

Studying the emotional costs of integration at times of change: the case of EU migrants in Brexit Britain

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Abstract

Events such as Brexit have drawn attention to the precarity of contemporary migrants' settlement rights and reopened the debate on the nature of integration and assimilation processes. Drawing on participant observation and interviews with Italian and Bulgarian migrants in Brexit Britain, this article develops a novel approach for understanding migrants' changing relationships with their countries of settlement and their current and future practices. This approach builds on the sociology of emotions, which it extends to migration and diversity with a transnational sensibility. The approach is then applied to explain the different displays of emotion undertaken by our participants and their consequences. Overall, the article develops a new way to examine the subjective experiences of integration at times of change that is capable of offering important insights into the emotional costs of the neo-assimilationist climate characterising several Western societies.

Keywords: assimilation, Brexit, Bulgarian migrants, emotional costs, emotional labour, emotional work, integration, Italian migrants, migration, settlement

Introduction

Migrant integration is often described as a long and complex process where migrants and receiving societies have to mutually adapt to each other (Penninx 2010). This process has a strong affective dimension, which is susceptible to socio-economic and political shifts that can disrupt migrants' settlement journeys. Brexit illustrates this disruption well. The sudden and,

for many, unexpected decision of the UK to ‘take control of its borders’ and end its 47-year long membership of the EU has unlocked a process of socio-political and economic reorientation which has affected the European citizens who had chosen the UK as a country of residency and settlement.

Until recently, this affective dimension was overlooked in migration studies, which have traditionally privileged the structural and cultural dimensions of integration. However, the recent literature on Brexit has clearly signalled a change of direction, bringing to the fore the emotional and affective side of integration as a process (Lulle et al. 2018; Botterill et al. 2018; Ranta and Nancheva 2018), while continuing to treat emotions as the *object of analysis* (Gawłewicz and Sotkasiira 2019). The aim of this article is to advance these debates by considering emotions as a *tool for* understanding wider processes concerning the relationships between individuals and society, connectedness and belonging (May 2011). Thus, we develop an approach which, drawing on sociological work on emotions expanded with a transnational sensibility, accounts for the role of emotions in migrants’ settlement processes.

Starting with Hochschild’s (1983) seminal work on emotion management, the sociology of emotions has been developed and applied to a range of studies on work, gender, social movements, crime and justice (Bericat 2016:504). In this article, we extend the focus to the sphere of migration to interrogate migrants’ relationships with their country of settlement and in particular their current perspectives and practices of integration. Our case study is that of ‘Brexit Britain’ where we document the experiences of Italian and Bulgarian migrants as examples of ‘old’ and ‘new’ Europeans¹. We argue that considering emotions is crucial to understand processes of settlement and integration. Specifically, we show how the different ways in which migrants display their emotions provide insights into how they perceive their place in contemporary Britain as well as into their current practices and future plans. Our case-study shows that some migrants are involved in ‘emotional labour’ trying to master the

‘correct’ feelings to successfully integrate in a rapidly changing British society and polity, while others manifest betrayal and some indifference. These findings allow us to argue that an emotions-centred approach offers a useful way to unpack the diversity of subjective experiences of integration at times of change, revealing the emotional costs of this new assimilationism.

In what follows, we first theoretically ground our study in the existing migration scholarship by looking at the way it accounts for migrants’ emotions, before operationalising our analytical approach drawing on the sociological literature on emotions. Next, we outline the methodological aspects of the study. The empirical part of the article presents migrants’ differentiated reactions to Brexit and their impact on actions and decisions. We conclude by discussing our findings, theoretical contribution and the wider applicability of our approach.

Emotions in migration and integration studies

Despite an initial neglect of emotions, migration research has progressively acknowledged them as a key dimension of human mobility (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015), paying attention mostly to migrants’ complex relationship with their home society. This is evident in the literature on transnational families (Parreñas 2001; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003; Zontini 2015); return migration (King and Christou 2011); and the role of material objects in the migratory experience (Svašek 2012; Boccagni and Baldassar 2015). Fewer studies have explored the emotional ramifications of migration in relation to the host society, focusing predominantly on the negative emotional reactions by host societies to the scale of specific groups of migrants, their welfare rights and access to the labour market (Barbulescu and Favell 2020)ⁱⁱ.

