Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Journal of Contemporary European Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cjea20

(Br)exit citizenship: belonging, rights and participation

Nora Siklodi

To cite this article: Nora Siklodi (26 Dec 2023): (Br)exit citizenship: belonging, rights and participation, Journal of Contemporary European Studies, DOI: 10.1080/14782804.2023.2298330

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2023.2298330

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

View supplementary material

Published online: 26 Dec 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 65

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=cjea20

JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN STUDIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2023.2298330

(Br)exit citizenship: belonging, rights and participation

Nora Siklodi

School of Area Studies, Sociology, History, Politics and Literature, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

ABSTRACT
This paper offers an in-depth analysis of perceptions of (Br)exit citizenship, integrating key themes of European Union (EU) mobile and political citizenship, along belonging, rights and participation. It draws on a series of original, semi-structured interviews and follow up conversations with 5 experts, 21 Central and Eastern European (CEE) migrants and 30 citizen activists collected between 2018–2022 in the United Kingdom (UK). Three key takeaways emerge from the evidence: 1) shared reluctance to use the term 'citizenship'; 2) hierarchised understanding of belonging and rights centred on mobility/migration, gender, class/race and deeply personal identity axes; and 3) the inconspicuous lack of CEE migrant juxtaposed with substantial presence of UK nationals as activists within pro-EU citizen groups. In contrast to being emblematic of EU political citizenship, the findings suggest a 'business as usual' juncture, wherein the enduring significance of free movement and intersecting social factors shape (Br)exit citizenship. Hence, the paper offers a cautionary narrative, urging restraint in placing too much emphasis on one-off instances of citizen mobilisations, while highlighting the secondary role migrant and pluralistic citizenship considerations tend to have amidst current and future European socio-political crises.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 21 October 2022
Accepted 15 December 2023

KEYWORDS
Citizenship; Brexit; activism; migrants; citizen groups

Introduction

The period following the Brexit referendum has significantly shaped contemporary citizenship in Europe. Both the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) implemented extensive changes to their citizenship frameworks, resulting in the widespread loss of rights for many citizens (Grütters et al. 2018). These changes have disproportionately affected EU free movers, notably, Central and Eastern European (CEE) nationals residing in the UK (Antonucci and Varriale 2020). Even before Brexit became a prominent issue, CEE free movers, while exercising their EU mobile citizenship, were often labelled as 'second-class Eurostars' (Siklodi 2020, 114). Following the Brexit vote, these challenges intensified further. CEE free movers were reclassified as migrants and became targets of xenophobic and nationalist rhetoric (Blachnicka-Ciacek et al. 2021; Guma 2020), straining further their already precarious status and EU and UK senses of belonging (Blachnicka-Ciacek and Budginaite-Mackine 2022; Pietka-Nykaza and McGhee 2020; Ranta and Nancheva 2019).

At the same time, the absence of formal channels for citizen and migrant input, combined with the looming threat of losing EU citizenship, fuelled increased activism in pro-EU and anti-Brexit citizen groups following the EU referendum across the UK (Fagan and van Kessel 2023). This surge in citizen

CONTACT Nora Siklodi Nora.Siklodi@port.ac.uk University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2023.2298330

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

activism culminated in the largest pro-EU march in history, advocating for a second referendum; the People's Vote (BBC 2019). It also resulted in the largest petition in UK history, titled 'Revoke Article 50 and remain in the EU', which gathered over six million signatures by the end of March 2019 (The Guardian 2019). These developments suggest a potential shift towards EU political citizenship during Brexit – marking the first time that such shift occurred and the first time that EU political citizenship was initiated by citizens (Brändle, Galpin, and Trenz 2018; Galpin 2022). However, with marginal, ethnic and migrant voices notably absent from Brexit activism and debates, concerns have been raised regarding inclusivity and representation (Frazer-Carroll 2019; Vathi and Trandafoiu 2020).

