Unsettled: Brexit and EU nationals' sense of belonging

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Abstract

This article explores the dynamics of belonging among EU nationals living in the UK in the context of UK's withdrawal from the EU. It uses a mixed-methods study of pre- and post-referendum survey and interviews and focus groups to investigate patterns of belonging among EU nationals, shifts in the parameters of these patterns, and the overall impact of Brexit on them. The study identifies four patterns of belonging (breakaway, cosmopolitan, in-between and patriotic) and argues that Brexit has significantly disrupted them, shifting them towards a new phase of rationalization and reaction reliant on migrantness, Europeanness and rights. The exclusionary rhetoric which accompanied the referendum and treated EU nationals as a homogenous group (and as a problem!) has thus had a constitutive effect on their groupness. In the aftermath of the referendum, EU nationals began to re-think their belonging, constituting themselves as a collectivity by making use of EU citizenship, EU treaty rights and a shared European identity. This constitutive dynamics is consequential for the status of EU nationals in the UK, for the boundaries of the political community of the British state, but also - for Europe.

Key words: *EU nationals, Brexit, Belonging, Migration, EU, European identity,*

The political significance of *belonging* has frequently been debated in Europe, either as a receding anachronism (Castles and Davidson, 2000) or as a salient political narrative (Yuval-Davis, 2006; previously Ignatieff, 1993). Stretched between local identities (the football club, the town, the dialect) and higher levels of identification (nation, religion, culture), belonging has never really left the realm of the political (pointing to its centrality Adamson, 2011; Alba, 2005; Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2009; Lamont and Molnar, 2002). This is because, at its simplest, belonging captures *the dynamics of self-identification of individuals with the collective identities* (see Jones and Krzyzanowski, 2011: 38ff) which structure and shape political mobilization and contestation. Migration, in particular, has always pushed debates on belonging to the fore because it challenges established community boundaries, especially and in particular those of the nation-state (Bauböck, 1994; and Castles and Davidson, 2000).

The phenomenon of intra-European migration adds an additional layer of complexity, to the dynamics of belonging, as it allows for mobility without the habitual modern constraints on migrants' settlement: going through the process of formal application and approval, as well as proving deservingness and fitness to the host community. Intra-European migrants are thus formally released from the structuring expectations of identification along the continuum between host and home communities, and can enjoy an integration context quite similar to that of internal migrants (for a call to combine consideration of both internal and international migration in migration studies see King and Skeldon, 2010). Their sense of belonging would inevitably be affected by such an integration context, as existing studies strongly suggest (see Crul and Schneider, 2010: 1257; but also Hesse, 2000).

Intra-European migration and the dynamics of belonging which it facilitates thus create a context visibly relevant to the emerging literatures on transnationalism (Portes et al. 1999) and identity (Vertovec, 2010), 'new migration' and super-diversity (Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore, 2018), but also 'differentiated' integration (cf 'differentiated embedding' in Ryan, 2018), as well as the calls for a more 'global sociology of migration' (Castles, 2007) and attention to the intertwinement between migration and 'global processes' (Anderson, 2016). It is clear then that in this case the dynamics of belonging of EU nationals who have migrated and settled in the UK needs to be considered with a special focus to the peculiarities of this type of migration context and the associations between private and collective identities that it creates.

The freedom of mobility and the rights of settlement that EU migrants enjoy within the European market also point to why the status of intra-European migrants had not attracted, until quite recently, significant scholarly interest in terms of exploration of belonging, integration and identity in the field of migration studies: the term 'migrant' did not seem to apply to EU migrants in an equal measure (from a legal perspective they are European citizens rather than migrants in the sense that third country nationals in the EU are). The more visible studies of the link between intra-EU migration and identities come from the field of European studies (e.g. Favell, 2008; Rother and Nebe, 2009; Risse, 2010) and focus on 'mobility' rather than 'migration'. Only very recently, special attention has been paid to the modalities of integration of EU nationals in the UK (Ryan, 2018; Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2017; McGhee et al, 2017). Nevertheless, the dynamics of belonging, central in shaping EU nationals' experiences, attitudes, and behaviour in the trajectories of their migrations, deserves exploration in its own right.

The purpose of this article is to explore the dynamics of belonging among EU nationals living in the United Kingdom (UK) in the context of UK's withdrawal from the EU (Brexit). We argue that Brexit offers a unique opportunity and context for outlining the dynamics of belonging and understanding its political relevance as it has shifted national and supranational boundaries in an aggressive manner, juxtaposing collective identities, creating

uncertainties and foreboding crises. It is precisely at such critical junctures (Capoccia, 2015) that belonging emerges as a category of tangible political relevance.