This neglect of emotions has partly to do with the long-standing preoccupation of integration studies with structural factors (Grzymała-Każłowska and Phillimore 2018). A growing number of integration scholars, however, is shifting attention to subjective factors, scrutinising, for instance, how migrants establish social relations and networks (Wessendorf and Phillimore 2018; Grzymała-Każłowska and Phillimore 2018) and build social and cultural capitals (Erel and Ryan 2019) that enhance their sense of belonging (May 2011). Ryan (2018), for instance, emphasises how processes of settlement are neither unidirectional nor irreversible. She conceptualises ‘differentiated embedding’ as a dynamic process occurring differently across different sectors of society and with different intensity (Ryan, 2018:235). Her work clearly draws attention to the subjective and emotional dimensions of settlement – something that also emerges from Grzymała-Każłowska’s (2018) work on ‘social anchoring’ and Zontini and Pero’ (2020) on ‘transnational emplacement’. Research seems to increasingly regard emotions as crucial for the better understanding of the migratory experience – yet, often they have been peripheral rather than central to analysis.

The new Brexit literature

With Brexit emotions have received greater attention in a new rich body of literature capturing the initial reactions to the event and the way in which it disrupted migrants’ integration and impacted their identities, belonging and future plans (among many see Lulle et al. 2017, 2018; Ranta and Nancheva 2018). Brexit was initially described as a unique event, provoking a ‘rupture’ with the mobility plans of young Europeans (Lulle et al. 2017, 2018). ‘Uneven power geometries’ were recognised in relation to the differentiated impact of Brexit (Lulle et al. 2018), however an *emotional consensus* quickly emerged among the early Brexit research where feelings and emotions were consistently represented as markedly negative, expressed in terms of ‘shock’, ‘disbelief’ and ‘incredulity’ (Ranta and Nancheva 2018).

As Brexit not only ‘came’ (Lulle et al. 2017) but the insecurity it brought about stayed, recent studies have begun unpacking the impact that this protracted insecurity has had upon EU migrants in the UK, offering a more nuanced understanding of the emotions it generated (Gawłewicz and Sotkasiira 2019; Sotkasiira and Gawłewicz 2020; Kilkey and Ryan 2020; Genova and Zontini 2020). For instance, while Kilkey and Ryan (2020) have questioned the uniqueness of Brexit, Gawłewicz and Sotkasiira (2019:1) have convincingly challenged the static nature of emotional reactions to Brexit arguing that ‘[...] over time, the initial shock may give way to more tempered responses’.

New studies have also emphasised how settlement can be easily undone and disrupted. Using the term ‘unbelonging’, Giralt (2020) argues that Brexit resulted in the attribution of “migrantness” and the non-recognition of the contributions and efforts made to belong’ (2020:30). This has been further illustrated by what Sotkasiira and Gawłewicz (2020:14) call the ‘politics of embedding’ - when people begin prioritising strategic social relationships and resources (‘ties that count’) over sources of belonging (‘ties that bind’). The authors ultimately argue that when embedding is threatened, it quickly becomes instrumentalised by migrants to highlight their deservingness to be part of the host society (Sotkasiira and Gawłewicz, 2020:15).

Overall, this literature has started to unravel the emotional impact of Brexit and the politicisation of migration more broadly, but we still do not know enough about the role of emotions in shaping settlement and integration processes. We fill this gap drawing on the sociology of emotions to develop a new approach that responds to recent calls for rethinking integration in ways that move beyond ‘measurable’ variables and encompass the subjective experiences of those involved (Grzymała-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018).

An emotions-centred approach to the study of migrants' integration

The sociology of emotions has pointed out that affect is important for meaning-making (Burkitt 1997; Reay 2015). Through feelings, people can understand their outlook on the world as they provide a connection between what they are seeing and what they had expected to see. Feelings also serve as a clue as to how people might act (Hochschild 1983, Gould 2009). Documenting migrants' emotional displays in relation to unsettling events such as Brexit can thus provide important insights into their changing relationships with the receiving societies, including how they see themselves in them.

In her seminal work, Hochschild (1983) distinguishes between 'emotion work' conducted in the private sphere and 'emotional labour' conducted in the public sphere where emotions become commercialised. Central to Hochschild's (1983) thesis is the idea that workers experience a 'transmutation of their feelings' when they successfully internalise the feelings that they are required to display by their employers. Hochschild (1983) believes that people act according to 'feeling rules', which govern the ways in which they have to display their emotions correctly in any given situation. We contend that feeling rules are also at play in relation to the public display of emotions deemed appropriate for migrants in their receiving societies. Similarly to service workers, migrants can conform to these rules (through deep or surface acting) or reject them, with different implications.

