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Original Article

Unsettling Events: Understanding Migrants' Responses to Geopolitical Transformative Episodes through a Life-Course Lens

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Abstract

Migration under the European Union's (EU) Freedom of Movement is constructed as temporary and circular, implying that migrants respond to changing circumstances by returning home or moving elsewhere. This construction underpins predictions of an exodus of EU migrants from the United Kingdom (UK) in the context of Brexit. While migration data indicate an increase in outflows since the vote to leave the EU, the scale does not constitute a "Brexodus." Moreover, EU migrants' applications for UK citizenship have been increasing. The data, though, are not sufficiently detailed to reveal who is responding to Brexit in which way. This article aims to offer a deeper understanding of how migrants experience and respond to changing geopolitical episodes such as Brexit. Introducing the term "unsettling events," we analyze data collected longitudinally, in the context of three moments of significant change: 2004 EU enlargement, 2008–09 economic recession, and Brexit. Examining our data, mainly on Polish migrants, through a life-course lens, our findings highlight the need to account for the situatedness of migrant experiences as lived in particular times (both personal and historical), places, and relationships. In so doing, we reveal various factors informing migrants' experiences of and reactions to unsettling events and the ways in which their experiences and reactions potentially impact migration projects.

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Introduction

In June 2016, the United Kingdom (UK) electorate voted narrowly to leave the European Union (EU), beginning a process commonly referred to as Brexit. The high level of migration to the UK from the EU following the 2004 and 2007 enlargements[1] was a central issue in the referendum (Kilkey 2017), which took place six years into an austerity program focused on reducing government debt incurred during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). Like the United States (Ybarra, Sanchez, and Sanchez 2016) and other European countries (Czaika and Di Lillo 2018), the UK has witnessed increasing hostility toward migrants, especially since the EU enlargement and 2008–09 recession which followed the GFC (Virdee and McGeever 2018). Moreover, since 2010, successive Conservative UK governments have had a commitment in their political manifesto to reduce net migration to the "tens of thousands"[2] (Kilkey 2017). Within this climate, EU Freedom of Movement (FoM),[3] which grants EU citizens the right to move to and reside in another EU member state and to receive equal treatment with nationals of the host state, was problematized as allowing "uncontrolled" migration from the EU (Kilkey 2017). The vote to leave the EU and subsequent negotiations between, on the one hand, the UK government and the European Council and, on the other, the UK government and UK Parliament have triggered high levels of uncertainty about the future rights of EU citizens currently living in the United Kingdom (Kilkey 2017; McGhee, Moreh, and Vlachantoni 2017; Erel and Ryan 2019; Guma and Jones 2019). In this context, popular and academic commentary is predicting a mass exodus — a "Brexodus" — of EU migrants from the UK (McKiernan 2017; Shapira 2018).

The "Brexodus narrative" is informed by the rational-choice theory of migration, which, focusing on labor migration, treats migrants as rational economic actors (e.g., Sjaastad 1962; Todaro 1969; Borjas 1987). The predictions of a "Brexodus" are also informed by a construction of intra-EU migration as a relatively frictionless

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[1] The 2004 enlargement involved the accession of 10 new EU member states. Eight were Central and Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia), commonly known as the EU8. Malta and Cyprus were the other two. In 2007, Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU and are commonly known as the EU2.

[2] The net migration target was dropped by Prime Minister Boris Johnson on July 25, 2019.

[3] EU FoM is enshrined in Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and was developed by EU secondary legislation and the Case Law of the Court of Justice. As discussed below, the rights associated with it have qualifying conditions attached.

movement across proximate and open borders and of EU migrants, particularly post-enlargement, as free-movers engaged in temporary and circular mobility (Favell 2008; Engbersen and Snel 2013). These constructions lead to an assumption that when circumstances change, EU migrants can and will move on from the UK (Engbersen, Snel, and de Boom 2010). Yet, while migration data indicate increasing outflows of EU migrants from the UK since the vote to leave the EU (ONS 2019), as we show below, the scale is not large enough to justify being termed a "Brexodus." Moreover, in the same period, EU migrants' applications for UK citizenship have increased (Home Office 2019). EU migrants' actual responses to Brexit, therefore, seem more diverse than predicted by the dominant narrative. Neither the migration nor the citizenship data, however, are sufficiently detailed to provide understanding of why some EU migrants are leaving the United Kingdom while others are extending their stay. This shortcoming in the data contributes to masking the complexity that lies behind migration projects.

This article's first aim is to develop a more nuanced understanding of EU migrants' behavior in the face of Brexit. A small number of recent articles have explored the migration plans of EU migrants in the UK following the Brexit referendum (e.g., McGhee, Moreh, and Vlachantoni 2017; Guma and Jones 2018; Lulle, Moroşanu, and King 2018; Lulle et al. 2019). This article contributes to that work by seeking to learn lessons from past relevant events to understand Brexit's potential impact on migration responses. We develop this temporal lens by introducing the notion of "unsettling events" — political, social, and economic transformations with the potential to disrupt preexisting migration projects. We focus on three unsettling events: Brexit, the UK 2008–09 economic recession, and the 2004 EU enlargement. We understand these events as interlinked because of the cumulative and spillover effects of the changes each event sets in train. Thus, rather than seeing Brexit as a unique and isolated event, we take a longer-term view to develop a wider understanding of patterns in migrants' responses to unsettling events over time.

The article's second aim is to analyze the role of time in migrants' decisions about whether to extend the stay, return home, or move on elsewhere. To do so, we draw on Glen Elder's (1998) life-course framework, highlighting the situatedness of migrant experiences as lived in particular times (both personal and historical), places, and relationships. In the process, we counter prevalent neoclassical models of migrants as rational, individualized, economic actors (Sjaastad 1962; Todaro 1969; Borjas 1987), recognizing migration as "embedded in broader networks of intensive social change" (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2007).

Using a life-course lens raises methodological questions about how to capture change over time in migrants' lives. As other researchers have acknowledged, "taking time seriously" (Adam 2000) is a challenge across the social sciences more broadly (McKie, Gregory, and Bowlby 2002). Thus, this article's third aim is to address those challenges through two innovative techniques. First, we combine three qualitative datasets collected by different teams and at different times to capture the three unsettling events under examination here. Second, we use longitudinal data

from the same participants gathered over more than a decade as they lived through these interlinked unsettling events. The first technique provides us with the long view from which we can learn lessons about Brexit; the second allows us to capture the complex interplay between personal biographies and unsettling events, thereby nuancing understanding of migrants' potential responses to Brexit.

