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WILEY

"Where are we going to go now?" European Union migrants' experiences of hostility, anxiety, and (non-)belonging during Brexit

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of the 2016 European Union (EU) referendum and its aftermath from the perspective of European migrants living in Wales. Drawing on interviews conducted with EU nationals in 2016 and 2017, the article highlights various examples of hostility and violence encountered by these migrants during and after the referendum campaign, demonstrating the longstanding nature of hostile experiences. It further outlines the uncertainty and insecurity experienced during this period, noting how Brexit affected not only EU migrants' rights and entitlements but also their settlement and sense of identity and belonging. The analysis sheds light on various negative emotions and reactions triggered by the referendum, illustrating the diversity of migrants' experiences. Highlighting the multiple and complex ways in which the referendum affected the migrants, the article argues that Brexit should be understood as an ongoing process of "othering" and unsettling.

KEYWORDS

belonging, Brexit, EU migration, unsettling, Wales

1 | INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom's (UK) 2016 European Union (EU) membership referendum ("the referendum" henceforth) was primarily a vote on attitudes towards immigration; little of the campaign focused on other issues of EU membership (e.g., common policies and single market). Immigration provided the most political capital; successive opinion polls and surveys have emphasised the prominence given to this issue by U.K. voters (Ipsos Mori, 2016; Ford & Lymperopoulou, 2016), and research has shown that the British right wing media display a particularly negative and aggressive hostility towards migrants and refugees in comparison with other western European countries (Gerard, 2016; Berry, Garcia-Blanco, & Moore, 2015). Although migration was often discussed during the referendum campaign and commentators outlined the implications of various potential outcomes for EU citizens

living in the UK and *vice versa*, the voices and perspectives of migrants themselves have been largely missing in these debates.

Migrants' perspectives are important especially as they are the most affected by the referendum result. European migrants, in particular, are affected by Brexit, questioning the rights and freedoms afforded by EU citizenship and bringing uncertainty over what future status these migrants to the UK will have and what conditions may be placed on remaining. Much of the current media and political discourses in the UK have focused on European migrants' onward migration ("Brexodus") and its potential impact on the British economy and society (Swinford, 2017; Travis, 2017), with little consideration given to the implication of the referendum's impact for EU migrants themselves, especially those who have built their lives and livelihoods in the UK over the years. Such preoccupation with the theme of movement further extends into the academic field; as Ryan (2018, p. 234) notes, many studies have been

dominated by a "mobility lens" that privileges circularity, temporariness, and mobility, paying little attention to processes of settlement and belonging among European migrants. We agree that examinations of the continuing and developing ways in which people maintain and renew connections with localities and people are needed. Understanding these processes is particularly pertinent in the context of a climate of hostility following the referendum. This paper builds on emerging literature on Brexit and EU migration by drawing on experiences of a range of different migrant groups. Although existing studies have focused either on a specific nationality, such as Polish migrants (McGhee, Moreh, & Vlachantoni, 2017; Rzepnikowska, 2018), or age groups, such as young European migrants living in London (Lulle, Moroşanu, & King, 2018), this paper draws on interviews with a diverse range of European migrants as regards their nationality, "race", ethnicity, age, class, family status, and length of residence in the UK to inquire into their perspectives on the unsettling and turbulent backdrop of the referendum campaign and its aftermath.

We argue that the referendum intensified an already hostile environment for (many) EU migrants. The campaign and its aftermath furthered a process of "othering" and unsettling as manifest in increased attacks on people and property, anxieties and uncertainties around future rights, and complex tensions where belonging is contested through formal and informal practices and processes. We begin by outlining the existing research on (EU) migration in the next section, locating it within the broader literature on belonging. Here, we also highlight a need to acknowledge migrants' complex attachments to place, rather than assuming temporality and mobility. The following section discusses the Welsh case study, illustrating a need to examine Brexit across the UK's diverse contexts. After outlining the methodology and methods, we introduce the empirical findings, focusing on three major themes that emerged from the data. The first part discusses various examples of hostility and abuse experienced by the respondents that undermined their connections to localities, showing how belonging was contested on the everyday level. The second part examines various emotional and affective reactions to Brexit, highlighting the diversity of experiences among the migrants and the underpinning factors influencing their varied reactions. The last empirical section considers the dilemmas and complexities of (non-)belonging, showing how individuals who had developed an attachment through connections such as work and family or citizenship became unsettled due to Brexit and its legal uncertainties, bringing tensions for individuals' identities and their sense of personhood. In conclusion, we summarise the findings and reflect on these various processes of "othering" and unsettling.