Notably however, Hochschild's (1983) dichotomous distinction between the private and the public spheres has been critiqued for overlooking the blurring that can occur between work and private life (Brook 2009; Knight 2019) and for being too centred on individual experiences at the expense of interpersonal and collective ones (Bericat 2016; Brook 2009; Burkitt, 2018; Theodosius 2006). Her work has also been critiqued for neglecting the pre-reflexive, non-conscious elements of emotions (Gould 2009; Theodosius 2006). We take these

criticisms on board in adopting a relational approach to emotions regulation, which also recognises that emotions can be complex, interactive, ambivalent, or even contradictory, and have non-rational, non-conscious elements that might defy regulation (Burkitt 2018; Gould 2009; Theodosius 2006). As Burkitt (2018) has highlighted, emotion regulation is just one aspect of the relational patterning of emotions where people respond to the attitudes that others have towards them. Actors can also defy 'feeling rules' by refusing to manage their feelings 'appropriately', not submitting to conventionally acceptable emotions (Gould 2009).

In examining how migrants display their emotions in Brexit Britain, we find useful the concept of 'emotional habitus' developed by Gould (2009) in the context of gay and lesbian activism in USA, as it brings together the social and conventional aspects of emotions with their nonconscious and bodily components. For her the emotional habitus of a social group provides it with a template on what and how to feel. Such emotional habitus is shaped by the field in which it operates. It is also shaped by the position that particular groups have within a field. Specifically, for marginalised groups it can be ambivalent, as it is influenced simultaneously by the prevailing emotional habitus of a society but also by their specific experiences of oppression. Moreover, those in more awkward social positions tend to have a higher need for intensive self-monitoring and such work can become sedimented in people's habitus (Reay 2015). Hegemonic emotional habitus tends to be based around feelings such as loyalty and gratitude or 'those that uphold social structures and relations of domination' (Gould 2009:40).

For Gould's (2009) marginalised participants, their emotional habitus included an ambivalent hope for social acceptance as well as a sense of shame for their gay/queer difference. Shame is an emotion that is often associated with actors feeling rejected or losing worth in the eyes of the other (Bericat 2016). Conversely, those in more powerful positions can express socially unacceptable emotions, such as anger, more easily (Bericat 2007). Anger, is

seen as an emotion that needs to be restrained and controlled particularly for subordinate groups as well as women, who are associated with powerless emotions such as fear and sadness. Feeling anger, however, can be seen as an achievement, as it signals the perception of a situation as unjust and in need of changing (Bericat 2016, Gould 2009) and it might spark action (Lorde 1981). Indifference can be seen as an emotional numbness where actors dim their inner signals to exit a situation of distress (Hochschild 1983).

In transposing these insights from the sociology of emotions to that of migration and integration, we draw on Bridget Anderson's (2013) work, which highlights the importance of social acceptance for migrants. In Anderson's view, migrants need to show that they belong to the 'community of value', defined as being 'composed of people who share common ideals and (exemplary) patterns of behaviour expressed through ethnicity, religion, culture, or language' (2013: 3). The latter requires migrants to show themselves as 'good citizens' with the 'right' values. The good citizen is understood as the liberal sovereign self: 'rational, self-owning and independent' (Anderson, 2013:3). The boundaries of the community of values, however, are porous: groups and individuals can slip in and out of it. Migrants' position in the community of value is thus precarious, as they tend to be seen at best as 'good enough citizens' or mostly as 'tolerated citizens'. Given this fragile position, they need to continuously 'struggle for acceptance'. According to Anderson (2013) this includes the work of policing the imaginary border of the community of value and constantly proving that they have the right values. They can do so not only by demonstrating their work ethics and their liberal and multicultural credentials but also by distancing themselves from the 'failed citizen', that is, those who are 'not the flexible, neoliberal subject, with a portfolio career, making the most of every opportunity' (Anderson, 2013: 7).

In this article we explore if the work required to be accepted in the community of value also includes emotional labour. We do so through our emotions-centred approach to migrants'

integration which recognises the relational, interactive, conscious and unconscious nature of emotions but also adds a transnational dimension. This is because migrants often engage with transnational forms of living (Vertovec 2007), occupying two or more social fields simultaneously and are thus likely to be exposed to different feeling rules and emotional habits. Moreover, Brexit itself might be seen as a time of change where previous rules are shifting. Brexit, we argue, can be considered as a complex affective event that has simultaneously unlocked feelings of joy linked to ideas of regained national sovereignty as well as of fear and resentment towards migrants and everything European which were previously more unarticulated. In such context, the analysis of how migrants are affected by and cope with this new shifting hegemonic emotional habitus requires attention. Our emotions-centred approach, which encompasses a transnational dimension, goes beyond the structural and cultural variables considered traditionally in integration studies, and as such, can be valuable for understanding the experiences of a variety of migrant groups in the UK and beyond.

Methodological overview of the study

While we have a longstanding research interest in Italian (Zontini) and Bulgarian (Genova) migration and are part of these groups, it was not until after the Brexit results had sunk in that we decided to jointly explore and compare the settlement experiences of both migrant groups in the context of a country negotiating its way out of the EU. We soon realised that there was variation, overlap, similarities and differences between and across our groups that required explanation.