Our article contributes to the emerging body of scholarship examining Brexit's impacts on migration projects. While that work acknowledges the importance of Brexit's temporal dynamics (e.g., Gawlewicz and Sotkasiira 2019; Rzepnikowska 2019), time remains underexplored in that literature (e.g., Lulle, Moroşanu, and King 2018, Lulle et al. 2019). By adopting a life-course lens and drawing upon a longitudinal dataset, we highlight time's importance in examinations of Brexit's potential impact on migrants' migratory projects. Moreover, while much of the emerging scholarship treats Brexit as a unique and isolated event (Ranta and Nancheva, 2019), we emphasize the importance of learning lessons from the past by considering Brexit as part of a series of interlinked unsettling events.

The data drawn upon in this article mainly concern Polish migrants, who constitute the largest group of EU migrants in the United Kingdom (ONS 2019a). In the following sections, we develop our analysis of migrants' reactions to the series of three unsettling events through our combined corpus of qualitative data. The concluding section highlights our methodological and conceptual contributions and their broader applicability to migration research. Before introducing our data and methodology, however, we begin by critically engaging with framings of intra-EU migration, particularly post-enlargement, through the life-course lens.

Intra-EU Migration under FoM

EU enlargement in 2004 extended FoM rights to more than 100 million additional persons[4] and resulted in a large-scale population movement from EU8 countries, "amounting to several millions of people" (Luthra, Platt, and Salamońska 2018, 369). The extension of FoM rights not only transformed the scale of East–West European migration but also facilitated new types of migration (Favell 2008). Scholars have invoked a plethora of concepts to describe these new forms of mobility: temporariness, circularity, pendulum mobility (Okolski 2004; Fihel and Grabowska-Lusinska 2014), intentional unpredictability (Eade, Garapich, and Drinkwater 2008), and liquidity (Engbersen, Snel, and de Boom 2010; Engbersen and Snel 2013). These conceptual framings are explicitly based on constructing EU8 migrants as young individuals whose migration is economically motivated and who will

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[4]For citizens of the EU8 countries, access to full FoM rights were restricted for up to seven years by most EU15 countries. The exceptions were the UK, Sweden, and Ireland, which immediately granted relatively unrestricted access (Kilkey, Perrons, and Plomien 2013, 68).

"respond and adapt quickly to changing conditions" because FoM rights allow them to "come and go as they choose" (Engbersen and Snel 2013, 31).

Such a construction of EU8 migrants is in line with the free-market values underpinning FoM, according to which, and drawing on a neoclassical rational choice model of migration (King 2018), intra-EU mobility is central to EU economic integration (Boswell and Geddes 2011). The FoM's roots, for example, lie in Article 48 of the Treaty of Rome — the founding Treaty of the European Economic Community in 1957.[5] Its inclusion was prompted by a desire to promote labor mobility as a factor of production, and it, thus, applied to "workers" only (Recchi and Favell 2009). FoM has evolved significantly since that time and expanded in three respects (Ackers 1998). First, it now incorporates workers' family members (ibid.). Second, it makes illegal all nationality-based discrimination between workers of member states in terms of work conditions, pay, unemployment benefits, access to social and tax benefits, and training (ibid.).[6] Third, it breaks the link between free movement and worker status by widening the focus from "workers" to "persons" such that in 1990 free movement, residency, and equal treatment were explicitly extended to qualifying noneconomically active categories of EU citizens (and their families) — students, pensioners, and the unemployed,[7] culminating in the introduction of a common European citizenship in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 (ibid.).

In comparison with free-movement regimes in other regional associations and trade agreements, including those with the "thickest" conceptualization of supranational citizenship, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Caribbean Community, and the Common Market of the South (Strumia 2017), FoM stands out for its combination of mobility, residency, labor market, and social rights. The FoM's expansiveness is especially significant because, as we argue below, it allowed workers and their families not only to move but also, importantly, to extend their stay. Nonetheless, that is not to argue that the economic utilitarianism underpinning the FoM's inception has lost its hold. As Ackers (2004) reminds us, the extension of family rights to mobile EU workers was motivated by the sole purpose of removing obstacles to *workers'* cross-border mobility. Moreover, even amid expansion of FoM rights to all EU *citizens*, the legacy of privileging workers persists. Thus, conditions attached to FoM are tighter for noneconomically active categories of EU citizens than for economically active categories (Bruzelius, Chase, and

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[5] There was an earlier precedent for free movement provisions in the European Coal and Steel Community founded in 1951, Article 69 of which provided for cross-border movement between the then six members of "workers who are nationals of member states and have recognized qualifications in a coalmining or steelmaking occupation" (https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do? uri=CELEX:11951 K: EN: PDF).

[6] These two developments were part of the 1968 Council Regulation 1612/68.

[7] This extension of rights followed the Single European Act of 1986.

Seeleib-Kaiser 2016). Despite those important qualifiers, our point is that under FoM, while EU8 nationals had the right to engage continuously in back-and-forth transnational movement as neoliberal migrant subjects, they also had the right, through residency provisions, and the capacity, through equal treatment and access to social provisions, to extend their stays in the destination country (Ryan et al. 2008; Kilkey, Plomien, and Perrons 2014).

In other words, under FoM people may not only move to other member states but also experience periods of extending their stay or embedding in place over time (Ryan 2018). Hence, recognizing the migration project's dynamism is crucial in our analysis, raising the issue of time, a subject of growing interest to migration researchers (Cwerner 2001; King et al. 2006; Griffiths, Rogers, and Anderson 2013; Collins and Shubin 2015; Robertson and Ho 2016; Mavroudi, Page, and Christou 2017). While young migrants may keep their plans open ended (see Collins and Shubin 2015), over time these plans may be revisited and change against the backdrop of dynamic familial responsibilities and wider contextual circumstances. As Papadopoulos and Tsianos (2007, 225) note, "migration characterises the continuous shifts and radical rearticulation of individual trajectories." Ryan's research has shown that, especially in the context of EU FoM, migration plans change and many who initially anticipated temporary sojourns gradually extend their stays (Ryan et al. 2008, 2009; Ryan and Sales 2013). As time passes, migrants may develop "social anchors" (Grzymala-Kazlowska 2016), their lives may become "grounded" (Bygnes and Erdal 2017), and they may begin "embedding" in local contexts (Ryan and Mulholland 2015; Ryan 2018). Hence, as shown throughout our data sections, treating migration as a project that evolves over time and across the life course is key to nuancing understanding of migrants' responses to unsettling events such as Brexit.