2 | EUROPEAN MIGRATION—MOBILITY, SETTLEMENT, AND BELONGING

Reflecting on the post-2004 migration from "Eastern" to "Western" Europe, Favell (2008) argued that "East European migrants are in fact regional 'free movers' *not* immigrants and, with the borders open, they are more likely to engage in temporary circular and transnational mobility, governed by the ebb and flow of economic demand, than by long-term permanent immigration and asylum seeking" (p. 703, emphasis in original). This image of mobile "East European"[1] migrants, constantly on

the move between UK and "home," was reinforced by various studies that documented their high levels of transnational movement and practices (Eade, Drinkwater, & Garapich, 2006; Engbersen & Snel, 2013; Moskal, 2013; Pollard, Latorre, & Sriskandarajah, 2008; White, 2011). Numerous surveys showed that a significant number of postaccession migrants had no long-term intention of settling in the UK or were uncertain about their plans, leading some scholars to argue it would be more appropriate to consider them as "temporary migrants" (Blanchflower & Lawton, 2008). Yet research also showed that not all migrants had short-term intentions, as some planned to settle in the UK or changed their plans over time, for example, coming for a short stay then "ending up" staying in the country (Ryan, 2018; White & Ryan, 2008). These processes of settlement and belonging have been studied focusing on Polish migration to the UK. Researchers have explored the complex ways in which these migrants have come to develop relationships with British society, for example, through workplaces, schools, and neighbourhoods. Grzymala-Kazlowska (2018) describes Polish migrants' adaptation and settlement in the UK as "anchoring," by establishing various "footholds" in the country while simultaneously maintaining links with Polishness and Poland. Ryan (2018) employs the concept of "embedding" to highlight how her Polish informants negotiated processes of settlement and belonging over time. In highlighting the temporal and the spatial and relational nature of belonging, these studies challenge the idea that mobile migrants are somehow footloose and thus unable or uninterested in settling in residence countries. Their findings lend further weight to existing critiques that question common understandings of mobility and belonging as "mutually exclusive" and that mobile individuals are unable to develop or maintain a strong sense of territorial belonging (Gustafson, 2009, p. 491).

European migration is further distinguished from other migration forms due to EU citizens' legal status. EU citizenship provides EU nationals with significant legal privileges and certainties, which affords "free movement" rights that enable them to move freely within the EU as it reduces or removes immigration barriers between member states. While EU citizenship broadly gives rights and entitlements to EU nationals on a par with British citizens, some restrictions such as related to residency requirements and voting rights still apply. It does so by placing "a thin layer of additional rights ... on top of a thicker national citizenship" (Bauböck, 2000, p. 310). EU citizenship thus entails a sort of integration "by default" (Mügge & van der Haar, 2016, p. 82), offering a formal route that "opens the entrance doors" (Wimmer, 2002, p. 251) for EU nationals to British society. Formal membership constitutes an important condition for migrants' "effective participation" in the residence country, as do informal and emotional elements of belonging (Anthias, 2016, p. 179).

In this sense, Brexit threatens EU migrants' rights and entitlements but also their participation, settlement, and belonging in British society. The debates around Brexit are about national belonging (Virdee & McGeever, 2017), entailing struggles of classification (Bourdieu, 1992) about who does and who does not belong in the national community. The focus on immigration in debates during the referendum campaign extended beyond that of migration from within the EU—most notably evident in the display of notorious symbols such as U.K. Independence Party's "breaking point" poster and the key trope of "take back control"—and showed how these debates were

underpinned by wider issues of racism, nationalism, colonialism, and populism (Burnett, 2017; Fox, 2016; Virdee & McGeever, 2017; Winter, 2016). The rapid rise of hate crimes targeting migrants and ethnic minorities in the UK since the referendum campaign began has signalled an increase in antiimmigrant xenophobia and racism to a frightening extent.

However, this questioning of European migrants' rights and belonging is not a new phenomenon. Rather it has been an ongoing process which occurred well before the referendum, taking place on different levels. On the discursive level, it manifested in the continuing, highly controversial debates about the impact of EU migration on public services and society in more general. Much attention has been directed at "Eastern Europeans" who have been subject to ongoing hostility, stigmatisation, and racialisation by British media and political discourses (Burrell, 2010; Fox, Moroşanu, & Szilassy, 2012; Rzepnikowska, 2018). Such debates are well captured in the tropes of "health tourism" and "benefit tourism" that have been commonplace in the UK's media and public discourse in the past years (Bentley, Faulkner, & Borland, 2015; Bowater, 2010; Chapman, 2013; Hough & Whitehead, 2011). These challenge the idea that the status of EU nationals as "White, European, legal" migrants renders them somewhat "invisible" (Engbersen & Snel, 2013) and remind that migrants' incorporation and belonging are context specific (Anthias, 2016); they are dependent not only on migrants' status and entitlements in the residence country but also shaped by societal reception (Portes & Rumbaut, 1996) and by localities and neighbourhoods in which migrants come to live (Rzepnikowska, 2018).