We began fieldwork by conducting both offline and online participant observation. Specifically, each of us spent time ‘hanging out’ with Italian and Bulgarian migrants in cafés, restaurants, community cultural events, private gatherings, information events as well as pro-EU demonstrations. Our prolonged engagement with community events enabled us to build

trust and intimacy with the participants and while we formally interviewed them once, we continued to communicate regularly with them at these social occasions. Occasionally, we jointly visited places to foster a stronger reflexive account of community life and settlement practices. We also closely monitored online Italian and Bulgarian Midlands Facebook groups, noting specifically how people react to and share news about Brexit. These Facebook groups served as an initial recruitment strategy. However, our recruitment changed over time: from the initial convenience sampling, combined with snowballing, we slowly moved to a more purposive approach, which enabled us to somewhat diversify our sample in terms of migratory and work trajectories.

In addition to participant observation, we conducted semi-structured interviews, which explored several topics: migration history, employment trajectories, emplacement, Brexit and everyday othering. We have a total of 30 formally recorded interviews: 13 with Bulgarians and 17 with Italians and a number of informal conversations with these and other participants. The latter also enabled us to observe how time impacted upon their emotions. Our youngest participant was 20 years old and our oldest was 55; 11 were male and 19 – female. Their arrival in the UK ranged from the late 80s (one Italian) through the 1990s (three Italians and two Bulgarians) to few months after the EU referendum (four Bulgarians). Participants were employed on different contracts – from precarious part-time positions in the catering industry and factory work to full-time academic positions. Our sample is thus slightly skewed as unlike our participants, most Bulgarians tend to find themselves in low or lower middle level of occupations (ONS 2017), but it captures well the profile of Italians from different migratory waves (Scotto 2015). All Bulgarians employed in precarious positions also had university degrees from their country of origin, which signalled a process of de-skilling. Regarding location, we chose to focus predominantly on the Leave area of the East Midlands. However, as we employed snowballing techniques, seven of our participants resided elsewhere in the

country at the time of the interview: three in London, three in Southern and one in Northern England (see Table 1 in the online appendix). Including such a wide range of experiences was beneficial as it allowed us to consider the complex intersections of age, gender, occupation, life course and how they shape migrants' settlement. Furthermore, the variation in length of stay is useful in highlighting how migratory experiences are linked to wider socio-economic processes (see Genova and Zontini 2020). Zontini interviewed all Italians and Genova – all Bulgarians. All participants chose to speak their native language except for two Bulgarians – Hristina and Yoana, who explicitly chose English, justifying it as 'easier'. While our fieldwork is ongoing, the data presented in this article was mainly gathered shortly before the EU referendum in the UK and up to November 2018.

We conducted a multi-stage process of data analysis. Having decided to focus on the Brexit topic within our data, we first created participant profile overviews. We then met to discuss them and draw out common themes. Time was crucial here as when we revisited the data, we realised that we needed to go beyond the themes and also explore what participants actually *do* with their talk about Brexit. In our final stage of analysis, we examined closely *how* emotions were narrated and displayed *as embedded* in their specific contexts. We thus scrutinised examples when participants expressed their emotions, specifically when they: 1) acted upon their feelings (Hochschild 1983), usually denoting a change to 'fit' a particular situation or 2) chose not to display emotion. Furthermore, we scrutinised how these expressions of emotion instigated action, that is – the practical and specific steps that emanated from these emotions. Next, we illustrate and reflect on those instances in depth.

Understanding Brexit and integration through emotions

Below we document the different ways in which our participants display their emotions regarding Brexit, asking whether they are regulating them to fit in with the new feeling rules

or defying them, and with what consequences. We are particularly interested in the role of their transnational experiences in shaping their reactions. More broadly, we reflect upon what migrants' emotional displays can reveal about their relationship with a changing receiving society, their current and future actions and integration. We do so by grouping participants' reflections according to the most dominant displays in our data: *betrayal*, *ambivalence* and *indifference*.

Betrayal

To articulate their feelings towards Brexit and the ways in which it was going to disrupt their settlement in the UK, some of our participants shared a wide range of negative emotions that were encapsulated by an overall sense of *betrayal*. This is a complex display of emotions that encompasses feelings such as *anger*, *shock* and *disbelief*, *incredulity* and *being patronised*. The participants in this group were all highly skilled and most had spent a minimum of five years in the UK but in most cases longer. Our data reveals though that experiences and interpretations of Brexit were not only classed but also gendered and indicative of migrants' relative social positioning regarding EU privilege.

