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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 explo

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 long-standing and have been about ‘losing the nation’s identity, culture and way of life’. The 2016 Leave campaign also

In Nations Unbound

Box 1: Semistructured 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?

Hopes/plans for the future:

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

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 am

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
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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 en

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

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

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

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

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.

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...

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