In terms of policy, measures introduced through the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts, as part of creating a "hostile environment" for immigrants in the UK, included new regulations and requirements that restricted the rights of European Economic Area nationals to move and reside freely in the UK facilitating their removal from the country (The AIRE Centre, 2017). At the same time, studies have also shown how the questioning of EU citizens' rights and entitlements has taken place beyond the level of policy and discourses as they are being enacted in mundane practices and everyday interactions with British state authorities. A study conducted in 2012 that focused on everyday experiences of welfare provision among Czech and Slovak nationals in Glasgow, for example, found how these nationals had their welfare payments frequently "cancelled" and their ID documents retained by U.K. welfare authorities, often without any explanation given (Guma, 2018). As well as hindering migrants' access to welfare and other state services, these document retention practices also impeded their "free movement" rights to cross national borders within the EU.

Brexit should thus be understood in this context of ongoing and longstanding processes of "othering" of (some) European nationals in the UK that has occurred on different levels. Such processes are not necessarily uniform across the UK and may vary across its devolved nations. Local contexts of Brexit need to be explored, rather than assuming homogenous experiences across the UK common to all groups (Anderson & Wilson, 2018). The different voting patterns of the constituent countries demonstrate different attitudes towards EU membership, whereas the UK's asymmetric constitutional arrangements bring different policy contexts. Although immigration and nationality are matters reserved to the U.K. government and

parliament, devolved administrations have competence in a range of fields affecting migrants' everyday lives (e.g., education, healthcare, and housing). We move now to outline the specific context of EU migration and Brexit in Wales.

3 | WALES, EU MIGRATION, AND BREXIT

Wales has lower levels of migration than the UK average. According to the 2011 census, 5.5% of its population of three million inhabitants were born outside the UK (compared with 12.7% across the UK), and 95.6% of its population is categorised as White (compared with 87.2% across the UK). Around 50,000 residents (1.7%) in Wales hold the citizenship of another EU state. Despite a self-perception of being a "tolerant nation," numerous studies have presented accounts of minority groups in Wales receiving hostility and abuse (Jackson & Dafydd Jones, 2014; Williams, 2003). Indeed, Mann and Tommis (2012) note a polarisation of views on immigration in Wales, with a higher ratio of negative accounts than any other U.K. region. Xenophobia in Wales is multidimensional, with anti-English sentiments prevalent and widely accepted in casual settings (Williams, 2003), and abuse towards immigrants and ethnic and religious minorities outside the more diverse metropolitan areas surrounding Cardiff, Newport, and Swansea are well documented (Crawley & Crimes, 2009; Robinson, 2003; Robinson & Gardner, 2004). Yet there is also empirical evidence that immigrants and in-migrants have felt welcomed, appreciated, and accepted (Dafydd Jones, 2015), and these more nuanced—and contradictory—accounts should not be overlooked.

Wales voted to leave the EU with a similar margin as whole of the UK. Voting patterns did not conform to clear linguistic or urban/rural divisions, although areas that had benefitted from EU structural funds due to low gross domestic product tended to support leaving. Evidence presented by Wyn Jones (2017) suggests that those who had both a strong Welsh identity and a strong British identity were more likely to vote to leave the EU, rather than those with only a strong Welsh identity, which often places Wales in a multilingual, multination Europe (Osmond, 1995; Wyn Jones, 2007). This differs from England where those with a strong English identity were most likely to vote to leave and those with a strong British identity to remain. Furthermore, the EU has been central to Wales' economic development: in the past decades West Wales and the Valleys received structural funds due to its weak economy, and the single market is the destination for 59.8% of the country's exports (Welsh Government, 2017). Although it seems surprising that most Welsh voters in the referendum supported leaving the EU, specific Welsh impacts were rarely addressed in the run-up to the vote due to a weak public sphere. Unlike in Scotland and Northern Ireland, there is no Welsh version of British "national" daily newspapers, and the only "national" Welsh newspaper, the *Western Mail*, has a low readership; the most widely read is the *Daily Mail*, noted for its negative portrayal of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (Gerard, 2016). Consequently, it appears unsurprising that Wales embodies such contradictions: reliant on EU membership, but voting against it; seeking a hospitable inclusivity, but also being hostile towards migrants.

4 | METHODOLOGY

This paper presents findings from qualitative research conducted with EU migrants living in Wales between February 2016 and October 2017, covering the period before and after the referendum. The study explored various ways in which these migrants engaged in civil society organisations and activities in different parts of Wales, forming part of a wider research programme on civil society. The paper draws on interviews conducted with 42 respondents involved in various initiatives and organisations in a range of localities across Wales that included major cities, post-industrial towns, and rural settlements. The interviews were supplemented by data in the form of participant observation in several events and activities attended by these migrants during this period. Although most respondents came from central Europe, the research sample also included Portuguese nationals, whose inclusion was informed by fieldwork; we found organisations that involved or catered for both central European and Portuguese-speaking migrants. Other commonalities between these migrants included arriving in Wales through recruitment agencies and working in similar jobs.