The Life-Course Framework

In this article, to understand the dynamics of migration projects, we draw on the work of Elder (1998). According to Elder's life-course framework, "time operates at both a sociohistorical and personal level" (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003, 8). In other words, our lives are socially organized in "biographical and historical times" with resultant implications for how we "think, feel and act" (Elder 1998, 9). Of course, we are mindful that Elder's life-course framework has been criticized for its assumed linearity (e.g., Collins and Shubin 2015). Clearly, as our data sections below demonstrate, lives do not follow an even or predictable path. Nonetheless, as other studies have shown (see Carling 2017), adopting a linear approach to historical time enables researchers to understand how sociostructural events impact migrants' personal life narratives.

Elder's (1998) work demonstrates how the historical era and geographical place in which individuals are situated make a difference for their opportunities and life chances. Historical events, however, are not all experienced in the same way.

Personal timing matters. For example, whether one is a small, dependent child, a single young adult, or an older adult with family responsibilities will impact how one experiences a significant societal event such as an economic recession. Thus, the "same events or experiences may affect individuals in different ways depending on when they occur in the life course" (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003, 12). That is not to suggest that historical time and personal notions of time are necessarily synchronized but rather that the former may provide a framing context to the latter (Plummer 1995).

Such framing contexts, of course, also depend on particular geographical locations (Ryan 2015); thus, place matters as well. Drawing on Gieryn (2000), Elder and colleagues understand place as possessing "geographical location; a material form or culture of one kind or another; and investment with meaning and value" (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003, 12). Acknowledging place's importance to understanding how significant societal events are experienced is especially relevant to intra-EU migrants, who, because of their right to engage in back-and-forth mobility, risk being portrayed as living deterritorialized lives (Kilkey and Merla 2014). Rather, we argue, EU migrants live their lives "situated" in specific places (ibid.), and their relationship to these places is continuously made and re-made over time through processes of embedding (Ryan and Mulholland 2015).

This notion of place-making highlights that people are not passive in the face of wider social forces. We find Elder's emphasis on agency especially useful in this regard: "individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances" (Elder 1998, 4). Elder's work, however, goes beyond a narrow focus on individual agency to highlight the principle of "linked lives" — "lives are lived interdependently" (ibid.). Such linkages point to the salience of networks of kinship, friendship, and professional others. The principle of "linked lives" is especially relevant in migration studies, as decisions about when and where to move, how long to stay, and whether to return home or move on elsewhere are often made in relation to networks of interpersonal relationships situated in specific life stages, structural opportunities, and constraints (Ryan et al. 2008; Ryan 2018; Schewel 2019). As we argue below, such linkages are especially relevant in how migrants react to unsettling events.

Elder's framework, then, helps us understand migration decision-making as complex and contingent upon time, place, and relationality. Furthermore, we respond to recent calls (Gawlewicz and Sotkasiira 2019) to bring a temporal lens into analyses of migrants' responses to Brexit, as this perspective has been underplayed in the emerging literature. We draw on Elder's notion of historical and biographical time to analyze qualitative life narratives and longitudinal data collected over more than a decade. In so doing, we consider how participants responded to particular unsettling events, which we define in the next section.

"Unsettling Events"

Elder's life-course framework highlights the role of significant societal events, such as the Great Depression and World War II, in mediating lives (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003). We draw on this important contribution in our attempt to understand how people's migration projects are impacted by events such as Brexit, by introducing the notion of "unsettling events." Unsettling events are transformations on the structural level that have implications on the individual level in ways that provoke reevaluation of migration projects. Geopolitical episodes which have unsettling potential for migrants may be isolated events in history, but they may also be intertwined, in part because of the cumulative and spillover effects of the changes each event puts in train. Whereas these geopolitical episodes are experienced simultaneously by migrant populations (Miller 2019), biographical events, such as bereavement or illness, are not.[8] While geopolitical events are shared, *how* they are experienced is highly differentiated because migrants are positioned unevenly in relation to the unsettling processes that ensue (Benson and Lewis 2019; Guma and Jones 2019; Lulle et al. 2019). Moreover, migrants' evaluations of unsettling events in the destination country may be shaped by circumstances elsewhere, including in the home country. Thus, we suggest, migrants' responses are likely to vary, as we further discuss in our data sections.

In this article, we understand the processes triggered by unsettling events as multilayered, consisting of interlinked material, relational, and subjective dimensions. The material dimension refers to aspects such as migrants' income, employment, and sociolegal status. The relational refers to the relationships migrants, as individuals and as members of wider collectivities, have to the society in which they live. These relationships take the form of everyday interpersonal social relations and interactions with individuals and institutions, as well as migrants' structural and discursive positionings relative to other groups.[9] The subjective dimension, finally, refers to what meanings migrants give to their circumstances and how they evaluate them. It captures the affective aspects of unsettling processes and includes feelings and emotions around belonging, identity, status security, and well-being. Each dimension may not have equal salience in every event, and within one event, positive changes in one dimension may be accompanied by negative changes in another dimension, such that unsettling events can have contradictory effects, even for the same individual. The remainder of this section outlines the three unsettling events on which our analysis focuses.

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[8]Both geopolitical and biographical events are also experienced by nonmigrant populations, but this article focuses only on how migrants experience them.

[9]While our focus is on interpersonal relations, we acknowledge that other relationalities, such as with objects, may be relevant.

Table 1. Polish and EU8 Migrants in the United Kingdom, Post-enlargement Stocks and Flows.

Year	Stocks of Polish-Born in the United Kingdom*		Flows of EU8, 1000s**		
	1000s	% of EU8	Inflow	Outflow	Net
2004	94	56	51	3	+47
2005	162	59	77	15	+62
2006	265	61	93	22	+71
2007	411	69	112	25	+87
2008	504	72	89	69	+20
2009	529	70	68	52	+16
2010	540	66	86	37	+49
2011	654	65	77	37	+40
2012	658	64	60	30	+30
2013	688	63	70	26	+44
2014	790	64	80	32	+48
2015	831	64	73	27	+46
2016	911	63	48	43	+5
2017	922	64	52	47	+6
Latest***	832	63	37	42	−5

Sources: *https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/ internationalmigration/datasets/populationoftheunitedkingdombycountryofbirthandnationality (Data come from the Annual Population Survey, which is the Labour Force Survey plus various sample boosts).
** 2004–2017 = https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/ internationalmigration/datasets/longterminternationalmigrationcitizenshiptable201a Data based predominantly on International Passenger Flows data, and are based on a standard definition of a long-term migrant as a person who moves to a country for at least a year.
Latest = https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/international migration/bulletins/migrationstatisticsquarterlyreport/november2019
Data based predominantly on International Passenger Flows data, and are based on a standard definition of a long-term migrant as a person who moves to a country for at least a year.
*** For stock data this is January to December 2018; for flow data this is Year Ending June 2019.