For example, our longstanding male Italian migrants experienced Brexit '*as an eye-opener*'. These participants lamented how they had mistakenly believed that Britain was '*open, tolerant, free, and progressive*' and how the referendum not only rejected these values of perceived British meritocracy, liberalism and multiculturalism but also undermined their personal commitment to residing in the country. Importantly, this also shows how the hegemonic emotional habitus can enforce a sense of betrayal that disrupts migrants' realities and their future plans.

In comparison, our female participants in this group communicated their experiences of Brexit as a much deeper rupture of the relationship with the country of settlement, which

encapsulated a violation of trust and profound injustice. They relied on the language of love and intimacy to convey their sense of feeling ‘*cheated*’, ‘*dumped*’ and ‘*rejected*’. The relationship between women and nation has long been documented, in particular their role as reproducers of the nation both through their biological role as well as through the affective labour necessary to reproduce membership (Anthias and Yuval-Davies 1989; Yuval-Davies 1997). Here however, our participants express their realisation that their devotion to the UK has been misguided as they were never perceived as full members of the nation. For example, Italian Silvia felt as if the country told her: ‘*look, I don’t love you as much as you love me! So, you say – oh sorry, I didn’t understand, I thought we got on well; we were a good couple, my dear England*’. She had moved to the UK after trying to settle in Spain and in the USA for better work opportunities. In the UK she successfully managed to work in her field, met her Italian partner and had a daughter. The couple have now returned to Italy, something which was not in their original plans.

As we can see in Silvia’s case, for our participants in this group Brexit resulted in the tipping point that made them realise that despite all their efforts they were not seen, and never will be, as part of the ‘community of value’, making them regret ‘falling in love’ with the country. For our female Italians, Brexit resulted in a sense of ‘*profound anger*’ that they continued to express long after the 2016 referendum. Thus, contrary to Gawłewicz and Sotkasiira’s (2019) anticipation, participants’ sense of betrayal not only did not seem to recede with the passage of time but also in some cases it even exacerbated. For them Brexit was a betrayal too far: something that cannot be easily forgiven and overcome. This is illustrated by Paola who reflected:

It’s like when there is a relationship with a partner and there is a big fight, you start doubting many things that you had never considered before, and as they

always say, you get back together like a glued vase, like a vase that is no longer new, that remains glued together.

Contrary to existing literature which argues that women do a bigger share of ‘emotion work’ because they are more interested than men in preserving relationships (Hochschild 1983, Burkitt 1997, Duncombe and Marsden 1993), our Italian participants saw their relationship with the UK as broken, and to some extent irreparable, as a result of Brexit. They defied prevailing feeling rules by openly manifesting their anger, provoking conflict and misunderstandings both in the intimate sphere (in arguments with their British partners) and at work (where they felt the issue was ignored).

Importantly though, anger can lead to action (Lorde 1981; Hochschild 1983). It is thus unsurprising that this is the group of participants more likely to have applied early for naturalization. They wanted to retake control and redress an unjust situation to secure their future. Paola, for instance, talks about applying as a safeguard against future discrimination: *‘I feel like a Jew that had to do the Nazi passport – look you are discriminated, get the Nazi passport so you won’t be discriminated anymore, you become one of them’*. Another form of action can be to leave the country, either to ‘return’ as Mauro has eventually done or to migrate further as in the case of Marta. Caterina, having migrated only in 2013, found herself unwilling and perhaps unable to do either. She had also had negative experiences in ‘crisis Italy’, hence her comments:

I wouldn’t like to have to apply for British citizenship. Because citizenship is part of my DNA, and there is no British DNA in my blood [...] I would like to be free not to have to do it. [...] I don’t feel that kind of affect that is necessary to say I become a citizen of that place. For me that is very important, in some ways I wouldn’t like to have Italian either.

This not only signals a kind of dual disembedding (Ryan 2018) but also the importance of considering a transnational perspective in evaluating how one's emotional habitus informs everyday practice and experience. Caterina's emotional display is somewhat pragmatic – she is prepared to engage in the kind of 'surface acting' that is required to get along in her everyday life. Once again relying on a reference to intimacy, she explains: *'I don't belong to this society, it's not a wedding, it's a cohabitation'*.

Ambivalence

Not all our participants expressed exclusively negative emotions regarding Brexit. A larger and quite diverse group (in terms of nationality, occupation, gender, age and length of stay) displayed their emotions in a much more ambivalent way. Some of them were as concerned as those who experienced Brexit as betrayal while a small group less so, however, what unites them is that they all decided to 'work' on their emotions, suppressing the pain and fear that they were feeling and 'choosing' to embrace a more positive outlook.