The resulting research sample consisted of a diverse group of EU citizens: 18 came from Poland, and others were from Slovakia, Czechia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, and Portugal. The Slovak and Czech respondents also included Roma individuals, and a few Portuguese nationals came from African countries such as Mozambique. The sample included 23 women and 19 men aged between 22 and 68. Many[2] worked in low-paid and demanding jobs such as factory work, hospitality, social care, and in the charity sector, alongside running or participating in civil society groups and activities. Moreover, participants also varied considerably in terms of their length of stay in Wales/UK although many had come to the UK after 2004 (four respondents had arrived since 2011), the sample also included individuals who had arrived prior to this period, with three participants having lived in the UK for over 45 years. The total span of arrival dates in Wales/UK ranged from 1968 to 2015.

The interviews were conducted in English; however, respondents were invited to express themselves in their own native language if they were unable to communicate certain words or expressions in English. The fact that one of the researchers was a "fellow migrant" and a nonnative English speaker (proficient in Slovak) may have also helped the interviewees to understand themselves as equal partners in the communication. The interviews were open ended, allowing participants to talk freely and openly about their participation and experiences in Wales. The interviews were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim; data were analysed with NVivo and coded in a "bottom-up" manner, drawing out relevant themes and issues and their interconnections.[3]

5 | HOSTILITY, ABUSE, AND VIOLENCE

Respondents' accounts revealed a negative reaction to the referendum and its result. Many gave examples of various incidents that they or their family had experienced, especially in the immediate aftermath of the vote. These took a range of different forms, including verbal abuse, physical violence, and vandalism. Monika, a 39-year-old Polish respondent who owned a Polish delicatessen, described how her shop was attacked in the referendum's aftermath:

> Here [in the town] I had a broken sign. ... That was destroyed one week. The next week it was ... all the flowers were taken out from the big tub which is in front of the shop. All the soil and everything was on the floor. Further down there was a few metres and they didn't touch those flowers because they're a solicitor. They only destroyed ours.

Unlike the solicitors' office a few doors away, Monika, resident in Wales for 11 years, felt that her shop was being targeted as a visible manifestation of EU migration. Here, the shop sign serves as a "marker of difference" (Rzepnikowska, 2018), which along with other markers such as car registrations, satellite dishes, language, accents, and a "foreign look" (p. 10) illustrate how the "whiteness" and "invisibility" of Polish and more generally European migrants are contested and constructed categories, rather than fixed.

Such hostile encounters were not, however, limited to people perceived to be of "Eastern European" origin, which, as we have noted, was the prime construct of the "other" during the referendum campaign. Sonia, a Portuguese national, also reported how her café was targeted in the aftermath of the Brexit vote:

> Before the people can think but they don't say it because it's embarrassing to say what the people think. Now because of Brexit everyone can say whatever they want because they think it is fine. Yeah, and I've had broken chairs, broken tables. Someone came here with a lead in his hand to threaten me. I put in the court. I call the Police because this is what they say I need to do, and after the court do what? Give a suspended penalty. Don't do nothing.

Sonia encountered physical violence in the form of a threat with a weapon and did not feel that she received justice due to the suspended penalty her assailant received. In Sonia's case, the "markers of difference" not only included her shop sign and accent but also her (darker) skin colour. Some of the Portuguese-speaking informants, including Sonia, were of African descent who came from former Portuguese colonies, such as Angola and Mozambique. Her example makes clear the historical link between colonialism and migration and the way in which EU citizenship extends beyond Europe, contributing to the diversity of the category of "EU citizen": It includes not only "White Europeans" (Engbersen & Snel, 2013) but also non-White individuals with different histories and migration trajectories who may or may not come from Europe. Sonia also notes how hostility towards immigrants became increasingly permissible during the referendum campaign and its aftermath. Other respondents also shared her view that the campaign had brought about an intensification in xenophobic abuse aimed at migrants, a rapid rise that has also been documented throughout the UK (Weaver, 2016).

Beyond the personal hostility or abuse they had experienced, many respondents were aware of incidents happening elsewhere through media coverage and expressed concerns also about the

overall climate of fear and hostility generated by the referendum. Monika listed several incidents involving Polish migrants, which were reported widely in the media and on social networks:

> Yeah, but there was a lot of incidents. The Polish people putting on Facebook, for example, someone's shed was put on fire. There was a note, go back to your fucking country or someone else had their ... a little girl received a little card and there was written, "when is your flight back home?" You know, things like that. That's changed. The people are looking differently on that. Whoever on the referendum voted to leave ... they are looking a bit different. Their thinking is completely different, but there is some people, like a lady from [the next-door shop] she came and sat down and was talking about my [broken] sign. I read that in the newspaper and how was the Brexit affecting you. Hopefully everything will be fine. So she was very supportive.