At least two important dimensions of political relevance stand out. The first is linked to the status of EU nationals living in the UK. Relatively inconspicuous until recently, they have suddenly taken centre stage in the EU referendum campaign and subsequent Brexit negotiations. What will happen to EU nationals who have made their lives in the UK exercising EU treaty rights, soon to be withdrawn? In the more generous scenarios they are to formalize their status, as third country nationals have had to do, before settling, and remain. But remain as what? For the first time the issue of *integration* of EU nationals is being raised in policy terms (Goodhart, 2016; and Katwala et al. 2016; see also Mindus, 2017 for the legal implications). This raises questions about the modalities of integration, as well as the policies designed to achieve it, which are intrinsically linked to the dynamics of belonging (Crowley, 1999: 20ff; Favell, 1999: 204; but also Crul and Schneider, 2010).

The second dimension of political relevance in the context of Brexit points to the changing parameters of belonging among EU nationals. Belonging has often been studied in terms of its attachment to citizenship, rights, identity, solidarity, and commitment. How its parameters acquire their seemingly settled quality has received less attention. Belonging is a transient, liquid category, highly contingent on changes in the environment, as well as on time: it combines 'dynamic structural, temporal, spacial and relational processes' (Ryan, 2018: 235) which are often inherently contradictory (Jones and Krzyzanowski, 2011: 47). Yet, it is perceived by its bearers as a settled category. But any settled quality to it is immediately affected by the shifting socio-political environment, thus creating perceptions of uncertainty and disorientation, which is illustrated by Brexit.

On the basis of the data collected in the period 2016-2017 through interviews, focus groups and surveys of EU nationals living in the UK, we argue that the context of Brexit is changing established parameters of belonging in ways that threaten to disrupt or 'unsettle' them, and that Brexit's narratives of exclusion are creating a stronger sense of groupness around the status of migrantness and the categories of Europeanness (citizenship, rights, common identity), albeit in a manner more reactive than conscious or purposeful. The dynamics of belonging shaping EU nationals' identification with collective identities in the UK thus appears to have entered a distinct phase of turmoil which calls for attention to its outcomes and political relevance.

In what follows we unpack our argument with a focus on the dynamics of belonging of EU nationals living in the UK. In the first section we set out the conceptual framework for studying belonging and its parameters of change in view of EU nationals in the UK. In the second section we outline four relatively distinct patterns of belonging that emerged from our study, and the ensuing disruption to them in the context of Brexit. Finally, in the third section we focus on EU nationals' attempts to stabilize belonging, reconstructing it in the framework of EU rights, migration and Europe.

The Concept of Belonging and Brexit

What does a study of belonging bring to the understanding of the impact of Brexit on European nationals living in the UK? Unlike studies of integration, which attempt to capture the outcomes of EU nationals' processes of 'embedding', 'emplacement', 'settlement', 'adaptation' (for the varied usage of these terms see, for example, the contributions to the Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore, 2018 special issue in *JEMS*) and often focus on external measures, an exploration of belonging attempts to unpack the internal dynamics of individuals' relations to the social: *the link between personal and collective identity* (as per Jones and Krzyzanowski's, 2011: 45ff). Because this link comes from a 'feeling', a sense of association with a group (*ibid*: 45), it is largely independent of external recognition even as 'thresholds to belonging clearly do exist at both formal and informal level' (*ibid*: 46, see also Geddes and Favell, 1999: 25, 34). At this point belonging is about someone 'making a choice that they want to be included' in a collective (*ibid*: 47). This choice is highly significant and central to understanding migrant decision-making, attitudes, integration outcomes (Kofman, 1995: 121), and the social identities that emerge or consolidate in the context of migration.

The available collectives of identification and inclusion are always messy and intersecting, but in the case of migration the dynamics of choice between them and a perceived personal identity is particularly complex and contradictory. It is then an omission that the dynamics of belonging are often overlooked in studies of EU migration at the expense of studies on integration (civic and social, e.g. Moreh, 2015) and collective identity (European and national, e.g. Delanty et al., 2011; Fortier, 2000; Sicakkan and Lithman, 2005; Thomas, 2012). It is these dynamics, their related processes, their patterns of perceived consolidation, as well as their parameters of change, and their political significance in the context of the UK, that are the object of this study. Outlining and understanding the dynamics of belonging seems to be of relevance not only to EU nationals' place in British society, their current attitudes and future decisions, and the process and outcomes of their integration; it also concerns the boundaries of the political community(ies) of the British state, as well as, in many ways, the personal relevance of Europe.

In order to address the issue of belonging, we set out to examine how EU nationals living in the UK position themselves within British society in the run-up to the Brexit referendum. Upon commencing this study we did not anticipate the outcome of the referendum, and neither did most of our participants. In the three months leading up to the referendum we collected data through six focus groups (n=32),[1] twelve in-depth interviews,[2] and a

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[1] Focus groups took place in London, Berkshire (Reading and Goring and Streatly), and West Sussex (Burgess Hill) between May and June 2016. The main method of getting participants was through personal contacts and snowballing; the only criteria for selection was being over 18, holding EU nationality, and in the UK not primarily for full time studies. All focus groups were of mixed nationality and gender. When participants knew each other in advance, it was through their workplace. Total number of participants 32 (13 male and 19 female): 12 Bulgarian, 5 Romanian, 3 Spanish, 3 Polish, 2 Czech, 2 Italian, 1 Hungarian-Romanian, 1 Lithuanian, 1 Greek, 1 French, and 1 Portuguese national.

nationwide survey (n=465),[3] as part of a research project entitled *EU Nationals in the UK: Challenges and Perceptions of Belonging*, funded by a British Academy/ Leverhulme Trust grant SG161867. Because of the unexpected nature of the referendum result and subsequent political processes, we set up another five focus groups (n=29),[4] and followed up with fourteen in-depth interviews.[5] The main purpose of the follow up study was to examine our main assumptions about the dynamics of belonging, the emerging patterns of belonging, and how they respond to the backdrop of the referendum result.

