experience a rise in anti-immigrant hostilities and attitudes, (BBC 2017; ITV 2017), compared to the more liberal and culturally diverse city of Brighton. Two distinctive narratives from participants residing in Bridport reported ‘affective atmospheres’ (Anderson 2016; Closs-Stephens 2016), feelings of mistreatment, and judgments resulting from the atmospheric anti-immigrant rhetoric embedded within Brexit. Regina (23) reported an isolated incident supportive of the idea that ‘migrants face distrust and hostility’ (La Barbera 2015: 3) disproportionately at times of social change and political crisis. She experienced a misplaced level of distrust about her Spanish documentation from a sales assistant after the referendum result:

I think I was buying cigarettes. They asked me for ID and I pulled out my Spanish ID card, and the person at the counter said, ‘I’m not sure we can take this’. And this man in the queue, he was from a Slavic country, well he had a very strong Slavic accent and he got VERY angry, very fired up... And it was obviously a reaction to this! [Brexit hostilities = distinctive distrust of migrants]. And it just felt like he had potentially gone through similar experiences.

This is a clear case of nationality-based discrimination and distrust. A type of unconscious ‘othering’, disguised as abiding to British retail standards, perceiving British documentation as legitimate and ‘others’ as illegitimate. Likewise Camilla (33, Spanish) has lived in Britain for nine years and endured on-going nationality-based hostilities from customers at work. Let us hear how they manifest themselves pre- and post-vote in this extended, albeit important extract. During the campaign she observed a noticeable difference in customers’ behaviour towards her:

It was a completely different way of behaving... You know suddenly like a lot of people asking me where I am from... And I would say not from England. I chose to change my way of answering, but I would say that I've been living here a long time... And lots of them would suddenly start to guess where I was from... People thought I was Russian, Albanian, Croatian, Romanian... and I thought actually they do have an issue with these types of people... I chose not to say where I was from for two reasons: firstly personally why do I need to give this information away, and [secondly] I didn't want to give the pleasure of judgment straight away... Questions that I knew were to judge me.

In the immediate weeks following the referendum result she reports overt nationalist atmospheres and further comments at work about 'being British in Britain':

People literally asking me 'Why are you living here?' 'We like Britain to be British'. After the vote it was like a victory, you know 'We don't want you here', more verbal, more open, more confident... It was only ever at work... I felt racist people. After Brexit it was racist behaviour... It was really harsh, because the environment didn't allow them to be aggressive, it was more subtle, just having to comment as soon as they heard my voice, say something like 'Britain is better without foreigners'... and then just leave! And about two months after the vote, just gone! Just like that! Suddenly nothing, it has completely disappeared.

Regina and Camilla's experiences are deeply distressing but due to sample size it is hard to draw interpretations of places based upon two cases. Bridport is, however, a largely conservative small town and voted more in favour for Brexit perhaps explaining the frequency of these negative incidents within my total sample size. Likewise Nora (24) works on an organic farm in Dorset, following her interests in sustainable livelihoods. She reported feelings of vulnerability after the referendum result as people would often seek to explain her 'otherness' by extrapolating her Hungarian identity. Likewise, (mostly female) participants discussed feelings of unease on occasions when they were told, 'Oh you are one of the good ones darling, you can stay'. We can draw an interesting gendered analysis here which sees 'women and their bodies as critical to the creating and the imagining of nations and communities' (Anderson 2013: 95). On the basis of 'good character' (Home Office 2010: 15), these comments act to draw specific individuals into the 'community of value' (Anderson 2013) but act to exclude 'others' – mainly undeserving migrants with 'problematic characters', perceived as threats to British culture. Instead of cultivating a sense of European belonging, Brexit conjured up attitudes that seemed to clearly separate 'us' from 'them' (Anderson 2013).