Monika juxtaposed the increased hostility with a growing sense of solidarity from those who opposed the rhetoric associated with the leave campaigns. These little acts of solidarity were also mentioned by other participants, with local residents offering messages of support and welcoming statements to migrants and organisations working with them, condemning the hostility towards migrants and the rising number of hate crimes throughout Wales and the UK. These hospitable encounters wishing to emphasise a sense of welcome provided research participants with as sense of appreciation; they are also evidence of a spirit of tolerance being at play during these difficult times.

At the same time, respondents also highlighted experiences of hostility in Wales as a longstanding and ongoing issue. Krysztof, a 38-year-old Polish respondent, was particularly upset at the verbal abuse his children had received in school well before the EU referendum took place:

> It's all the people, some nasty people who say go back to your country ... Lots of times they call my boys, "you Polish twat" or something like that. Lots of comments and sometimes the school will do nothing with that. Three or four times they do that so we go straight to some ladies group who run the school. We told come down the policeman and try and explain but it's happened again and again and again.

His upset at the abuse his children received was compounded by a frustration that despite these incidents recurring frequently, the authorities had failed to take any action and tackle these issues. Marcel, another Polish informant, also recounted similar experiences that his children had encountered at school. These two informants shared similar accounts despite living in different parts of Wales; Krysztof lived in a small and relatively isolated town in mid-Wales, whereas Marcel resided in Cardiff, a city highlighted for its diversity and multiculturalism.

The various examples of hostility and ongoing abuse highlighted here show how the processes of "othering" EU nationals did occur not only on the level of policy and discourses but also on the everyday level, through name-calling, "reminders" such as "go back home" and "why are you still here?", or acts of vandalism (Rzepnikowska, 2018). Although the aftermath of the referendum saw a considerable rise in hate crimes towards migrants, these accounts also make clear the ongoing nature of antiimmigrant sentiments and attitudes. This in turn has implications for migrants' participation in society; as Tomek, a Polish respondent, noted "bad press" also made people feel "ashamed to show themselves as Polish" and thus affected their daily lives, as people would be reluctant to communicate freely in Polish or interact with their fellow nationals in public places. Similar concerns were echoed by other Polish respondents, which is unsurprising given that within the context of EU migration and mobility, "East European" migrants have been particularly targeted by the British media and politicians, and "Polish," as the largest group among these migrants, has become a generalised and stigmatised category when it comes to hostility directed at EU migrants. Dunn (2001) describes the denial of "othered" actors' access in public space as an undermining of citizenship. Although some dissimulated themselves in public space—a tactic that Scott (1985) characterises as a "weapon of the weak," this hostile environment provided motivation for others to engage in civil society.

6 | ANXIETY, FEAR, AND PANIC

Respondents' strong emotional reactions recorded after the vote indicated that many did not expect the outcome. Echoing Lulle et al.'s (2018) study of young EU migrants living in London, some respondents reacted to Brexit in a profoundly affective way, using a variety of terms to express themselves such as feeling "sad" or "angry," being left "speechless," being "hit" by it or feeling completely "shocked" or even "panicked." Such strong response was particularly evident in Branca's narrative (a 41-year-old Portuguese-speaking respondent, living in the UK for 15 years). She found it extremely difficult to come to terms with the result in the days following the referendum:

> Personally the first two days I couldn't speak. Really, I was shocked. I was really ... I don't know. It was worse than being raped and dumped in a valley. Really that was the sensation I had. I remember that morning when I woke up I already had interviews booked with the Portuguese media and BBC and blah, blah. I couldn't speak with the BBC I was crying. Really I couldn't believe my eyes. I was like somebody that you really ... like imagine that you're stressed or ... I don't know. I wasn't expecting that was really going to happen, especially because we are immigrants.

Branca experienced Brexit as a sudden and dramatic change that generated a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty about her future in Wales. Other interviewees also spoke at length about how the referendum had affected them emotionally, thus confirming the "affective impact" of Brexit that has been documented elsewhere (Henley, 2017; Lulle et al., 2018; New Europeans, 2017; Quinn, 2017).

Another consequence of Brexit increasingly discussed is "Brexodus," the rising number of EU citizens leaving the United

Kingdom. This has been recently confirmed by statistical data that showed a significant increase (29%) in the number of EU nationals who left the UK between June 2016 and June 2017 (Swinford, 2017; Travis, 2017), amid the uncertainty created by the EU referendum vote and the ongoing negotiations between the U.K. government and the EU. Although we did not encounter any respondents who said that they would leave or were planning to leave Wales/UK during our research, several participants discussed the prospect of returning "home" or moving to another country. One respondent talked about her family moving to Scotland, which she saw as "more open-minded" with a political discourse more welcoming of migrants.