A case in point is 50-year-old Bulgarian Hristina who arrived in the UK in 2000. Using the same love analogy employed by many of the female Italians she remarked: *'It's like when your lover breaks up with you, you are like **oh, he can have me back**, even after he's married with, like, three kids. **It's just very painful, it's very painful**'* (our emphasis). Betrayal here is clearly associated with pain but unlike the Italian women who regretted 'falling in love' with the country, Hristina is hopeful that the relationship will work: *'I still believe that Britain is tolerant, I still **want to** believe it. I'm, you know, still in love with the country, but the country is not in love with me anymore'* (our emphasis). The phrase 'I still want to believe it' signifies a deliberate action to make her feelings and thoughts fit the kind of Britain she would like to

inhabit. Her attempt to belong to the ‘community of value’ is illustrated by her remark: ‘*Loads of immigrants come here and they don't want anything, but just to be the best British citizens they can be. That was my intention [...] I wanted to be the best I could be to this country*’.

We can see here a deliberate and purposeful effort, an act of management. Her interview also demonstrated the importance of considering the transnational context that frames one’s emotional habitus, which can be really complex and even polarised. The latter is evident in the fact that in her narrative she often contrasted the negative emotions of *frustration* and *exasperation* of her previous occupation as a barrister in Bulgaria with the *pride* and *joy* of working for the NHS as an administrator. This was further emphasised by her deliberate choice to be interviewed at her hospital’s café and also continuously reaffirmed when taking part in social and community events where she spoke about her love for the NHS and the UK. Even though she has effectively undergone a process of deskilling, we can very clearly see the emotional labour employed in working on her negative emotions and having faith in the inclusivity of Britain. Her case thus clearly illustrates the complexity of emotions and their relational and interactive nature.

Similar to Hochschild’s (1983) flight attendants, many of our participants managed to conquer their emotions by depersonalising the situation. This was achieved by ‘not taking it too personally’ and portraying themselves as rational actors capable of adapting quickly to any environment. Dora, a 27-years-old Bulgarian graduate, explained:

*They want **people like me** to come over and work for cheaper and they are ready to invest a lot [...]. So somehow **the rational in me overcame the emotional and I said to myself** “Most probably it won’t happen”’ (our emphasis).*

Evidently Dora, in trying to act ‘appropriately’ and ‘productively’, is sanctioning herself as illustrated by the phrase ‘I said to myself’. This shows how one changes their feeling to fit the

situation, illustrating ‘acts upon feelings’ (Hochschild 1983:13). Another aspect that is important in Dora’s quote is her reference to ‘people like me’. Many participants made the point that the anti-immigrant sentiments connected with the referendum were not really about them. Distancing from the ‘real migrants’ is thus another strategy employed to navigate their current situation. This is done by young professionals who invoke their cosmopolitan values and adaptable dispositions, and by those who, while doing precarious jobs, stress their ability to work hard and their difference from Anderson’s (2013) ‘non-citizens’. For the former, this distancing means portraying themselves as rational agents, focusing on their pragmatic and individualist plans to succeed. This allows them to present themselves as ‘the rational, self-owning, and independent’ citizen who naturally belong to the community of value’ (Anderson 2013:3). Re-establishing belonging, however, also entails policing the boundary of the ‘community of value’ by drawing a line between themselves and less desirable migrants. Such moves to create social distance are not new (Genova 2017, 2019) but Brexit has further reinforced the need to do so.

The case of 46-year-old Bulgarian Krasimir illustrates well the policing of the boundary of the ‘community of value’. After splitting up with his partner with whom he has a child, he joined his sister who was already living in the UK. We met him just after he had come out of an abusive relationship with a Bulgarian woman involved in ‘dodgy benefit schemes’ and reflecting on Brexit, he shared:

*I am really angry when I get compared to a gypsy who has come here and committed a crime and I get the same treatment because I am also Bulgarian. This is why I support Brexit because there are all sorts of people that come here and there needs to be a way to stop all these people leeching off[...]. Whoever wants to come and work, they should have to apply for a work permit and only then be allowed to work. So, that these **trashy people** stop coming and I am no longer compared to them!*

Here Krasimir draws the line between deserving and undeserving migrants, relying on an equally problematic racialised rhetoric, which we can see in some of the migration literature on European racialisation and othering (Moroşanu and Fox 2013; Genova 2017). While in the context of Brexit all EU migrants experience a loss of mobility rights that puts them on par with other non-EU migrants, it is worth noting the slight difference in the emotional reactions between the two nationality groups we studied. Italian participants appeared to be considerably angrier in response to their newly acquired status of ‘migrantness’ (Giralt 2020) whereas for Bulgarians it simply reaffirmed the previously established racial boundaries and the technique of disassociation with fellow co-nationals on the basis of class and ethnicity (Genova 2017; Genova and Zontini 2020). We see this in Krasimir’s case where he differentiates himself from working class migrants despite his current working-class job. Furthermore, the alignment of Krasimir’s narrative with the hegemonic emotional habitus illustrates the complexity of emotions where anger is translated in support for Brexit, which is reconceptualised as positive and generating happiness. Anger here is not directed to the system perceived as unjust but to other migrants whose shortcomings might affect his acceptance in the community of value.