EU Enlargement

Following EU enlargement in 2004, Poland experienced the greatest volume of outmigration of all accession countries (Luthra, Platt, and Salamońska 2018), and the United Kingdom became the main destination (Kilkey, Perrons, and Plomien 2013; Ryan et al. 2008; White et al. 2018). Between 2004 and 2017, the Polish-born population in the United Kingdom increased from 94,000 to over 900,000 (see Table 1), and by 2015 Poland had become the most common birth country among the United Kingdom's foreign-born population, displacing India (ONS 2019a). Most of these new arrivals were young, with a high proportion aged 20–24 (Okolski and Salt 2014).

   The UK was Polish migrants' main destination in part because it was one of only three EU15 countries that immediately granted relatively unrestricted FoM rights to citizens of the new member states (Kilkey, Perrons, and Plomien 2013).[10] FoM rights not only provided the sociolegal basis for people to migrate from Poland to the UK but also allowed undocumented Polish migrants already in the UK to regularize their status (ibid.). Enlargement, through the acquisition of FoM rights, therefore, unsettled preexisting circumstances for Polish migrants in the material, relational, and subjective fields in ways which might be expected to open their opportunities as migrants in the UK. There were also contradictory forces at work, however. Ahead of enlargement, the UK tabloid press criticized UK government policy, warning of the "flood" that would ensue from Central and Eastern European countries and, in particular, Poland, the largest of these countries.[11] Within a few years, anti-EU8 and anti-Polish sentiment was prevalent in the UK's tabloid press (Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015), and the then Conservative opposition accused the Labour Government of "losing control" over migration, sparking the problematization of EU migration noted in our introduction.[12]

Economic Recession

Our second unsettling event is the economic recession, beginning in the UK in 2008 after the 2007 GFC and ending in late 2009. The recession saw the UK's Gross Domestic Product fall by over 6 percent, and almost 900,000 jobs disappeared from its labor market (Gregg and Wadsworth 2010). As unemployment increased, anti-immigrant sentiment intensified in public discourse, with Poles receiving the most hostility (Kilkey, Perrons, and Plomien 2013; Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015; Rzepnikowska 2019). At the time of the recession, the Polish economy grew, and its currency strengthened relative to the British pound (Kilkey, Perrons, and Plomien 2013). Polish migrants' material, relative, and subjective circumstances could be expected to have changed with the recession. Indeed, against this background, there was much academic interest in how Polish migrants would respond in terms of using their EU FoM rights to return or move to other EU member states (Pollard, Latorre, and Sriskandarajah 2008; Finch et al. 2009; Glossop and Shaheen 2009; Engbersen and Snel 2013). In our data sections, we consider the extent to which these predictions were realized.

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[10] EU8 citizens were required to register with the Worker Registration Scheme to work in the UK, and their access to welfare benefits was restricted. Following 12 months of continuous registered employment, EU8 citizens were entitled to full free movement labor rights and welfare benefits.

[11] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/feb/23/eu.poland

[12] https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2007/oct/30/immigration.immigrationpolicy

Brexit

Our third and final unsettling event is Brexit. As argued above, the high level of migration to the UK following the 2004 and 2007 enlargements was a central issue in the referendum. Moreover, the referendum took place against the backdrop of an austerity program and deep public-sector spending cuts introduced by the Conservative–Liberal coalition government following the recession (Grundmann, Kreischer, and Scott 2017). Hence, although we discuss these events as separate episodes, they are connected and entangled in the spillover and accumulation of increased hostility toward EU migrants. Emerging with EU enlargement in 2004, this hostility became especially manifest following the 2008 recession and came to a head with the 2016 referendum and its aftermath (Virdee and McGeever 2018). Reported hate crimes against migrants have increased since the referendum (Home Office 2017), and Polish citizens, as the largest and highest-profile group of recent EU migrants, have experienced heightened racism and xenophobia (Guma and Jones 2019; Rzepnikowska 2019). While Brexit remains an unfolding event at the time of this writing (January 2020), since the referendum result, much uncertainty has surrounded the future rights of EU citizens currently living in the United Kingdom once EU FoM between the United Kingdom and its former EU partners ceases. This uncertainty creates insecurities around sociolegal status, which researchers describe as "unsettling" (Guma and Jones 2019; Ranta and Nancheva 2019). Moreover, since the referendum, the pound and UK economy have both been volatile.[13] Thus, as in the case of enlargement and the recession, Brexit is widely considered to have the potential to disrupt preexisting migration projects of Poles and other EU migrants vis-à-vis the UK (McGhee, Moreh, and Vlachantoni 2017; Ranta and Nancheva 2019).

Understanding Brexit as an unsettling event, as defined above, enables us to do three things. First, it helps us examine how this structural-level geopolitical transformation is experienced by migrants on an individual level, depending upon their diverse social positionings. Second, conceiving of Brexit as part of a series of interlinked unsettling events (along with EU enlargement in 2004 and the 2008–09 economic recession), rather than as a unique and isolated geopolitical episode, and following the life-course framework (Elder 1998) draw attention to the historical times within which migrants' biographies, positionings, and migration projects need to be understood. Third, seeing Brexit as one of a series of unsettling events enables us to learn from previous experiences to develop understanding of patterns in migrants' responses over time. In this way, we go beyond the work exploring Brexit's potential impact on migrants' migratory projects solely in the present moment (e.g., Lulle, Moroşanu, and King 2018; Ranta and Nancheva, 2018; Lulle

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[13] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-46862790; https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/report/2018/eu-withdrawal-scenarios-and-monetary-and-financial-stability

et al. 2019) and engage the important lessons that can be learned from previous unsettling events to deepen understanding of migrants' potential responses to Brexit.

Methodology

How the process and experience of change over time can be studied has vexed social scientists (Adam 2000; McKie, Gregory, and Bowlby 2002; Corden and Millar 2007; Neale, Henwood, and Holland 2012; Erel and Ryan 2019). One strategy for addressing this challenge has been to adopt a longitudinal approach which allows us "to construct a story of a life, which is greater than the sum of its parts (the individual interview), making it possible to gain insight into underlying biographical and social processes at play" (Thomson 2007, 577). While a one-off interview can provide a snapshot of participants' experiences, plans, and aspirations, repeatedly reinterviewing participants can allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of life-course dynamics, changing circumstances, and evolving migration plans. This approach allows us to make a novel contribution to understanding migrants' responses to Brexit. While some of the recent literature on Brexit includes repeated rounds of data collection, these studies either involved different participants (e.g., Ranta and Nancheva 2018) or occurred within a very short time frame, such as one year (e.g., Lulle et al. 2019). We argue that revisiting and reconnecting with participants over many years provide valuable insights into how migration evolves through time, illuminating the dynamic relationships between people and the places in which their lives are situated.