In comparison, participants in Brighton never reported intrusive questions about 'where they were from'. Luana described quite the opposite: as the youngest participant (22) and most recent arrival (2017), she was born in Albania but identified as Greek. From a young age she experienced hostility as an Albanian at school in Athens and consequently felt excluded, struggling to make friends. In her narrative she compared the negativity she felt as being 'other' as an Albanian in Athens to a non-existent feeling of 'otherness' potentially stimulated by Brexit in Brighton. From our conversation, being 'other' in Athens was much more intense and detrimental, and as a result she adopted a form of 'tactics of belonging' (cf. Lulle et al. 2018) by changing her name to reflect Greek roots. She told me that people in Greece 'are more scared of Brexit than here [UK]'. She believed Brexit would ultimately be better for the UK but not for Greece, describing her family's position in



Brighton as stable despite her father's anxiety about what it might entail once immigration laws have been agreed. For Luana, the recent pain of leaving her friends, life and partner in Athens was much more significant than the potential rupture of Brexit. The affective responses to Brexit in migrant narratives thus reflected individual capacity, agency, and power, in relation to gender, past experience, social-spatial positioning's and trajectories as well as complex temporalities relating to future plans and aspirations.

### *Significant connections*

In this final analytical subsection I will explore how connections to people and places in the UK impacted migrant narratives in relation to Brexit. Although I have highlighted above some negative experiences, all narratives also expressed positive attitudes towards the places of Brighton and Dorset, citing multiculturalism, social openness, greater freedoms, improved working conditions and a meritocratic climate as reasons. The Brighton sample were overwhelmingly content, conveying a happy sense of place, purpose, and reference in the city. Likewise participants in Bridport felt very welcome, citing a friendly and characterful community and spoke of 'taking Bridport as a base' (Pasquale, 29, Italian).

Over three-quarters of participants have forged significant connections within the UK, contributing to a deeper feeling of rootedness (Ahmed et al. 2003) despite the geopolitical rupture of Brexit. Among participants these included: establishing and developing a business, buying houses, obtaining/applying for formal citizenship, marriage, relationships with British nationals, family reunifications, British-born children and commitments to them in the British education system. It was evident that these important and meaningful developments contribute to a sense of both attachment and stability within the UK, in defiance of the liminal space of a pre-Brexit Britain. Despite these attachments however, narratives did not convey the notion of conditions as fixed or static. It was clear among the more mobile Brighton-based participants (due to zero-hour contracts, short-term tenancies and no dependents), but also within the total sample that people recognised the possibilities to migrate elsewhere and highly valued the opportunity of a transnational way of life.

Ideas of home and belonging were often topics of conversation in the interviews. As Ahmed et al. (2003: 9) point out, 'homes are always made and remade as grounds and conditions... 'change'. Permanence of residence, age and family situation impacted participants' perceptions of 'feeling at home' despite Brexit. Zef (35), born in Northern Albania, with a 'background from Kosovo', is now a well-known and well-respected member of the Albanian community in Brighton. He has two British-born daughters, formal citizenship himself, and employs me at one of his two businesses developed in the 18 years of living in Britain. Given his formalised citizenship status, he was the only individual able to exercise his right to vote in the referendum. Voting to remain, he discloses his shock and sadness on hearing the referendum result, but did not perceive Brexit as a rupture. In our interview he discussed his essentialised connection to Albania and where he feels most at home:

I have mixed feelings about it you know. Because I've spent more time in the UK now than Albania. So... do I miss my country? Yes I do miss my country, you know, like you cannot deny where you come from and you know you always look back. But I feel like now, my home is here.

Anderson argues that ‘citizenship is not simply a formal status, but is typically presented as a good; membership and participation in a community of value’ (Anderson 2013: 93). Zef feels his essentialised nationality as Albanian is something he cannot deny despite a sense of resentment and shame, but values his British citizenship as a symbol and strategy within society. His interview extract below illustrates this idea:

Do I feel Albanian? Maybe I do, but I’m not proud. I’m proud to be a British citizen. It’s sad to say these things but there are reasons behind them, you understand... I feel ashamed, if you ask me if I’m proud to be Albanian? I’m not fucking proud to be Albanian, even though I keep the flag in my home. I’m not proud of it!... I’m proud to be born there, and the life that I had, I struggled in the beginning. But no... I’m really proud to be British more than being Albanian.