Considering migrants’ transnational context is key in understanding their emotional habitus. In the case of Italian Valentina, even though she was initially scared about Brexit, she is now ‘choosing’ to ignore her negative feelings, and is even being optimistic about it. As she herself admits, all this enthusiasm for the UK despite Brexit derives from comparing it with her home country: *‘it is the comparison that gets me, I swear, it is the comparison that makes me love this place even more’*. For this cohort of more recently arrived migrants, their dual frame of reference, encompassing their relationships to both their country of origin and the UK, made them see Brexit in a wider perspective. As Marcello from Italy put it: *‘At this particular historical moment, it’s better to be in Brexit Britain than in Salvini’s Italy’*.

In practical terms, this group's decisions regarding securing their rights post-Brexit were dictated by pragmatism. For the young and highly educated, it directly linked to their self-perception as global citizens. Bulgarian Tina explained that her long-term ambition is to get a British passport because *'on a global level it is better if I have it as I can go to Australia or America, after all it is a privilege to have this passport'*. She sees the need to stay in the UK to accumulate enough years of residence as a *'sacrifice'*. This sacrifice will pay off eventually giving her mobility options both inside and outside the EU. For others, like Krasimir and Valentina doing the work necessary to acquire citizenship (collecting all the documents, filling in forms, learning the *Life in the UK* book) was portrayed a sign of their commitment to the UK. Thus, being a successful migrant was understood by these participants as not complaining and getting on with things, constantly aspiring be the *'best British citizen'*. Evidently, this also requires working on one's emotions so that they fit the *'correct'* structure of feeling.

Indifference

A small but significant group of our participants appeared unconcerned or unaffected by Brexit in the initial post-referendum period. Acting nonchalant, their emotional reactions were largely illustrative of apathy, indifference or outright dismissal. The five Italians in this group were younger and/or recently arrived. They also had weaker ties to the UK in terms of owning their homes or having permanent jobs or children. The Bulgarians were disillusioned with the situation in Bulgaria or viewed the home country as unable to provide them with the opportunities they needed, which once again highlighted the importance of applying a transnational lens to the better understanding of one's emotional habitus. Bulgarian Biser's story is a case in point. He associated his home country with both professional and personal disappointment as several businesses he tried to run went bankrupt, which triggered stress-related health problems. He arrived with his wife and while they experienced a process of

deskilling whereby their master's degrees were not immediately recognised and they had to work as delivery drivers, they also associated their stay in the UK with the joy of the birth their son. Biser was thus really dismissive of Brexit: *'Shall I tell you why I don't believe anything will change? I have been here for a year and a half and their system works as follows: if you pay your taxes, everything is well'*.

Interestingly, this group also included some who saw themselves as global citizens who could succeed anywhere. Bulgarian Ana, for instance, is still studying while working part-time through an app. She is the typical 'liquid migrant', happy to stay in a position of deliberate indeterminacy (McGhee et al. 2017) despite Brexit: *'I can go anywhere and feel ok there. So, I might be in a new place, but I would not feel as an outsider'*. Mostly, however, it was comprised by those who seemed to know very little about the possible consequences of what was going to happen post-Brexit. These were migrants who were used to precarious working and living conditions and for whom new disruptions caused by Brexit were not going to signify anything new. Italian waitress Monica, for instance, did not know much about the legal requirements after Brexit and was unconcerned about that at the time of interview as she felt that those who were already in the UK with full time jobs were not going to be affected much. The same view was shared by Biser: *'There will be no Brexit. [...] They will sit at the table, shake hands and will decide on a middle ground, something along the lines of "we are neither in, nor out"'*. In these cases, indifference blurs with denial.

Like those in the ambivalent category, these migrants were convincing themselves that if they behaved well and worked hard nothing will happen to them. The main and very important difference is that those who expressed indifference to Brexit seemed less motivated to act to secure their status. This is either because they were for a long time in denial thinking that ultimately it would not happen or because they knew very little about its possible impact on their rights. Biser, for instance, was not considering applying for either permanent status or

settled status, yet his wife was very much invested in legalising her master's degree, which highlights the importance of gender. A large group of our participants, especially those who had come recently, seemed to know little about the processes involved and the requirements, leaving them in a particularly vulnerable position. Having experienced precarity both in their country of origin and in low-skilled jobs in the UK, they navigate their day-to-day lives without thinking too much about the future. Many in this group are young people who still see migration as an opportunity to reach some short-term goals rather than being concerned with eventual settlement.