Three sets of data inform our analysis. Louise Ryan has been researching migration for approximately two decades, with a particular focus on intra-EU mobility. She has an established body of work on Polish migration built over several research projects, including longitudinal work following particular Polish migrants over more than a decade (Ryan, Rodriguez, and Trevena 2016). In 2004–06, with colleagues, Ryan conducted a study on recently arrived Polish migrants in London, interviewing 30 participants (there were also three focus groups and several key informant interviews; thus, over 50 people took part in that initial study). That original study aimed to explore reasons for migration, use of social networks, and expected duration of stay. In 2014, Ryan conducted research with 20 Polish migrants resident in the UK for approximately 10 years (Ryan 2018). That study aimed to understand how migration plans, especially initial expressions of temporariness and uncertainty, may develop over time into extensions of their stay. Nine of these participants had been interviewed previously by Ryan and colleagues. Ryan recontacted all 20 participants in 2016 to gauge their reactions to the EU Referendum, thus developing a large corpus of longitudinal data from these migrants. As discussed below, these data clearly reflect the evolution of migration plans over time in the context of particular places and in relation to significant others. It is possible, of course, that being involved in this study over time has contributed to participants' reflexivity about their migration plans. It seems unlikely, however, that being interviewed three times over a 10-year period would have impacted those migration plans.

Majella Kilkey draws on data collected, with colleagues, in 2008–09 in England as part of a larger project exploring the outsourcing of masculinized forms of domestic work and its displacement to migrant men. A key aim of that study was to understand the determinants of the supply of migrant handymen, their migration paths, and their experiences of work and family life (Kilkey, Perrons, and Plomien 2013). In the UK, post-accession, "handyman work" has become a labor-market niche for Polish men. Among the 80-plus semistructured interviews conducted for that project, 21 were with Polish handymen and three with representatives of Polish handyman companies. This article draws on those interviews, focusing specifically on migration experiences against the backdrop of Poland's EU accession and the UK's economic recession, during which the research project took place.

This article brings together the above datasets. During the writing process, we spent considerable time discussing our data and sharing examples of specific participants from the various studies, as well as how these examples might be incorporated in the article. Our revisiting of the datasets was theory driven, informed by concepts developed in our previous separate research (Kilkey, Perrons, and Plomien 2013; Kilkey and Merla 2014; Ryan 2018). Although collected at different times and by different teams, these studies were markedly similar in the research questions they addressed, facilitating our reanalysis. Collectively, we identified particular cases of individuals whose experiences enabled us to test concepts and build our argument (Stanley 2015). While not claiming to be representative, these individuals reflect wider patterns across our datasets.

We collected the third set of data together, with colleagues, at a public event on Brexit and EU citizens' rights in Sheffield, a medium-sized UK city, in Autumn 2017. The event involved an "expert panel" of guest speakers and was attended by over 70 people. We distributed postcards and asked attendees to write anonymized responses to the question: "What is your main concern for EU Nationals in the UK after Brexit?" Thirty-seven of those attending, spanning a total of 14 nationalities, responded by writing short (two- or three-line) responses on postcards. We present analysis of these data through the following three sections.

EU Enlargement and FoM Rights

Although all data were collected after EU enlargement in 2004, some participants had come to the UK in the years prior to that enlargement. They had come as students or on tourist visas, but with the intention of staying longer than six months and finding work, or on a so-called "self-employed" visa. The latter was a legal migration route to the UK for accession-state nationals throughout the decade prior to enlargement and had been especially popular with Polish citizens (Eade, Garapich, and Drinkwater 2008). For those with a pre-2004 migration experience, whether in the UK or elsewhere, irregularity was a common feature of their situation. As a result, migration was often a risky business, as revealed by Adam: "I had totally no permit to work, so I was caught in Germany because I worked illegally there. I

was arrested. Then [in 2000], I was deported to Poland' (interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009). Adam left Poland immediately for the United Kingdom and described in detail the preparations he made to secure entry at the border: "We prepared ourselves for that properly. We borrowed quite a lot of money. We bought fancy clothes … brands. Every one of us … . No one was stupid. Everyone could speak a bit of English. And, we chose the most expensive flight on purpose … . It was like collecting points to get in. It all added up, and one after another we managed to enter" (interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009). In 2003, however, returning to the UK from a trip to Poland, Adam was refused entry and deported: "And you know, suddenly, I had to stay in Poland. I already had everything here [London]: a flat, furniture, bike, and friends. Suddenly, I lost everything" (interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues; cited in Kilkey, Perrons, and Plomien 2013, 70).

Mateusz arrived in the UK as a student in 1998. Like Adam, he recalled the various strategies required every time he needed to cross the border: "having to explain yourself 'I'm here to study English', and I never did study English … the deposit paid to numerous school of languages, you know, *Mickey Mouse School of Languages*, which sort of allowed me to return time and time again" (interviewed by Ryan, 2014). Ewa, who also arrived in the United Kingdom before accession, needed a work permit to enter the United Kingdom: "I had to go through all the paperwork, and I had to get a proper visa. It was quite a big deal in those times" (interviewed by Ryan, 2006).

These examples illustrate the ways in which participants sought to navigate the barriers to migration, prior to Poland joining the EU. They took personal risks, made sacrifices, and negotiated migration obstacles through both formal and informal means. Even with these efforts, migration regimes limited their geographical and social mobility. Thus, gaining EU FoM rights in 2004 had transformative implications for all participants, disrupting preexisting migration projects. Adam, discussed above, spent a year in Poland, "thinking all the time about Great Britain … Then, the borders were open. We joined the Union. It's freedom finally" (interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009). For Mateusz, also discussed above, Polish accession and his newly acquired rights as an EU citizen marked a major transformation in his lived experiences in British society, and he quickly decided to study nursing.