The spacing of our data collection allowed us to better capture the shifts in the parameters of belonging with reference to Brexit's socio-political reverberations. The focus groups had different make up; we did not aim to replicate the pre-referendum groups in the post-referendum stage of the data collection (although some individuals did participate in both stages). The purpose was not to measure shifts in certain individuals' sense of belonging but to capture the dynamics of belonging as perceived and expressed by the individuals, to identify any emerging patterns of belonging and changes in their parameters. We analyzed the collected data using SPSS and qualitative content analysis, identifying patterns through the surveys and triangulating them with the patterns that emerged in the qualitative studies through interviews and focus groups. We compared the pre- and post-referendum data, mapping our findings against each stage of the data collection. It is important to highlight

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[2] Interviews took place in London, Berkshire (Henley-on-Thames, Reading and Goring and Streatly), and West Sussex (Brighton and Burgess Hill) between May and June 2016 and included participants on the basis of their EU nationality/ migration status in the UK who were not able and/or willing to participate in a focus group. Total number of participants 12 (6 male and 6 female): 3 Romanian, 3 German, 3 Polish, 1 Bulgarian, 1 French, and 1 Dutch national.

[3] A UK nationwide **survey** was conducted in the period 1st-19th June 2016. The survey was taken by over 600 participants. In total there were 400 completes and 65 incompletes that were used (answered all of the demographics questions and several more). Gender representation: 31% male (142), 69% female (323); 419 participants were in England, 11 Wales, 20 Scotland, and 5 Northern Ireland; 33 had British nationality as well as EU nationality; 19.9% arrived to the UK before 2004, 36.4% between 2004-2009, and 43.7 after 2010; ages: 18-29 21.2%, 30-39 40.1%, 40-49 24.9%, 50-64 11%, and 65+ 2.8%; Employment status: in full time employment 52.5%, part time 11%, self-employed 12.7%, looking for work 3.4%, not working 1.3%, full time student 4.7%, part time student 0.8%, homemaker 5.3%, business owner 3.2%, other 2.1%; highest level of education completed: primary 1.1%, Secondary 10.4%, Vocational school 5.9%, Some university 12.1%, undergraduate 30.1%, postgraduate 26.1%, PhD 5.9%, professional degree 3.6%, other 2.8%. Nationality of respondents: 99 Bulgarians, 64 Polish, 47 German, 44 French, 25 Irish, 22 Italians, 21 Hungarians, 20 Portuguese, 18 Spanish, 15 Dutch, 14 Romanian, 14 Swedish, 11 Lithuanian, 10 Latvian, 9 Danish, 6, Austrian, 6 Belgian, 6 Greek, 4 Czech, 3 Estonian, 3 Finish, 2 Slovakian, 1 Croatian, and 1 Maltese. The survey was divided into a number of sections: reason for coming and staying in the UK; strength of national identification; European identity; transnational engagement; social and civic engagement; views on migration; and views on Brexit.

[4] Focus groups took place in London, Reading, and West Sussex (Brighton and Burgess Hill) between July and December 2017. Most of the participants were those we were unable to get together in the previous focus groups. Total number of participants 29 (16 male and 13 female): 11 Bulgarian, 5 Polish, 4 Hungarians, 3 Portuguese, 2 Germans, 2 Italians, and 2 Romanians.

[5] Interviews took place in London, Berkshire (Henley-in-Thames and Reading), Glasgow, and East and West Sussex (Worthing, Hove, Brighton, Burgess Hill, and Eastbourne) between July and December 2017and included participants on the basis of their EU nationality/ migration status in the UK who were not able and/or willing to participate in a focus group. Total number of participants 14 (7 male and 7 female): 3 Bulgarians, 3 Germans, 1 Belgian, 1 Dutch, 1 French, 1 Italian, 1 Lithuanian, 1 Portuguese, 1 Spanish, and 1 Romanian.

that we carried out a cross-sectional study capturing new participants in its fresh rounds, and the results we received are inevitably impacted by the small samples and their biases. A larger sample longitudinal study would shed further light on the arguments we put forward.