Overall, the respondents' reactions to Brexit were notably varied. Some did not feel that Brexit would have any significant impact on them and thus were not necessarily thinking about leaving. For example, Marek, a 24-year-old graduate working in the IT sector who came to Wales in 2013, felt that for him, "not much had changed":

> Nothing changed for my surrounding, for friends. It's like, okay, it's another news, let's see what happens and still nothing happens yet. I'm not worrying about it because … I think that nothing is going to happen for people who stay here for a longer time, and for younger students who have decided to come [here] or any other UK university I think they might find it more challenging.

Other respondents also adopted this "wait-and-see" approach (Lulle et al., 2018, p. 8) to Brexit. Many seemed aware of the ongoing uncertainty and volatility of the situation surrounding the negotiations between the EU and the U.K. government and how these circumstances might change quickly depending on the outcome of these negotiations. As Norina, a 37-year-old Hungarian respondent who has been living in Wales for much longer than Marek (14 years) put it, "at the moment the rules are all the same and I'm just trying to keep calm about it and not panic in advance … we just need to deal with it one day at a time."

At the same time, we encountered reactions to Brexit that differed markedly from those highlighted above. For some, Brexit seemed to have generated a heightened sense of insecurity and uncertainty, as a senior representative of an organisation working with Portuguese nationals in northern Wales described:

> I fear there is going to be lots of panic here, because nobody is prepared to move. These people that came with me 15 years ago they're much older than I am. They're in their 60s. More, 60 plus. Some of them are now disabled, become disabled, ill. Life long term illnesses and they cannot go to work. If they have their benefits stopped they're going to die, because my country is not prepared to having all of us back there. So where are we going to go? What's going to happen?

The quotation demonstrates the anxiety and uncertainty facing this category of older migrants, especially as this involved individuals who were already facing challenging circumstances due to their illness or unemployment. The "panic" reaction to Brexit can be seen as a reflection of their marginal lives and vulnerability.

Similar strong reactions also emerged among Czech and Slovak Roma migrants who "panick" after the referendum, fearing that they would be a "target" of deportations by British state authorities and forced to return to their countries of origin. Many had been living in the area for a relatively long time and settled in with their families. These concerns were confirmed by a Roma participant who added that such fears among Roma were based on their existing experiences of local state authorities, especially those involving social services who seemed to threaten Roma with "taking their children" away. Another respondent, Ian, referred to "ethnic profiling" of Roma and other marginalised communities taking place in Wales: "I was speaking to the Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association and there were some police forces that actually have family trees on people, regardless of if you've committed a crime and you've got ethnic profiling there." In this context, and given the notable rise in the number of EU nationals, including, Roma, who have been deported by British authorities especially since the EU referendum (Bradley, 2017; Townsend, 2017), the rather strong reactions by Roma migrants, who may have seen Brexit as providing further "pretexts" for state authorities to target them seem unsurprising. The further prospect of being deported to another EU state with entrenched anti-Roma attitudes was also troubling them.

The cases discussed above refer to different categories of migrants whose marginality and "otherness" were further exacerbated by Brexit. Their experiences point to a reality different from that of "young and mobile Europeans" who are able to negotiate Brexit by using various "tactics of belonging" (Lulle et al., 2018) or simply move on to other countries. By contrast, here, we see individuals who felt in limbo, found themselves in difficult circumstances, and felt highly uncertain about their future. Many wanted to stay but felt that Brexit would eventually force them to leave the country. Moreover, this also included those who simply had no means to arrange a "return home," or to move elsewhere, as one research informant put it, "where should we go now, we have nowhere to go."

7 | FORMAL AND INFORMAL (NON-) BELONGING

The referendum result created a great deal of uncertainty regarding respondents' rights as EU citizens. Jennifer, who worked in an organisation that offered support to European migrants living in southern Wales, explained how their drop-in service saw a significant rise in the number of enquiries from individual migrants who had suddenly become worried about their rights:

> Recently I've had new people signing up to the service, but they might have been in Wales for ten years or eight years and they've never had to use the service, and they've come because they've come up against an issue that they don't know how to handle. So they just come for advice. It's not about form filling for them because they've got the language skills and they've got the skills to do that, but it's usually somewhere to do with rights. Have I got the right to do this or I've been told I can't get child benefit and is that true, and people generally I think are concerned about the future.

