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

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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 'migrantness' 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 frame-work 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 arrange-ments' 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 hier-archies 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 Bul-garia 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 Euro-peans'. The most common experiences of xenophobia reported across all nationalities (EU15 and post-acces-sion 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 ra-cialisation 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 Giralt 2011). For instance, Victoria from Hungary (resident in the UK since 2015 – 208), 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 scheme[4] (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 disentitlement, 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 disentitlement 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 intersubjective 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 disentitlement 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 Dyfydd 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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