Analysing our survey data and comparing it with the responses we got from interviews and focus groups, we were able to identify four patterns in which the dynamics of belonging unfolded: breakaway, cosmopolitan, in-between, and patriotic patterns. These four patterns correspond to an extent with similar findings by other studies: for example, Duvell and Vogel's (2006) distinction between four types of migrant attachments; Engbersen et al.'s (2013) research on attachment to host and home communities; and Burrell's (2010) review of Eastern European migration to the UK. We treat these patterns, as well as classifications provided by other authors, as conditional (all labelling must be) and often even overlapping. What they import to this study and to the broader literature is awareness of the perception of stability that belonging brings to its bearer, as well as greater clarity when it comes to identifying changes in the parameters of belonging.

What we found is that many EU nationals inevitably retain a strong sense of attachment to their home communities, but their sense of belonging undoubtedly changes as a result of their migration experience. The extent to which they rationalize this change is correlated with factors such as family status (particularly if married to a British national and having children), education level, and engagement with host communities. Only a small minority of EU nationals have sought to completely detach themselves from their home communities and assimilate into British society. What is particularly important to note is that the context of Brexit affected belonging along all four patterns, unsettling them in their perceived stability and moving them towards a new phase of rationalization or reaction.

At the same time, intra-European migration and its pertaining rights, which originally structured the parameters of belonging in the context we study, add an additional layer of *sui generis* transnationalism (as per Portes, 1999; Vertovec, 2010; Dahinden, 2017) to the way EU nationals assess and determine their belonging. The readily available transnational connections of intra-EU migrants who see themselves as free to move and re-locate, clearly relate to the conceptualisations of 'liquid societies' (Baumann, 2000), 'transit populations' and 'fluid communities' (Gryzmala-Kazlowska and Phillimore, 2018) or even the '(semi-) permanent impermanence' (Levitt and de la Dehesa, 2017: 1520) often characterizing transnational (or post-national) migration. The dynamics of belonging which we identified along four conditional patterns relate to the emerging literature on conceptualizing the phenomenon of 'new migration' in the context of transnationalism and super-diversity (Gryzmala-Kazlowska and Phillimore, 2018) as opposed to 'traditional' migration (see Faist, 2000; Vertovec, 2010). The dynamics of belonging identified in this way, and especially in their condition of flux in the context of Brexit, address both the perceived settled quality of belonging, and its complexity and fluidity as a process.

In the following two sections we attempt to outline the main parameters of the four patterns of belonging that emerged, and how they have responded to the impact of Brexit.

Four Patterns of Belonging

As outlined above, belonging is sustained by a subjective and contingent choice to be included in a collective: the dynamics of belonging connect a personal with a collective identity in a manner that is often independent of external recognition, though clearly related to it. The issue of migration from the EU to the UK featured prominently in national debates about withdrawal from the EU (Shipman, 2016), from which EU nationals were largely excluded. This is especially salient against the backdrop of an almost entirely missing public debate and policy discussion on the role and place of French, or German, or Polish for that matter, EU nationals in the UK prior to the referendum. This stands in stark contrast to public debates over African, Afro-Caribbean and Muslim migrants (see, for example: Joly, 1998; and Joppke, 1998). Thus, EU nationals in the UK were, within a relatively short period of time, faced with a viral public discussion (which they formally did not participate in) questioning their place in the UK. This should clearly affect their conscious and reactive choice to be included in the collective: to challenge the debates, to achieve distance from them, or simply to participate in them.

The main weight of the argument we put forward is that Brexit has *disrupted* the dynamics of belonging in their established patterns among EU nationals in the UK. Its essence has been re-positioning EU nationals in the UK not as (EU) citizens but as migrants. Thus, an active phase of rationalisation and re-constitution of belonging has commenced, prompting greater utilization of EU citizenship, EU rights and a common European identity as personally relevant categories of collective belonging in their own right. In both pre- and post-referendum data, the four patterns of belonging, which we identified, were discernible. However, in the post-referendum data these patterns appeared more 'unsettled', displaying features of uncertainty, resentment, and impermanence.

EU nationals arriving in the UK (and, presumably, elsewhere in the EU) often lack concrete long-term plans. This is sometimes discussed in relation to 'liquid' migration, although it is clear that many migrants also seek to lead more 'grounded' rather than liquid lives (Bygnes and Bivand Erdal, 2016). This is one reason why *patterns* of belonging emerge as migrants reflect on their place in the temporal, spacial and relational structures they find themselves in (cf Ryan, 2018). But the time they spend in the communities which they join, and the concrete paths they take in the UK, often change their perspectives, priorities, and plans. Jobs progress, partners are met, children arrive, schools are joined. Thus belonging is simultaneously perceived as settled but in constant flux in relation to contingencies. This is central in capturing responses to the context of Brexit and is the main reason why we decided to compare and contrast our findings with qualitative data collected after the referendum, albeit in a cross-sectional manner.

Breakaway

The first pattern of belonging we identified is the breakaway pattern of belonging. It describes people who actively seek to sever existing links with their national community: they display a strong and deliberate detachment from their community of nationality. Their reasons to migrate have been dictated by a conscious desire to break away from previous communities of belonging. A clear vision and strategy of 'becoming British' is mostly associated with this group. In our pre-referendum focus groups and interviews only four participants emerged within this pattern (all of whom in their 20s), while in the survey 38 respondents expressed similar views (most of whom in their 20s as well): lack of importance attached to national identity and greater importance to the need to formally integrate and, to an extent, assimilate.