This paper aims to contribute to the conceptual and empirical literature on contemporary citizenship in Europe, shedding light on the persistent and potentially novel aspects of EU citizenship during Brexit. In the light of the fusion between perceptions of EU and national citizenships in practice (Favell 2008; Siklodi 2020, 159), this paper refers to the integrated concept of EU mobile and EU political citizenship as (Br)exit citizenship. The paper draws on 56 semi-structured interviews and follow-up conversations conducted in the UK between 2018 and 2022. It compares the perceptions of (Br)exit citizenship among various groups of EU citizens, including 5 experts, 21 CEE migrants and 30 citizen activists (UK nationals). Specifically, the paper investigates (Br)exit citizenship along the dimensions of belonging, rights, and participation – placing particular emphasis on participants' informal in/activism around Brexit in this later dimension.

The interviews highlight a common reluctance among participants to embrace the continued use of the term 'citizenship' due to its association with contentious and exclusive nationalist discourses across Europe. Despite the potentially new fractures in citizen activists' and CEE migrants' senses of belonging, assertions of formal (EU) rights and bottom-up pro-EU activism, (Br)exit citizenship seems to essentially extend existing patterns, featuring intra-EU free movement and intersecting social factors at its core. Therefore, this paper offers a cautionary narrative, urging restraint in placing too much emphasis on one-off instances of citizen mobilisations, while highlighting the secondary role migrant and pluralistic citizenship considerations tend to have amidst current and future European socio-political crises.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows. The first part offers an overview of EU mobile and EU political citizenship, before defining (Br)exit citizenship. The second introduces the research methods employed to collect the interviews. The third part offers an in-depth analysis of perceptions of (Br) exit citizenship among experts, citizen activists and CEE migrants. Finally, the conclusion summarises the key findings and implications of the paper and suggests directions for further research.

Different forms of EU citizenship during brexit

The legacy of EU mobile citizenship

Citizenship signifies a dynamic link between the individual and a sovereign political community, typically the nation state, as well as the coming together of a set of dimensions, namely belonging, rights and participation (Isin and Turner 2007). Its normative premise has been undermined in practice by the role of citizenship in community building processes, including the exclusion of non-citizens and differentiation between citizens (Bosniak 2008, 19–25). It is the divisive undertone of contemporary citizenship that the introduction of EU citizenship was expected to address (Maas 2007).

30 years on, however, concerns about the true transformative significance of EU citizenship persist. Questions arise regarding the extent to which a replica of national models at the transnational level can avoid assigning a white, Euro-centric and gendered framework to a 'budding' European community (Ammaturo 2019; Galpin 2022; Guerrina, Exadaktylos, and Guerra 2018). Others are concerned by the interplay between the market origins, political premise and equality principles of EU citizenship (Bellamy 2008, 603). Since EU citizenship is only activated by member state nationals' intra-EU free movement (European Commission 1993), in practice it leads to internal differentiation between EU citizens, depending on migration status (Juverdeanu 2021).

Despite these challenges, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of free movers, especially following the Eastern enlargements in 2004 and 2007 (Baas, Brücker, and Hauptmann 2009). Due to the anticipated strain posed by CEE free movers on the welfare systems and social cohesion of EU-15 countries (McMahon 2015), it has led to further stratification in EU citizenship rights, especially access to welfare (Barbulescu and Favell 2020). Indeed, the lack of a more universal EU social provision remains one of the most significant limitations of EU citizenship (Goodman 2023).

This pattern was particularly pronounced in the UK, where the outcome of the Brexit referendum has been attributed to migration considerations (Dennison and Geddes 2018). Long-term trends indicate a sustained and increased flow of free movers to the country, hence by 2016, EU free movers made up nearly 6% of the UK population or around 3.5 million people. Their annual net migration to the country peaked at 280,000 in the same year (Migration Observatory 2022). While nearly 70% of EU movers had arrived from CEE countries, the period since the referendum has seen a drop of more than 120% by 2022, the largest fall in the number of an immigrant group at the time (Ibid).