As Jennifer argues, Brexit gave rise to issues and uncertainties that affected a larger group of migrants, that is, not just individuals that the organisation was routinely engaging with but also those migrants who had acquired English language skills and seemed to be getting on well with their lives in Wales. The marked increase in enquiries concerning legal rights, which was also reported by other organisations working with EU nationals in Wales, added to the existing workload of these organisations at a particularly challenging time: an austerity context with many organisations facing ongoing difficulties to keep their services and programmes running. The emergence of these "new problems" clearly demonstrates the disruption caused by Brexit vis-à-vis rights and entitlements associated with EU citizenship. This finding resonates with other studies that have documented such impact on EU nationals living elsewhere in the UK. McGhee et al. (2017) demonstrate that a larger number of Polish migrants were keener to apply for legal residence and explore formal pathways to settlement in the UK (e.g., through naturalisation and citizenship) in the context of Brexit. According to these authors, this marked a shift in strategy; although previously Polish migrants relied on legal certainties afforded by EU citizenship and thus "deliberately" maintained a more "open-ended approach" towards settlement, the referendum disrupted this certainty, compelling them to make "more concrete plans about their future," a reorientation described as "undeliberate determinacy" (p. 2124).

At the same time, the referendum's unsettling impact extended migrants' concerns around how their settlement and belonging in the UK would be affected beyond their legal rights. This is well illustrated by Tomek, a 34-year-old who migrated from Poland to the UK in 2002. Unlike other respondents, Tomek had applied for and gained British citizenship well before the referendum, thus following a more formal route to settlement in the UK. He applied for citizenship after considering its benefits, for example, being able to vote in general elections or for setting up a business in the UK. Yet, rather than feeling secure in the context of Brexit, the referendum outcome made him "regret" becoming a British citizen:

> To be honest when we went to the Referendum recently I'm very close to enough is enough. You know I find it very close and I said to a friend of mine, I said do you know despite I'm actually a British citizen and I really regret it now. So it made my decision very difficult because if I wouldn't be I would just pack my bags and go back. Seriously, this is where I am at the moment.

Tomek was more concerned about the overall negative atmosphere in Britain, influenced by British tabloids' coverage of immigration, than the actual referendum result. His case highlights again the ongoing nature of antiimmigration sentiments and a hostile environment. It is in this context that the referendum prompted Tomek to rethink his stay in the country; despite having a secured legal position in the UK and formal membership through acquiring British citizenship, he clearly felt like he no longer belonged there.

This process of "othering" can also be seen in the case of Emilia, a 38-year-old Polish respondent. Although not a British citizen, Emilia had spent more than 10 years in Wales and felt settled in the country. Emilia

listed a number of changes that she had undergone during this period, including getting a better job, finding a local partner, and learning how Welsh/British society functioned, leading her to develop an attachment to the country. She felt at ease and settled in Wales, but this was now unsettled by the referendum result, making her feeling like an "outsider" again: "I haven't felt like an immigrant for a while—the whole EU referendum hit back and made me feel a bit like one again."

Luciana, a 34-year-old Portuguese national, also felt settled in the UK but the referendum result challenged this feeling and her sense of identity. Married to an Englishman, Luciana has been living in an Anglo-Welsh border town for 16 years and has a daughter who "speaks only English and doesn't know any Portuguese." Although she previously felt "half British and half Portuguese," Luciana could no longer identify in this way:

> I used to feel half British, half Portuguese. Too many years here. Sixteen years, living ten years in a very English world. Adjusting to the language. The history of England. All those sorts. I felt half English, half Portuguese. Not anymore. Since Brexit I feel that that part of me, I get quite upset, angry, because I felt I married an Englishman but it's still not an assurance that I will not be sent home. So by having that in limbo for me it's a bit … I spent so many years in this country. Gave so much to this country. Help with community. It's not all mine, but theirs too. I've done a lot of charity, and to be forced to go to home with the possibility that my husband can't come with me, because that is starting from zero again. I don't know. I don't know if I will like to do that. It makes me kind of sad.

Clearly, the referendum has disrupted Luciana's identity that had developed over a number of years, unsettling her sense of self and belonging. Moreover, it has also impacted on her ongoing volunteering work and engagement in civil society. Indeed, this aspect applies to other respondents; all respondents were involved in civil society organisations and activities in different ways, an engagement that entails a form of connection and belonging to the society in which they live. As expressed in Luciana's sadness, Brexit threatens to "undo" much of this incorporation and integration work that these migrants have done over the years.

8 | CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have outlined the complex ways in which the EU membership referendum impacted EU migrants living in Wales. We have demonstrated the differentiated and uneven effects and anxieties these migrants have of the referendum and Brexit. Rather than assuming that European migrants have homogenous experiences, we outlined several different experiences of different migrants, relating to their ethnicity, "race", class, family status, etc. Placing these diverse respondents' perspectives and experiences at the centre of our analysis, we argued that Brexit amounts to an ongoing process of "othering" and unsettling. It unsettles EU migrants' attachments and connections, to both the UK and Wales in general and to localities in particular, which have been cultivated through diverse formal and informal