Largely due to current EU legislation extending the right and freedom to live and work in the UK (note not for Albanians), few participants spoke of securing themselves more firmly by obtaining formal citizenship or permanent residence. Brexit however may disturb this. But for others, like Zef, formalising one’s status was regarded as ‘instrumental for the realisation of certain individual and collective goods’ (Anderson 2013: 96). For Jakub (34), a Polish head chef at a care centre for dementia, formal citizenship was important. He has been living in the UK for 10 years, and at the time of our interview (February 2018) he was in the final stages of acquiring British citizenship which has taken him more than two years. With a sense of excitement he was about to attend his final ceremony, pledging allegiance to the monarch by formalising his entry into the ‘imagined community of value’ (Anderson 2006; Anderson 2013).

For Giulia (30) however, formalising residence in the wake of Brexit was not her priority, but she mentioned many of her European friends ‘rushing to get it’. Giulia has put down roots in terms of financial commitments in Dorset and has three British-born children with a British national. For most participants, these types of connections and investments were more significant to feeling ‘settled’ and ‘not worried’. Giulia did however acknowledge her anger towards her partner’s family for being pro-Brexit and thought ‘these things [Brexit] can break families apart’. Although she feels ‘100% Italian’ and very much misses aspects of Italian ‘civilisation’, she prefers the ‘mentality’ in the UK. Despite the atmosphere of Brexit, for her it does not constitute a significant rupture for their family unit, she feels as though her life is in the UK, as she explains below:

Well, we’ve just bought a house, so that is a motive yes. I’m pleased I’ve opened my business, my life is here, and the children go to school... Whatever happens with Brexit I like the mentality in the UK, it is open-minded and it’s what we don’t have in Italy.

In terms of the future, other narratives portrayed a more contingent, yet relaxed wait-and-see attitude. Others were willing to adapt, and some were excited about the prospect of relocation whilst others spoke of not wanting to ‘give themselves’ to a country that may ultimately reject them on the basis of nationality. But what was central to all narratives about the future was an emphasis on individual choice, agency and rationality, denying Brexit as the conclusive factor in their decision-making. Nine out of 17 participants had previously lived and worked in different countries other than the UK and their country of birth, mostly in Europe but also in South America and the French Caribbean. The opportunity to continue a transnational way of life through the freedom and flexibility of intra-EU movement was a

highly valued and widely recognised dimension of participant identities. For some, Brexit did serve as a potential ‘disruptive border’ in terms of future status in a climate of uncertainty in relation to ease of future travel. But many were aware of the value in cultural and social capital accumulated by the skills and networks linked to migrating and living abroad (Lulle et al. 2018).

Maria (30) migrated to the UK in 2015 after labour market restrictions had been lifted on Romanian nationals in the UK. She expresses a resistance to any anxiety generated by the potential rupture of Brexit and instead conceives of herself and her husband as a mobile unit with agency in a changing Europe. Let us listen to her expression of this below:

You know because I left home so young, now its so easy for me to change my life all the time. So for me it doesn’t matter where I am as long as I have my husband with me, my family. We complete each other! [smiles] ...I don’t feel connected so much to places, I’m just gonna go on, you know we’ll go on. You know in the beginning [when you move] its hard yes, you need to be tough but after you can do it for the second time, and the third and again. After you feel so powerful you know... It doesn’t matter what’s going to happen in my life I know I can start again, and again and again. You have so much trust in yourself. You are powerful after... Really.

Likewise, Mateo (28) a Spanish national living in Brighton with his Spanish partner (Sofia), described how their migration experience had provided strength and courage to ‘do it again’ if Brexit eventually turned out to represent a rupture to their present conditions:

Yeah I would find it much easier to move somewhere else again, when you do all these things, I’ve been through all of these bad moments, I felt really impotent you know when you start... but you’ve been through all that already so if we need to go to another country then we will do it, it won’t be a problem.