In November 2004, just six months after EU enlargement, Ryan and colleagues conducted a focus group in London with young Poles, who reflected on the difference FoM rights had made to them. One participant stated, "I feel a big freedom now … like a normal human being. Before, [I felt] like a rat" (Ryan and colleagues, Focus Group 2004). This quote powerfully demonstrates how EU enlargement and associated FoM changed Polish migrants' status and subjectivity in the UK, from feeling like "a rat" scurrying and hiding in the shadows to a "normal" member of society. Thus, experiences of the UK were being made and remade over time against the backdrop of EU enlargement and of gaining status as EU citizens. Considering enlargement as an unsettling event, we can see how this structural transformation

was experienced on the individual level in ways that transformed individuals' migration plans.

However, this transformation was not entirely positive. The focus group also noted the backlash, "panic," and scare mongering associated with increasing migration. Some newspapers warned of Polish "hordes" swarming to London.[14] Focus-group participants were sensitive to these reports: "I heard that on the first weekend in May [2004] 40,000 people came to London from Poland." Another participant recalled "panic" about jobs because "lots of Polish people were coming." The findings from this focus group visibly capture the EU enlargement's unsettling impact for migrants, simultaneously transforming their status in the UK while causing increased anti-migrant hostility in some quarters of British society. Moreover, while FoM made geographical mobility possible, many participants initially experienced downward social mobility and were deskilled in the UK labor market (Ryan 2011). Ewa, for example, although a graduate from a Polish university, upon arrival in London got a job in the care sector, working well below her qualifications (interviewed by Ryan, 2006). Ewa's experience points to the contradictions of unsettling events, even for the same individual: while her sociolegal status improved, her relational positioning in UK society remained that of a migrant, rather than a fellow EU citizen.

Many participants arrived in the UK with short-term and uncertain plans (Kilkey, Perrons, and Plomien 2013; Ryan and Sales 2013). In that respect they appear to conform to the notions of temporary and circular migration discussed earlier. Magda, first interviewed by Ryan in 2006, arrived in the UK in 2004 as a student. She waited until Poland joined the EU so that she would not have to pay overseas student fees: "The cost of the studies were enormous if you weren't from European Union . . . . It was just an enormous amount of money, and I couldn't pay it." Shortly after Poland joined the EU, she began a course in architectural technology at a London university. When first interviewed, Magda was determined to return to Poland after she and her Polish boyfriend completed their studies: "Go back to Poland after couple of years, because if I want to have babies, I want to have them in Poland." Longitudinal data, however, reveal how migration projects can change through the life course. Hence, we return to Magda later and consider how her plans developed over time.

Participants widely acknowledged FoM rights as giving them the opportunity and confidence to engage in short-term migrations with little prior planning, as Jakub, who arrived in 2007, demonstrated when asked about his future migration plans: "Who knows what will happen in a month, two, or three? We are in the global village. The European Union gave us the possibilities to be everywhere at home" (interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009). Klaudia arrived in London with her young son in 2005 to join her husband, who had already been working in the city for

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[14]https://www.economist.com/europe/2004/01/15/the-coming-hordes

six months when she arrived. This pattern of women and children joining husbands in the United Kingdom was common, especially in the years following accession (Kilkey, Plomien, and Perrons 2014; Ryan et al. 2009). These data about family reunion reflect the FoM expansion beyond workers, as discussed earlier. At that time, Klaudia did not have any idea about how long she would stay: "I wasn't decided, I haven't decided back then: should I leave? Should I stay? Should we go for another country?" (interviewed by Ryan, 2014). FoM rights gave Klaudia's family the ability to keep their options open and not to make any long-term commitment to stay. However, as discussed below, the passage of time and evolving life course make a difference to migration projects (Ryan and Sales 2013; Kilkey, Plomien, and Perrons 2014). In the next section, we begin to illustrate this argument by focusing on the ways in which the economic recession — as an unsettling event — impacted migration projects.

Economic Recession

All the Polish handymen interviewed by Kilkey were aware of the economic recession affecting the UK at the time of fieldwork, and there was a general feeling of insecurity around their future livelihoods. Reflecting on the pre-2007 period, handymen noted that they had been booked for several months in advance, often with a number of big and small jobs lined up and with their phones ringing "100 times a day" (Dawid, interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009). With the recession, the Polish handymen noticed that there was far less demand for their work: "This week, I have made about 100 phone calls to ask for a job. It is very hard' (Wojtek, interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009; cited in Kilkey, Perrons, and Plomien 2013, 90). Some reported downtime and work stoppages lasting from days to weeks, despite reducing their prices by as much as 30 percent. Participants, therefore, experienced a deterioration in their living standards, and those sending remittances home were also worried about the British pound's falling value against the Polish zloty.

Moreover, some handymen spoke of increasing hostility toward Polish workers: the recession exacerbated the tabloid-press narrative, present from enlargement, of Poles threatening British workers (Fitzgerald and Smoczynski 2015), and then Prime Minister Gordon Brown declared a commitment to securing "British jobs for British workers."[15] Fryderyk reported that prospective employers now asked where he was from, which they had not done in the past. When asked to reflect on why this difficulty in finding jobs was happening, he reported: "Because they don't want to employ foreigners, from Eastern Europe, Romanians, Polish people . . . . Since the recession started, they don't employ us" (interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009).

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[15] https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/jan/30/brown-british-jobs-workers

In the context of deteriorating economic and political circumstances wrought by the recession and against the backdrop of configurations of intra-EU mobility as temporary and circular, commentators predicted large-scale return migration to Poland (Pollard, Latorre, and Sriskandarajah 2008; Finch et al. 2009). Based on return patterns in two Polish towns located in regions with some of the highest rates of post-2004 outward migration, White (2011), however, argues that the scale of Polish return in the recession era was exaggerated. Indeed, as Table 1 above indicates, the Polish population in the UK continued to grow through the recessionary years. Migration flow data are not available at the country level, but those for the EU8 countries as a whole indicate that while outflows peaked in 2008 and 2009, the scale of return was relatively low compared to what was predicted — less than 10 percent and 7 percent of the UK's EU8 population in each year, respectively (Table 1).

The accounts of Polish handymen interviewed in Kilkey and colleagues' study help explain the pattern observed in the data. The men emphasized a tendency to stay rather than to return: "Well, my friends, the ones that I know, are still here" (Jan, interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009); "People try to wait for the end of it. They don't want to go back to Poland" (Franek, interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009). For some, the decision to stay was because the passage of time had produced new attachments to the UK, as in the case of Wiktor, who initially came for a "short period" but "found a woman and now the life looks different" (interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009). Wiktor's experiences clearly illustrate the importance of relationality and linked lives in migrant decision-making, emphasizing a life-course framework's relevance for understanding migration projects.