These developments shaped mainstream discourses around EU citizenship. Initially, EU-15 free movers – assumed to be a highly mobile, professional group of multilingual individuals – were viewed as the ideal EU citizens, the so-called 'Eurostars' (Favell 2008). However, research indicated that even these 'Eurostars' tended to appreciate the welfare systems of their home or host countries rather than the opportunities offered by the EU as such (Favell 2008; Recchi 2015). As a significant portion of CEE movers came from underrepresented racialised backgrounds and took on lower-skilled or manual jobs abroad (Baas, Brücker, and Hauptmann 2009), the population of free movers became more diverse in the post-2004 era. Citing national stereotypes and a deficit in cultural and economic capital, CEE nationals were quickly labelled, made to feel like, and, to a considerable extent, accepted a lower-class EU citizen categorisation (Siklodi, 2015, 830; Antonucci and Varriale 2020; Blachnicka-Ciacek and Budginaite-Mackine 2022). Frequently rendered as 'illegal workers', their 'chances for socio-economic mobility' had therefore been restricted long before the EU referendum became a prominent issue (Manolova 2017, 52). After Brexit, the structural challenges CEE movers faced multiplied further, forcefully stratifying their already fragile EU and UK attachments (Blachnicka-Ciacek et al. 2021; Guma 2020; Lulle, Moroşanu, and King 2018; Pietka-Nykaza and McGhee 2020; Ranta and Nancheva 2019). Therefore, while many EU-15 movers sought UK citizenship for protection in post-Brexit UK (Sredanovic 2022), CEE movers often chose between leaving the UK or accepting a less favourable migrant status through the new EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) (Barnard, Butlin, and Costello 2022).

These developments highlight the ongoing significance of EU mobile citizenship during Brexit. Given that many free movers may not fully recognise their EU citizenship even under normal circumstances (Favell 2008; Siklodi 2020, 159), examining perceptions of (EU) citizenship during a crisis and among those considered most 'vulnerable' (Jablonowski 2017), i.e. CEE migrants, warrants further scholarly investigation.

Enacting EU political citizenship

Considerable academic attention has been paid to the 'activist' nature of citizen responses to the Brexit vote (Brändle et al. 2018; Fagan and van Kessel 2023; Galpin 2022; van Kessel and Fagan 2022; Vathi and Trandafoiu 2020, 2022, 2023). Often indirectly, these studies shed light on the potential for EU citizenship to become politicalised, which in turn marks an important shift from EU mobile citizenship. Drawing insights from social movement, citizenship and feminist studies literature, these studies highlight three key themes. First, they underscore the novelty in the scale and tone of pro-EU mobilisations after the vote. Pro-EU activism has been identified as the first time the '"right to have rights" as EU citizens' was enacted collectively by people from below (Brändle, Galpin, and Trenz 2018, 812). Second, they draw attention to the questions pro-EU activists and citizen groups raised about the quality of democracy in the EU and the UK. With Brexit signalling a '(re) politicisation of Europe and European identity' (van Kessel and Fagan 2022, 170), anti-Brexit mobilisations indicate

the challenges of 'formulating effective pro-European counter-narratives' (Fagan and van Kessel 2023, 4). In the UK, the politicisation of Brexit has led to new questions about the legitimacy of British democracy, identity and party politics, as well as the opportunities and lack thereof online communication channels offer to making diverse and marginal voices heard (Brändle, Galpin, and Trenz 2022; Vathi and Trandafoiu 2023).