Barbara (female Czech, full time student and au pair, late 20s, London): *'I knew that I wanted to move since I was a child. […G]rowing up in Prague I witnessed such hatred to everything foreign, it's a very racist country… After coming here I can't imagine [anymore] living without diversity, without other cultures, without other nationalities.*

… I feel at home here. [...T]he UK really matches my personality. So I just decided to stay. [W]hen I go back everything is so different, I have to adapt again … I personally really like British culture. I really do.'

When prompted to reflect on how the public debates around Brexit make her feel, she shares:

'I tend to take some of this stuff personally. Like, for example, they say that all these dirty immigrants, they come here to claim our benefits. I've lived here for six years. I've never claimed a single benefit. I've been to the doctor once. I'm not a burden on anyone. I work and I pay my taxes and I study at the university.'

Cosmopolitan

The second pattern of belonging we identified can be described as cosmopolitan. It includes people who actively seek to establish an identity that transcends specific national communities. This group includes people who clearly detach themselves from bounded belonging, finding instead self-identification across and beyond the communities of their nationality and host country. This is where the 'differentiated embedding' (Ryan, 2018) of some of the more 'liquid' migrant communities appears more visible. People in this group are more likely to be in a mixed-nationality relationship or be in a profession that requires high mobility; Favell's 'eurostars' (2008) with their higher levels of education and skills, would fall into this category but also the 'transit populations' Grzymala-Kazlowska and Phillimore (2018) discuss. Some of this group self-identify as cosmopolitans, others as Europeans (or cosmopolitans within a European context). They often express relative ease

at the prospect of leaving their current place of residence, and are less likely to have applied for British citizenship (even though many have applied for permanent residency).

Johanna (female Polish, HR manager, mid 30s, Reading): *'I see myself as cosmopolitan. Wherever you tell me to live tomorrow, tell me to live in Germany, I'll move to Germany. I'm not that fussed. My family status shows it: when we travel, me, my husband and daughter, the three of us have different passports. I'm Polish, she is British and my husband is Israeli. So this is how I see us: as just being cosmopolitan.'*

Yana (female Bulgarian, IT consultant, mid 30s, Burgess Hill): [Would you go back to Bulgaria one day?] *'Maybe. [W]e are people of the world and my home is where I settle: maybe in the UK, maybe Spain, maybe another country. [...] But this is a very good question, with the coming referendum, we simply do not know what the outcome is going to be. I'm not sure what will happen.'*

This sense of uncertainty appears tentatively even in self-proclaimed cosmopolitans prior to the referendum, as the above quote indicates.

Sanja (Slovak female, full time student and au pair, late 20s, London): [post-Brexit] *'The way I think and feel about the UK has changed drastically. I had quite a naïve idea of this country, so I suppose reality hit harder.'*

In-between

A third, in-between pattern of belonging acknowledges strong links with both national and host communities. The people in this group identify strongly with both home and host community, and have created for themselves links with both. We find this pattern more likely among those who have lived in the UK for longer; who have had children in the UK; and who are in a long term relationship with a British partner. They are more likely to have applied for permanent residency and British citizenship, to have British friends, and to engage frequently with British civil society.

Catalina (female Spanish, catering manager, early 40s, Goring and Streatly): *'[I see myself as] Spanglish. You know, it's a process. [M]y partner is British, so it must have some effect on me…'*

Gosia (female Polish, hotel shift manager, mid 30s, Goring and Streatly): *'[M]y heart is still in Poland but I live in England, and my partner is British [… I]t's funny, because when I came here, I could really feel that English people, they don't like Polish. But I remember when I met my partner, I was like, "You know I'm Polish, right?" And he said, "And I'm English. What are you going to do about it?" It was such a nice exchange.'*

But even in these cases, the issue of Brexit creates reflections that seem personally relevant and, what's more important, disruptive:

Catalina: *'So I ask my partner, who supports the Out campaign, "But baby if you leave, what happens to our five years of love, what happens to the house we invested in?!"... But then he starts telling me about all the money the UK is paying to the EU...'*

Patriotic

Finally, we were able to identify a pattern of belonging which we call patriotic. People in this group display a strong and deliberate attachment to their community of nationality, actively maintaining their national identity. They would not have emigrated, had it not been for external, instrumental reasons such as work and family. Members of this group seek to recreate their national settings in their new host country. They are less likely to apply for permanent residency and British citizenship; less likely to have English language proficiency; and less likely to have British friends (the importance attached to work in particular, as the main reason for coming to the UK, negatively correlated with the importance of having British friends -.195** and the importance of applying for permanent residency -.152**). They are more likely to be part of formal diaspora settings, Sunday language schools, national churches. In our pre-referendum focus groups and interviews nine participants were clearly positioned within this pattern and in the survey, 47. Interestingly, most of these were Eastern European and had lived in the UK for a short period of time.