Professional attachments, developed over time in one place, could also hinder return or migration elsewhere, even in the context of recession. Marzena and her husband ran a web portal linking British customers to Polish handymen. Marzena commented:

> We have been talking about this [return] many times. I think that finally, we would like to go back to Poland. However, it is difficult for us for many reasons because we have been here for a long time and there are things that we have got used to and they are common for us .... We know how to run this business, what kind of receipts we need to collect, what we can deduct, what we can't. We don't have any idea what it is like in Poland.

Marzena went on to say: "I'm surprised with all the articles and information about the big comeback because I have many friends here, and I don't know anybody who has gone back" (interviewed by Kilkey and colleagues, 2009).

The recession led to unsettling processes in the form of deteriorating financial circumstances and a more hostile environment toward Polish migrants, potentially disrupting preexisting migration projects. As such, it could be expected to have pushed them into using their FoM rights to return to Poland or move to another EU country. This prediction, however, was not borne out by the data (Table 1), and

the handymen's accounts in this period highlight tendencies toward extending their stays in the UK. The rationale behind this tendency lay in the situatedness of their living in the UK, constituted by a combination of personal relationships that had developed over the life course and "emplaced capital" (Ryan and Mulholland 2014), which the handymen had also developed over time and in relation to the UK specifically.

The Brexit Referendum

Our Brexit public event occurred 18 months after the referendum and in the midst of the first round of negotiations between the UK government and the European Council, in which the rights of EU citizens living in the UK were a main area of contention (Kilkey 2017). Responding voluntarily to the question, "What is your main concern for EU nationals in the UK after Brexit?," participants wrote on postcards, as described earlier, to express fears about their and their relatives' future legal status, including their residency, employment, and welfare rights. A Spanish respondent expressed concern about "losing everything" he/she had worked for in the UK. Many expressed fear that Brexit would become "an excuse for discrimination towards not only Europeans, but nationals of other countries" (Polish participant). A respondent from the Netherlands was concerned about being treated like a "second class citizen," while someone from Bulgaria worried about being looked on "as less of a person." A Slovakian person was fearful about increasing "hatred and abuse." These responses clearly illustrate Brexit's transformative dimensions, as an unsettling event with disruptions to EU migrants' feelings and emotions around belonging and security following from uncertainties about their future sociolegal status in the UK.

Concerns about "hurt" and/or potential for "hurt" have been defined by Waite, Valentine, and Lewis (2014, 315) as "feeling uncertainty, fear, pain, anxiety and so on" and as experienced "bodily, materially and psychologically" (320). For some, such fears amounted to a sense of ontological insecurity (Giddens 1990). As one participant put it, since the Brexit referendum, he/she felt like "a floating log in the middle of the ocean" (no origin country given). Similarly, another participant spoke about feeling "in limbo" (German participant 1). These fears highlight the deeply unsettling effect of the Brexit process on EU migrants at the subjective level. Despite the potential for such unsettling to disrupt their plans, several respondents hoped to stay in the UK. This hope was partly because returning to their origin country was not an easy option: "Moving back to one's home country is by no means straightforward due to housing issues, finding qualified work, getting into health insurance, transfer saving without double taxation, etc." (German participant 1). For some, the passage of time also implied a distancing from their home country: "the UK makes me feel like a visitor, but I have been here so long that the country of my origin is strange to me" (German participant 2). This quote is similar to Marzena's statement above and further underlines that migration projects are situated within particular

places imbued with meaning and value (Elder, Johnson, and Crosnoe 2003, 12). An understanding of migrants' place attachments, therefore, is central to analysis of their experiences and reactions to unsettling events.

These reactions to Brexit seem at odds with the narrative of "Brexodus" (McKiernan 2017; Shapira 2018), which predicts that EU migrants will react by leaving the UK in large numbers. The referendum result came as a huge shock for many migrants in the UK, unsettling migratory strategies and future plans (Guma and Jones 2019). Possibilities for transnational mobility, extending the stay, and keeping plans "open" were replaced, for research participants, by narratives of securing status and affirming rights to stay. Thus, in contrast to the dominant "Brexodus" narrative (Shapira 2018), a more nuanced interpretation of migrants' responses is required to understand the different reactions to Brexit and the factors behind them. Population and migration data (Table 1) indicate a decrease in the number of Polish-born migrants in the UK since the referendum and an increase in outflows of EU8 nationals in the same period. Outflows in the year ending June 2019, however, were only 3 percent of the UK's EU8 population in that year; in other words, 97 percent of EU8 nationals did not leave. Moreover, since the referendum, applications for UK citizenship by EU citizens have been increasing: among EU8, they were up from 5,690 in 2016 to 15,291 in 2018 and 8,215 in the first two quarters of 2019; among Polish migrants the corresponding increase was from 3,539 to 9,545 and 5,234 in the first two quarters of 2019 (Home Office 2019). As discussed below, changing strategies may partly reflect the fact that migrants had been already engaged in extending their stays but without seeing any need to seek UK citizenship status. It is important to understand that FoM not only gave EU citizens the right to move but also to remain indefinitely without the need to change their immigration status. Brexit threatens to transform those rights to remain and hence requires migrants to take action to secure their status.

In Summer 2016, Ryan recontacted her Polish participants and asked about their reactions to the referendum result. The data are used here not only to demonstrate Brexit's unsettling and potentially transformative impact but also to further our analysis of longitudinal data through the life-course lens. Through repeated interviews over many years, we can see how participants' initial migration plans altered considerably. Hence, we argue, rather than seeing Brexit as a unique, isolated unsettling event to which migrants responded, it is important to take the long-term view to understand how their reactions were framed by linked lives evolving in place and over time.

Ewa, introduced earlier, said: "On the day after the vote, I actually couldn't stop crying. The loss of belonging to Europe, the aggressiveness of the out campaign, it was all too much, too sad" (interviewed by Ryan, 2016). Nonetheless, most participants reinterviewed in 2016 stated that they planned to stay in the United Kingdom, at least for the foreseeable future. To do so, they either had already or would soon apply for British citizenship. Having lived in London for several years, they had invested too much to leave. For most, going back to Poland was not a viable

financial option. With children in local schools and partners in local jobs, moving to a third country was usually not an option either.

Mateusz, introduced in the previous section, had lived in Britain since 1998. When interviewed by Ryan in 2014, he had completed his nursing studies and was working as a psychiatric nurse in the National Health Service. He had also met and married a Polish woman in London, had two children, and secured British citizenship. Reinterviewed two years later, following the referendum, he now felt like an "immigrant" again amid rising xenophobia. Nonetheless, having lived in London for 18 years, he planned to stay: "My home, my family, my work, are all here" (interviewed by Ryan, 2016).