Discussion and conclusions

This article set out to focus on emotions as a tool to understand migrants' changing relationship with their receiving society. In doing so, our analysis has moved beyond homogenising accounts of migrants' reactions to Brexit as being primarily based on fear and anger (Botterill et al 2018) as well as from accounts that see emotions as softening with the passage of time in a linear manner (Gawlewicz and Sotkasiira 2019). We have uncovered three very different reactions to Brexit – betrayal, ambivalence and indifference – that changed little over the post-referendum period. Focusing on these different and persistent emotional reactions helps us to understand the very different positionality of migrants in relation to the receiving society and can also offer clues on their future decisions and overall integration trajectories.

While the migrants who expressed betrayal may be going through processes of dis-embedding (Ryan 2018), those who expressed ambivalence were trying hard to embed themselves, despite the emotional costs this entailed. Rather than as a two-ways process as it is normally described (Pennix 2010), integration for this group meant accepting the new status quo without complaints, working hard and doing their best to fit in, something more akin to

assimilation. We can see here that the kind of emotional labour documented by Hochschild (1983) in relation to service workers, can also occur to migrants as they navigate their relationship with their country of settlement in neo-assimilationist times. Finally, those who expressed indifference indicate the existence of a group little considered in Brexit migration literature. These people have already experienced high levels of precarity in their countries of origin as well as having little expectations about the future, including in relation to their rights and entitlements. Because of their lifecycle stage or their previous experiences, they mostly had short-term plans and/or were unconcerned about wider political changes such as Brexit. This is the group most at risk after Brexit is enforced as they have low-paid and precarious jobs in the service economy, have little knowledge about the legal changes connected to Brexit and have done very little to secure their future status.

Our analysis has shown the intersections of class, ethnicity and gender in shaping these reactions. Middle-class Italians, as ‘old’ Europeans, seemed more able to articulate their anger and thus signal their unhappiness with their acquisition of ‘migrantness’, something they perceived as unquestionably unjust. Women are normally not allowed to express anger, but here their relative privilege allowed them to defy the accepted feeling rules. They also acted in line with the emotional habitus of highly skilled migrants used to be sought after and moving freely. Bulgarians tended to dominate the more ambivalent group, perhaps perceiving a more insecure status in the ‘community of value’ (Anderson 2013) and a less dramatic decline in their status given they experienced labour restrictions up until 2014. ‘New’ Europeans and ‘crisis’ migrants felt a mixture of gratitude and desire for inclusion as well as shame for those compatriots associated with deviance. Precarious, recently arrived and often young migrants from both nationalities were prevalent in the indifferent group.

Finally, our case-study illustrates how a transnational lens helps us understand some of the experiences highlighted above. Migrants constantly compare their situation ‘here’ and

‘there’ but also ‘now’ and ‘before’ thus complicating their perception of the appropriate ‘feeling rules’ (Hochschild 1983). Space and time thus both emerged as important in understanding migrants’ attitudes but not in a linear way. Migrants who migrated up to the early 2000s compare their situation post-Brexit with their experiences as ‘Eurostars’ settling in multicultural Britain; those who came later tend to contrast ‘crisis’ and ‘racist’ Italy or Bulgaria with the post-Brexit neo-assimilationist UK. Our analysis on the one hand acknowledges the presence of a hierarchy of privilege that differentiates groups of migrants. On the other hand, it shows how even the most privileged are left with very few options in navigating post-Brexit Britain which seem to be limited to either leave (migrating elsewhere or returning home) or as Paola had put it ‘*becoming one of them*’, thus returning to this idea of integration as assimilation.

Our approach consisted of extending the sociology of emotions (Brook 2009, Burkitt 2018, Duncombe et al. 1993, Hochschild 1983, Knight 2020) by incorporating a transnational dimension to the notion of emotional habitus (Gould 2009) and linking it to discussions on diversity and inclusion. This has allowed us to shed light on the emotional side of integration and to refine understandings of the subjective experiences of migrants’ integration (Anderson 2013, Grzymała-Kazłowska and Phillimore 2018, Ryan 2018, Wessendorf and Phillimore 2018), showing the importance of emotion regulation as an aspect of what migrants have to do to fit in in the community of value. This work is significant as it develops an approach for the study of migrants’ different positionalities and relationships with their receiving society that can be used in a variety of contexts in Europe and beyond, particularly at times of rapid policy and political change.

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ⁱ Understood here as descriptors of the respective migrant groups' length of membership in the Union.

ⁱⁱ With the exception of studies exploring migrants' responses and strategies to processes of othering and racialisation (Moroşanu and Fox 2013, Genova 2017).