Varo (male Bulgarian, data engineer, late 30s, Burgess Hill): [has been in the UK for three years after previously working for several years in Ireland] '*… Maybe I'm old fashioned, but I'd prefer to go back to my country one day.*[Follows Bulgarian politics and has Bulgarian TV at home] *… I'm not very interested in British politics, I read the newspaper sometimes, but I don't understand all British politics.'*

Based on our data even this latter pattern of belonging is often associated with a stable and productive accommodation into British society: social activities around child-rearing and education, as well as work-related engagement. This is to illustrate the inherent contradictions of belonging and its relation to integration outcomes. But reflections on the possible results of the referendum still evoked uncertainty and anxiety:

Varo: *'I don't think it will affect us, who are already here, but I am still a little bit worried, we don't know: after that, what*?'

A business owner in London put it even more bluntly:

Kircho (male Bulgarian, business owner, early 40s, London): [post-Brexit] '*What, am I a donkey, now that I have done all of this work and paid my taxes, I need to leave?!'*

While the above four patterns of belonging (breakaway, cosmopolitan, in-between, and patriotic) were very visible in our data from the pre-referendum period, and relate to data from other studies, in the period after the referendum their parameters seemed to have shifted and were harder to define clearly. Since the contours separating the four patterns

are never too rigid, shifts in the environment can blur them. With discussions on Brexit, particularly in the post-referendum debates, they became 'unsettled'. This disruptive potential stems from the bewilderment which the referendum outcome gave rise to, and the uncertainties which it implied. This became clear when our interview and focus groups participants discussed their changing attitudes towards British society and the UK. Questions of whether or not to stay in the UK, and under what conditions, began to surface.

This, we argue, is the main impact of Brexit on the dynamics of belonging. Even as debates have started to settle nearly two years after the referendum, immediate reactions of resentment and confusion have begun to subside, and plans to return or to migrate to a third country have not always materialized, the dynamics of belonging has begun to shift in response to Brexit because of the change in self-positioning and self-identification Brexit has brought about.

Silvia (female, full time student and au pair, late 20s, London): [who fit into a breakaway pattern] '*The Brexit vote … has made me rethink whether in fact I should and want to live here. '*

Elena (female German, executive MNC, late 40s, Henley-on-Thames): [fit into a cosmopolitan pattern, but had bought a house in the UK,has a child in the British education system, and had no plans on leaving before Brexit) '*I am not sure this is the country I want to live in any more… I have started to think and look at opportunities back in Germany, but also elsewhere in Europe'*.

Giannina (female Romanian, teaching assistant, amateur handball player in a local team, late 30s, Glasgow) provides a good account of why this disruption is important. She is exactly the type of EU national political narratives praise. She never thought much of issues of identity and clearly tried to assimilate [fits in the boundary between breakaway and in-between): in a very discernible Glaswegian accent, having lived in the city for the past 14 years, '*I remember walking down the street and it was chucking down, and this was before I met my [Scottish] husband, and I thought, I like it here, I want to make a life for myself here … you cannot expect a society to change for you, you need to make an effort to fit in within society.*'

She claimed to be 'frustrated with the [particularly English] media coverage of Brexit'. This made her question her own identity: '*It made me feel more [Romanian] patriotic, especially the talk of Eastern Europeans taking people's jobs'*. At the same time, it also made her rethink her place in the UK: '*I think that's why I feel more Scottish now [rather than British]… the SNP make you feel like you are part of the Scottish culture.'*

A number of our interviewees provided additional corroboration. **Ines** (female Spanish, MNC executive, late 40s, Worthing) told us that EU national employees of her company were openly talking of leaving, examining opportunities elsewhere and politely turning

down promotions that would require long-term commitments in the UK. **Ana** (female Bulgarian, business owner, mid 40s, London) who owns a moving business told us of EU nationals hedging by sending some of their property back to Europe while waiting to see what the Brexit negotiations will bring.

These accounts follow similar ones presented in the media and academic literature (see, for example, Lulle at al, 2017; France24 series on Brexit's effect on EU nationals; the Nursing and Midwifery Council Register for March 2018 on the number of EU nurses leaving the UK; and a survey conducted by the Facebook group 'The 3 Million' in Nov 2017 on EU nationals' future plans: 42% intended to stay whatever happened; 33.1% were thinking of leaving after Brexit; 12.5% intended to leave before Brexit; the rest made firm plans to leave either before or after Brexit). Our data corroborates these results. Surprisingly, those who expressed the most disruption as a result of Brexit are the ones who have been most willing to integrate (our breakaway pattern) and who are better educated and/ or highly skilled (our cosmopolitan pattern). They are precisely the ones the UK government has declared 'desirable' but are now most likely to be considering or planning for leaving - before or after Brexit. The EU nationals least likely to invest into integration (our patriotic pattern), who often happen to be low-skilled labourers (the most 'problematic' category in the UK government's assessment) are also the ones least concerned about Brexit. Whether because of a history of structural discrimination or because of their more recent arrival (they are often Eastern European), EU nationals in that category often declared that they will stay 'until kicked out'.