events, experiences and practices over a number of years. Three interconnecting strands unsettle these attachments. First, the referendum campaign and its aftermath brought an increase in hostility, physical, and verbal abuse, often experienced personally or by other people known to respondents. These experiences of abuse in the immediate and everyday arena, which forms the basis for many interactions and encounters, threaten attachments to localities and Wales/UK more broadly through creating anxieties about belonging and being wanted and accepted in places. Second, Brexit triggers uncertainties about legal rights and future conditions on remaining in the UK. Specific vulnerable migrant groups, such as Roma or those who are unemployed, ill, or disabled, have deep-seated anxieties about being marginalised further or targeted for deportation, and many respondents were uncertain about whether family members would be able to join them in the future. These sociolegal uncertainties, protracted through withdrawal negotiations, bring further anxieties about the post-Brexit future, and onward migration is not necessarily an option for those who have built their lives and are entwined with communities in the UK/Wales. Third, our findings show how uncertainties that followed the referendum not only impacted on our participants' legal rights in the UK but also affected their emotional attachments and sense of belonging in Wales. Informal and emotional aspects to settlement thus exist alongside legal certainties, and as our analysis has demonstrated, the referendum has already greatly disrupted these affective connections, regardless of the outcome of the current UK–EU withdrawal negotiations and of what future rights EU migrants in the UK will have.

More broadly, the paper contributes to the existing literature on belonging in various ways. First, our analysis has highlighted the intricate link between formal and informal aspects of belonging and how the two intertwine in our research participants' experiences. They emphasise the multiple and complex ways in which people develop a sense of connectedness to places and localities in which they live and the significant role that relationships and emotions also play in this process. Second, and relatedly, our findings also indicate that belonging is an open-ended and ongoing process of making and remaking connections and building and maintaining attachments. It is fundamentally a "temporal phenomenon" (May, 2016) rather than a fixed state of being that happens in a somewhat linear fashion, with an endpoint reached when one feels "at home" somewhere or "anchored" in a specific place or locality. In this context, as our analysis has shown, the referendum is significant in that it disrupted this open-ended process of belonging in various ways, undermining the connections, attachments, and relationships that made our research participants feel at ease in places and communities in which they lived, and affecting their lives and way they engaged in Welsh and British society.

Third, these attachments and connections are significant and should not be dismissed as merely "fleeting" forms of belonging somewhat associated with mobile and transient individuals, that is, European migrants. They can be seen as "embedding" or "anchoring" practices (Grzymala-Kazlowska, 2018; Ryan, 2018) and demonstrate that EU migration should not be reduced to understandings that emphasise transience and unspecified long-term settlement plans. Not all migrants are always mobile, as health, family, education,

employment, and affective circumstances create connections that may not be easily or desirably detached. For some, it simply remains unaffordable to move on and (re)start their lives in their "home" countries or elsewhere. Care should be taken in reifying flows and lucidity in accounts of liquid migration, as the accounts of those who may remain can provide insights on how and why such decisions are taken, attesting to the complex situations in which migrants consider the future, where remaining is not necessarily an easy "default" option.

Fourth, the unsettling effect of the referendum that we have discussed here has also wider implications for social cohesion, community relations, and solidarity. The unsettled attachments highlighted above also disrupt migrants' integration and their participation in local communities and more broadly in society, as existing connections are disturbed and may take time and effort to be remade. Efforts will thus be needed in re-establishing trust and focuses around which common identities and values can develop; this will be challenging in a polarised society where there appears to be little reconciliation around Brexit. Such unsettling events are not restricted to the UK; similar processes of "othering" seem to be triggered by anti-immigration, populist and racist movements elsewhere in the EU and in the United States and present a significant global challenge for migration scholars.

Future work can contribute to a broader and more nuanced understanding of Brexit in various ways. For example there is a need to study the changing attachments migrants have to place as the UK withdraws from the EU, inquiring into of how broader geopolitical events are experienced in specific localities. More research is also required to understand different experiences across the UK, illuminating areas of different demographic, constitutional, and socio-economic contexts. This includes different voting patterns, devolved administrations, linguistic contexts, rural–urban differences, and places that have "benefited" or been "left out" from globalisation. Finally, there is a need to account for the experiences of different migrant groups, including other EU nationals who may have not been "othered" in the same ways as those migrants included in this research. As the UK's exit from the EU approaches, further research is required to understand its varied perceptions, experiences, and complexities in full; this paper, through its nuanced and critical analysis, has hopefully provided a first basis for such exploration.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

ENDNOTES

[1] The term *"East Europeans"* has problematic connotations and has become largely a stigmatised category in the United Kingdom's media and political discourse; hence our use of quotation marks.

[2] Although the vast majority of the participants were migrants, in the course of our research, we also interviewed and had conversations with several nonmigrant key individuals who represented migrant organisations or were involved in migration policymaking in Wales.

[3] All data have been anonymised in order to prevent identification and to minimise potential negative consequences for informants; pseudonyms are used instead for people and more general descriptions are employed for organisations and geographical locations.

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