Similarly, Magda, previously discussed, intended to remain. When reinterviewed by Ryan in 2014, Magda's circumstances had changed enormously since her first interview in 2006. Having completed her studies, she was working as a project coordinator for a large multinational corporation. She had split from her Polish boyfriend and started a relationship with a British man, with whom she had a four-year-old daughter. Contrary to her initial expectations, she no longer felt the need to raise her children in Poland. After living in the UK for 10 years, she remarked, "We've started creating our home, our little family . . . . I had Sara [daughter], which kind of contributed to the feeling of, well ok, this is my home. This is where my family is. This is where my daughter was born, and I think this is where I will stay." Thus, in line with many other participants in Ryan's 2014 study, Magda's plans evolved over time, through the life-course, in close relation to significant others, from short term, temporary, and transient toward gradual embedding in place (Ryan 2018). By the time of her third interview in 2016, she had attained British citizenship and said that Brexit did not affect her plans. She was well established in her career and had built a home with her British partner and their young daughter.

Klaudia, introduced earlier, had initially been very uncertain about how long she would stay in London. Her plans, however, also evolved through the life course. Following the birth of her second child and her older son starting school, Klaudia began to feel more settled in London. When interviewed in 2014, she had recently qualified as a teacher and was excited about starting a new career. Although she and her husband had separated, Klaudia did not plan to return to Poland, as she felt that, as a single mother, she had more opportunities both economically and socially in the UK. When recontacted after the Brexit referendum in 2016, Klaudia reflected on this unsettling event's potentially disruptive impact: "We were in shock . . . even scared about the future. I couldn't believe what had happened . . . . I feel hugely disappointed with politicians in this country" (interviewed by Ryan, 2016). Nonetheless, Klaudia planned to stay in London, even though she was reluctant to apply for British citizenship: "I hope I won't have to."

These quotes reflect many of the themes identified in our Brexit public event data and suggest that despite feelings of anger, resentment, and even fear at the referendum results, EU citizens who had made long-term investments in the United Kingdom could not simply pack up and leave. In this respect, the responses to Brexit are not dissimilar from those we observed for the recession. Our data collected over

more than a decade and analyzed through the life-course lens enable us to understand the ways in which migrants become situated in particular places over time through processes of embedding. In so doing, we offer deeper insights, beyond the narrow Brexodus narrative, to understand the varied ways in which EU migrants may react to unsettling events.

Conclusion

In this article, we have introduced the notion of unsettling events to understand how migrants may respond to potentially disruptive structural transformations and, thus, go beyond simple predictions of a Brexodus. In the context of EU FoM, which, according to King (2018), is informed by a neoclassical rational choice model of migration, research has focused on mobility rights and assumed that migrants will respond to changing circumstances by moving elsewhere (Engbersen and Snel 2013). This assumption is especially apparent in the Brexodus narrative (McKiernan 2017; Shapira 2018). However, we underline here that FoM entitles EU citizens not only to move but also to stay indefinitely and that less attention has been paid to those processes of extending the stay in place over time (see Bygnes and Erdal 2018). Drawing on longitudinal data and adopting a life-course lens, we have shown how initial short-term, temporary migrations may become gradually extended as relationships develop and migrants begin embedding in places of destination (Ryan 2018). Hence, we have made clear that migrants' responses to Brexit must be understood against the backdrop of their life-course experiences, which include two prior interlinked unsettling events — the 2004 EU enlargement and the 2008–09 economic recession.

Going further, we have argued throughout this article that much of the emerging literature on EU migrants' responses to Brexit treats it as a unique and isolated event (e.g., Guma and Jones 2018; Lulle, Moroşanu, and King 2018; Ranta and Nancheva, 2018; Lulle et al. 2019). Instead, taking a longer-term view, we have used the notion of unsettling events to examine a series of separate but interlinked geopolitical transformations with the potential to disrupt migration projects. Focusing on EU enlargement, the economic recession, *and Brexit* as a series of interlinked unsettling events and combining qualitative data from different studies with Polish migrants, we have explored how these structural transformations have contributed to informing evolving migration projects over time. EU enlargement triggered large-scale migration, particularly from Poland to the UK. In this sense, EU FoM facilitated considerable mobility, sparking much academic and public debate about new migration patterns (Engbersen and Snel 2011). However, rather than simply assuming that Brexit, as another unsettling event, will have the same impact and provoke considerable mobility out of the UK, our analysis of responses to Brexit, and to the economic recession some years earlier, suggests a more nuanced picture.

During the recession, EU migrants were predicted to move (Pollard, Latorre, and Sriskandarajah 2008; Finch et al. 2009; Glossop and Shaheen 2009; Engbersen and Snel 2013) but, as we have shown, they did not do so in significant numbers. How

can this pattern be explained? While most EU8 citizens who moved to the United Kingdom after 2004, especially Poles, were in their 20s and single (Okolski and Salt 2014), the life-course lens allows us to understand how migration projects change over time. As we have shown, initial temporariness evolved into a gradual process of embedding. As migrants developed linked lives in particular places (Elder 1998), moving became more complex and less attractive, even in the face of deterioration in their material circumstances during the recession. Now at the point of Brexit, 15 years have elapsed for those who arrived in the enlargement's immediate aftermath. With the passage of time, the Polish population in the UK has changed, with most now aged over 30 (House of Commons Library 2016). Our longitudinal research reveals the continuities of processes of embedding and, thus, that despite their anger, sadness, and resentment about Brexit, participants were planning to stay in the UK. These qualitative data help make sense of trends in the official migration datasets (as depicted in Table 1 and in Home Office 2019b) and contribute to understandings of why, despite Brexit's uncertainties, migrants are not leaving in significant numbers.

To conclude, then, we argue, Brexit should not be analyzed as a unique and isolated event, and lessons can be learned about migrants' potential responses to Brexit by looking back at previous interlinked unsettling events. As argued earlier in this article, much of the emerging scholarship on migration and Brexit is limited by a lack of longitudinal data; hence, our article reveals the value of the methodological innovation of combining data from separate, but related, studies, especially long-itudinal data, to expanding the empirical basis for analysis of evolving migration projects over time. Although we focused mainly on Poles, the findings from our public event, with a more diverse group of EU citizens, suggest some common reactions to Brexit. Moreover, while our article's focus has been on the specific context of EU citizens in the UK, our methodological approach and notion of unsettling events may be useful in other contexts as well.

Acknowledgements

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

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