What is also clear from our data is that in the context of disruption, the rights contained in the framework of EU citizenship and the shared recourse to a common European identity are being used to stabilize disrupted belonging and re-construct it in the new post-Brexit environment.

Unsettled in the UK: The (Im)possible Europe

One of the most interesting aspects of EU migration is its link to and support for European integration (Hooghe and Marks, 2004) and a transnational European identity (Risse, 2011). It has been argued that increased intra-European mobility, particularly for highly skilled migrants (Favell, 2008), can foster a European identity. It has also been highlighted how this could happen for young migrants, especially students through the Erasmus exchange programme, which would lead to the 'consolidation of a people's Europe and the creation of European citizens' (Van Mole, 2013: 209-210; see also, King and Ruiz-Gelices, 2003). It is clear then that intra-EU migration affects the dynamics of belonging by providing in a tangible way the collective identity of Europe as a form of association and identification. Intra-EU migration also facilitates the personal relevance of European citizenship which enables unimpeded migration in the first place. Our pre-referendum survey data demonstrates that for many EU nationals their European identity is related to the importance they attach to migration within the EU (0.258**).

Hanjalka (female Hungarian-Romanian, catering manager, mid-30s, London): *'I feel more European since I came here, to be honest. Europe didn't make much sense when we were in Hungary. But here when we have people from Africa, from America, from Europe then you feel, "Okay, I'm European." Meeting non-European people, that's how you feel what it means to be European.'*

But what our pre-referendum study established was that belonging among EU nationals, in the UK but perhaps also elsewhere, had not been attached to formal status or to issues of integration. EU citizenship, enacted in the context of mobility (Currie, 2008; Uecker and Jacquet, 1997), grants rights which make acquiring formal settled status redundant. EU citizenship has also, somehow, prevented the problem of integration from politicization. As a result, EU nationals were left to integrate, as they saw fit, and as far as they saw fit, without interference from authorities. If and when their presence in the host community was questioned, EU treaty rights gave EU nationals a clear legal framework for resistance and for carving out their own paths of mobility, migration and accommodation. This legal framework allowed them even not to be fully aware of their status and the rights which it entailed, as we have showed above, particularly before the referendum vote (indeed, we have met a number of EU nationals who were not even aware prior to the referendum that they were 'EU nationals'). However, in the period of the Brexit referendum campaign and after, we found strong indications that this has begun to change. EU nationals living in the UK, suddenly challenged externally in both their membership and ownership of the communities which they inhabited (in their *belonging* there), sought justifications of their status and rights. They relayed their unease to their EU citizenship and to their European identity, and sought to re-construct their belonging in the context of anti-immigration rhetoric and perceived exclusion. Our quantitative and qualitative data before and after the referendum suggest that EU nationals perceived themselves as more deserving of formal rights and status than non-EU migrants in the UK because of their European identity and EU citizenship:

Yana (female Bulgarian, IT consultant, mid 30s, Burgess Hill): *'I think generally they should not give benefits [to non EU-migrants], perhaps only for people with children or disabilities, but I think that's where it should end…'*

Valia (female Bulgarian, housewife, mid 30s, Burgess Hill): *'I don't know Bulgarians who [claim benefits], but I know several people from my [English language] course who are [Asian], they have the whole family on the system…'*

In our survey EU nationals' attitudes towards non EU-migration, particularly among Eastern Europeans, were harsher, though this was negatively correlated with levels of education (-0.109**). When asked about the extent to which migration should be regulated (1= not at all, 5 = to a great extent) overall mean score for EU migration was 3.07 and for non EU-migration 3.83.

In this sense, our study highlights the modalities of making EU citizenship personally relevant and making European identity salient, which is a subject of analysis students of European identities have long struggled with (e.g. Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009). More specifically, we set out to investigate how the parameters of belonging shifted and got re-arranged in the context of Brexit among EU nationals living in the UK taking recourse to EU citizenship and to a common European identity.

Alex (female Romanian, waitress, late 20s, London): *'I think as long as we've been born in a European country, no matter Slovakia, Poland, we are children of Europe.... That means we shouldn't have boundaries between our countries. We are Europeans. We've been born in Europe, we can't change this*.'

What we found is that European identification is triggered by a number of complementary processes. Our study shows that higher education levels correlate with higher identification with Europe. Levels of identification with Europe and the EU, and European identity were correlated with levels of education (0.178** and 0.187** respectively). Interestingly, there was also a correlation between European identity and strength of national identity (0.128**). However, this identification is not always explicit or conscious. In the process of our data collection we established that different types of questions produce slightly different outcomes when it comes to explicitly acknowledging a European belonging. For example: 'I am proud to be European' 3.91 (1-5); 'I identify with other EU national in the UK' 3.65; 'Being European is something I rarely think about' 3.01. This is a problem we were well aware of and relates in part to the already established fact that surveys 'may create the attitudes they report, since people wish to provide answers to questions that are posted' (Checkel and Katzenstein, 2009: 10), and that it is not always clear what people really mean in surveys when they state that they 'feel European' (Bruter, 2004).