Third, and despite the considerable personal uncertainties Brexit posed to them, a large portion of ethnic minorities and EU migrants have been found to be absent from pro-EU debates and citizen groups (Frazer-Carroll 2019; Vathi and Trandafoiu 2020). Some pro-EU activists have even seemed to have reproduced gendered and 'white cultural conceptions of Europe' and a 'European exceptionalism dislocated from its colonial past' (Galpin 2022, 314). In a study that focused explicitly on the Brexit activism of the EU diaspora in the UK, Vathi and Trandafoiu (2022, 757) find that EU migrants were often absent and, when present, made a point of 'differentiat[ing] themselves from the[ir] British [counterparts]' and mobilised around their sense of belonging to Europe, with references to their personal, 'national and regional geo-political particularities and (dis)advantages'.

From a citizenship studies perspective, these analyses can be linked to the acts of citizenship framework (Isin 2008). This framework advocates considering how citizenship struggles highlight the subjective, dynamic and political nature of contemporary citizenship practices (Isin 2008, 2–3), with a focus on claiming and challenging citizenship as membership. It also highlights the significance of the meaning attributed to citizenship by those who cannot actively perform it. Importantly for critical analyses, acts of citizenship can vary significantly based on who is involved in enacting them (individuals, groups, institutions), the objective of their actions (asserting or contesting citizenship within national/transnational arrangements) and the expressions and the activities involved (what they say and do) (Ibid, 15–22). The framework may help explain further the uncertain and somewhat contradictory implications the main themes on Brexit activism seem to have for EU political citizenship.

In fact, prior to Brexit, the acts of citizenship framework was mostly applied to 'marginal spaces' in the EU context (Turner 2016), namely migrant claims for European citizenship within the context of the EU's increased mobility and refugee flows (Isin and Saward 2013; Juverdeanu 2021). While offering valuable insights of how to-be, semi- or quasi-citizens claimed or challenged national and EU policy frameworks, some warned about the potential for such studies to overestimate the idea of citizenship as a momentum without considering longer-term community building processes, for example (Seubert 2021, 83). Others have pointed to the potential lack of recognition acts of citizenship may offer to more nuanced, seemingly mundane citizenship (re)configurations that occur in less formal settings, such as in the course of plural language use by migrants (Ni Mhurchú 2016).

To assess the feasibility of EU political citizenship during Brexit, it may thus prove beneficial to consider the in/activism of various groups of EU citizens along free movement status and experiences. Such analysis could then reflect on, for instance, EU free movers' longstanding passivity in host country politics (Recchi 2015, 105–122) and examine how the apparently muted response to Brexit developments of CEE migrants (Vathi and Trandafoiu 2020) may, nonetheless, signal an enactment of EU political citizenship.

(Br)exit citizenship

The benefits and potential loss of EU citizenship were central topics in public and elite discussions during Brexit. However, our current understanding of how Brexit impacted the EU citizenship of various groups of EU citizens is somewhat fragmented. This fragmentation is due to the somewhat separate literature addressing citizenship developments during Brexit, as outlined earlier. These streams reflect well the distinct traditions in contemporary citizenship studies in Europe, with one focusing on mobility, in most cases with normative and legal implications in mind, and the other on political participation usually through an analysis of citizen attitudes and behaviour.

This paper argues that a more nuanced understanding of Brexit's implications for contemporary citizenship in Europe, encompassing both its persistent and potentially new facets, can be achieved by simultaneously examining the significance of EU mobile and EU political citizenship. This integrated approach, termed (Br)Exit citizenship, guides the rest of this paper and the investigation of the perceptions of citizenship among experts, CEE migrants and UK activists along the dimensions of belonging, rights, and participation, with a particular focus on pro-EU citizen group activism in the latter dimension. Before presenting the interviews, the next section of the paper presents the methods used to collect and analyse the evidence.

Research methods

To investigate senses of (Br)exit citizenship, 56 original interviews were conducted.[1] Initially, the research aimed to explore how CEE migrants in the UK responded to Brexit. However, it became apparent that many tended to avoid Brexit debates and pro-EU groups all together (similarly to the findings by Vathi and Trandafoiu 2020). Consequently, the focus shifted to examine why CEE migrants abstained from engaging with Brexit-related matters and to investigate who else participated in pro-EU citizen groups and their motivations for doing so.