There is a considerable literature on identity (trans)formations occurring as a result of the migratory experience that is beyond the remit of this paper to explore (see for instance La Barbera 2015; Madsen and Van Naerssen 2003). But all the interviewees discussed the existence and development of ‘identities based on dual attachments to both the host country and the country of origin’ (Madsen and Van Naerssen 2003: 68). Reflections on the origin country across time and space, as well as previous mobility, was narrated as ways in which identity is constantly (re)negotiated and developed. There was a palpable sense that the liminality of Brexit did not stimulate fear per se, but rather fortitude for future possibilities based on individual rational choice situated within broader contexts of life transitions. The more detached and relaxed narratives relating to Brexit seemed based on levels of integration, legal status, cultural background, personal capacities and spouses. Some examples:

You know there are negative things but for me, I don’t really mind too much about Brexit (Sofia, 36, Spanish).

I don’t feel like it’s a big deal... I feel like now its going to happen people are more worried about how it’s going to happen, properly, bureaucratically’... (Pasquale, 29, Italian)

You know I think he [her son] is interested in what's happening [politically about Brexit]... I don't know about his dad [Arthur], but on my side I'm not worried about what's going to happen, and he knows that if we have to go, we'll go! (Adele, 39, French).

I'm pretty chilled out... I don't care, I'll go back to Italy, [laughs] you know all my family are there (Giulia, 30, Italian).

I'm spontaneous. If today I think maybe it's not so good here, we gonna move, and that's it we gonna go there. I'm not making my plans now. I think I can live wherever you know (Maria, 30, Romanian).

Participants were well aware of the increasingly bounded territory of the UK produced by media and political discourse. Ultimately however, personal relationships to people and places both in the UK and Europe were more integral to future plans than the uncertainty of the migration regime embedded within the liminality of a pre-Brexit Britain.

### **Concluding thoughts and reflections**

Aiming to present a representative and fair account of my research findings, I have offered an analysis that goes beyond any personal involvement with participants and ultimately brings complexity to the subject of Brexit and the discourses surrounding European migration. By deploying the key concept of rupture, the qualitative data collected provides insights into the diversity of EU migrants' opinions and attitudes towards Brexit, their current situation and aspirations/plans for the future. My analysis was based on three interconnected themes: migratory motivations, Brexit as a potential rupture, and the significance of connections to people and places in regards to the future.

Membership to a 'community of value', whether formal or informal, and rootedness in place are critical in fostering feelings of belonging. Likewise if we consider belonging as inherently spatial, and 'therefore who belongs and who does not is written into the landscape' (Antonsich 2010: 650; also Trudeau 2006), then the populist anti-immigrant rhetoric of Brexit acted to reproduce particular landscapes that conveyed a range of meanings of inclusion and exclusion. Participants had forged various identities within these British landscapes, and it was evident that these personal connections interfaced with the political and symbolic rupture of Brexit in complex and varied forms. However, the future impact of Brexit is unknown and is still up for negotiation in Brussels. Whilst there is uncertainty, there is a probability that future outcomes will control access to the UK's increasingly 'bounded territory' (Berezin and Schain 2003).

The immediate rupture of Brexit was undoubtedly an affective event. But in considering Brexit as a liminal space 18 months on, there was a sense of composure, willingness to transition and 'life as usual'. It was clear that participants highly valued the opportunity of open borders, likewise they acknowledged that Brexit may represent a disruptive border, making their condition as an EU national more distinguishable, and potentially uncertain in the UK. Although two participants now hold formal British citizenship, others are putting down roots outside the formalities of juridical status. My research demonstrates that participants have taken and are taking various other measures to establish belonging and connections within the UK, whilst simultaneously maintaining transnational connections and possibilities.

Relationships with people and places as well as employment were the most important factors for deciding whether to stay or move elsewhere, however it was acknowledged that Brexit has the possibility to disrupt these connections. Brexit-related uncertainties were definitely there, albeit on the 'back burner' 18 months on in liminal space. The crux of this research exposes that, above all, there was a tendency for participants to highlight agency, personal mobility capacities and individual rational choice as the main factors in deciding future plans. Brexit-related uncertainties or anxieties were not the defining feature of 'what next'; rather they are a consideration amongst life's many, through which we all try to navigate our next moves. In the context of Brexit's liminality, this paper ultimately seeks to contribute to the emerging literature that tries to unpack the impact of the British referendum on EU nationals living within the UK.

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