In our qualitative data it appeared that this self-identification often occurred reactively rather than consciously, in particular when discussing experiences of hostility and exclusion in the context of the Brexit referendum. This in many ways contradicts Fligstein's argument that positive interactions in host EU country made EU nationals identify as European (2009: 134).

Gosia (female, Polish, late 30s, Goring and Streatly): [at the beginning of the conversation she says] *'I don't feel European. We don't have anything in common, different countries have different cultures. Just because all of us came from somewhere to the UK doesn't mean that we are a team.'*

[at the end of the conversation, talking about Brexit] *'Well, if I have to be honest, I think **we** European people will really build the country up. [T]here are so many of us, could you imagine right now if they would make the decision, "All of you have to leave"? What would happen with the country? I would like to see that. I would really like to see that.'*

Faroukh (male, French-Algerian, early 40s Goring and Streatly): *'Believe me that if you take just this group [of Europeans], we have way more in common among us than a group of Asians. That's what makes Europeans Europeans.'*

Dev (male German, chef, late 30s, Brighton): *'They want to kick **us** [Europeans] out, who do they think they will get to do the jobs? English people?'*

In the process of re-thinking and questioning their position in British society, EU citizenship, EU rights and European identity emerged as stabilizing reference points for the disrupted belonging which followed the Brexit referendum. It was very clear in the interviews and focus groups after the referendum that the fear of Brexit triggered among many EU nationals a new sense of Europeanness. This, as we can see above, was expressed in the collective 'we' which emerged only when prompted to reflect on the referendum and the future: it had been consciously denied as a self-identification previously, perhaps because of the implied shared otherness ('we' as migrants). It also appeared that the immediate lack of clarity on the UK government's negotiating position on EU citizens in the UK in the post-referendum period prompted conscious efforts in clarifying legal rights and resisting narratives that challenged them. This is visible in the civil society initiatives that followed (e.g. the3million campaign) but also in the way EU nationals spoke about their rights. When asked about her right to stay and work in the UK **Ezster** (female Hungarian, retail manager, early 30s, London) was emphatic: *'I have a right to be here because I am European! … Just like English people have the right to be in Hungary'*. Ezster's European citizenship rights and proclaimed European identity enabled her to make this claim.

Europe and being European emerged as important aspects in EU nationals' identity. A number of complementary processes have contributed to this, among them the British media portrayals of EU nationals as a singular group; the distinction made by EU nationals between themselves and non-EU migrants, which is further emphasised in the home and host countries; and the fact that many EU nationals work mostly with other EU nationals. This is perhaps part of a long-term process among EU nationals of positioning themselves in relation to non-EU migrants and British society (Eder, 2009).

Conclusion

In this article we used a cross-sectional study on EU nationals living in the UK to interrogate the dynamics of belonging, its emerging patterns, and its parameters of change in the context of Brexit. EU nationals had been excluded from taking part in the Brexit referendum, even though its outcome significantly affected them. This created a democratic and legitimacy deficit, which exacerbated the legal insecurity around the status of more than three million EU citizens living in the UK. It is inevitable that such a context would affect EU nationals' sense of belonging. Our study set out to investigate how.

Such an investigation can help discussions on the current and future status of EU nationals in the UK, as well as our understanding of the patterns and parameters of belonging as a concept and as practices. We identified four emerging (though certainly overlapping) patterns of belonging visible in both pre-and post-referendum data: breakaway, cosmopolitan, in-between, and patriotic. These patterns speak to what the literature on types of migrant accommodation has studied so far. What we argued was that Brexit had significantly disrupted these patterns as a result of the general sense of insecurity and hostility which it created, blurring the boundaries between them and shifting them to a state of flux signifying a new phase in the dynamics of belonging. In this new phase, European nationals were faced with their migrantness and began to reflect on or react to challenges to their place in the society of the British state or their choices in migrating to the UK. This is particularly true for those EU nationals whose pattern of belonging had been most conducive to integration (i.e. breakaway and cosmopolitan, and to a degree in-between pattern), and applies to a lesser degree to EU nationals who are least expected to integrate (patriotic pattern). This is a surprising conclusion, and one that is immediately relevant to policy making towards EU nationals in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum, particularly given the UK government's insistence that it wants to continue attracting the 'best and brightest'.

As a response to the disruption which Brexit caused in the dynamics of belonging of EU nationals living in the UK, EU nationals appear to have begun to consolidate as a group - a collective constitution which had been much less evident before and often consciously rejected! - making recourse to their legal rights as EU citizens and their shared European identity. This re-constitution of belonging among EU nationals living in the UK in the context of Brexit can be consequential. To begin with, it can create a problem of integration where previously there was none. Furthermore, it is linked to the long term boundaries of the political community of the British state, as well as to the boundaries of Europe. Finally, in the process of re-constituting belonging, the individual decisions of more than three million UK residents excluded in the context of Brexit, become politically relevant, the impact of which remains to be fully understood.

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