Access to prospective CEE participants was obtained through previous and on-going research projects on EU citizenship and free movement. 21 CEE interviews were collected with a mean age of 35 years, all engaged in full-time employment or education. Some arrived in the UK as late as 2017, a couple held dual CEE-UK citizenship (Activist 9 and CEE 5, after Brexit Expert 4, CEE 3, 18 and 19) and most intended to remain in the UK post-Brexit.

Access to citizen activists were facilitated through my existing contacts with pro-EU citizen groups, notably the NewEuropeans, the3million and the European Movement (Experts 1–5). I expanded my pool of potential participants through referrals, including three local leaders (Activists 1, 12, and 21) and, unexpectedly, five Leave supporters (Activists 26–30). The latter is probably best characterised as moderate Brexiteers; with two advocating a clear break from the EU (Activists 26 and 29), two expressing cautions about future EU-UK relations (Activists 28 and 30) and one displaying some Bregret (Activist 27). It is notable that their participation in the project occurred during a period when meaningful dialogue between the Remain/Leave (and I might add EU migrant) segments of the UK population appeared especially challenging (Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley 2021).

Most activists were aged 45 years or older and came from middle-class white backgrounds, aligning with the broader profile of pro-EU activists (Frazer-Carroll 2019; Galpin 2022). There were significant gender differences in activists' motives along gender, but this did not seem to hinder pro-EU citizen groups' recruitment efficiency (Guerrina, Exadaktylos, and Guerra 2018). The Brexit activism of the majority of men centred on party positions, economic policies and EU migrant treatment. Most were party members, often with the Conservative or Labour parties and a few were associated with the Liberal Democrats. Four had prior experience as local councillors or were standing as candidates in the 2019 local elections at the time of the first interviews, all representing Labour. In contrast, women activists preferred a supportive role in electoral politics, focusing on local, gender and wellbeing issues within anti/pro-EU, feminist and migrant groups.

The initial interviews were completed by the end of 2020, with intermittent follow-up verbal and written interviews conducted ever since. Participants were presented with a series of open-ended questions probing their reactions to and involvement in Brexit activism. They were then asked about their perceptions of the significance of citizenship and citizenship considerations in Europe, with the majority then mostly focusing on the unfolding situation in the UK. Additionally, participants were questioned about their post-Brexit anticipations and future plans, including decisions related to where they intended to live or whether they would engage in citizen groups in another tumultuous political climate.

Anonymity was maintained by assigning random aliases, namely, experts, activists, or CEE migrants with numbers to the transcriptions of interview recordings. Thematic analysis was then carried out on these transcripts, focusing on the dimensions of (Br)exit citizenship – belonging, rights, and participation. The themes presented in the empirical section therefore reflect the issues on which most participants either touched or agreed upon, as well as broader trends across the interviews. The evidence is not intended to be representative of (Br)exit citizenship, but offer an original, qualitative and in-depth interrogation of this issue, drawing attention to the potentially stark contrasts in the perceptions of various groups of EU citizens.

In an effort to address the power dynamics inherent in qualitative research (Mason 2018, 93), I actively engaged my participants in shaping the agenda of this project and the direction of interviews. Due to the deeply personal nature of my research topic, I shared my intellectual engagement and personal interests in citizenship, identifying myself as a researcher, CEE migrant and pro-EU citizen activist at the start of interviews. Follow-up conversations gave us further opportunities to reflect on the key themes emerging from the interview analyses. The scope of my project broadened in response to these practices. Initially, I spoke to CEE migrants, then turned to pro-EU and eventually pro-Brexit citizen activists. These shifts reveal the 'circularity' in reflexive empirical research (Benson and O'Reilly 2022, 179–180), as well as the requirement to have a dynamic approach when studying a highly variable issue, such as citizenship during Brexit. Further interview details and participant demographics and even some of their self-ascribed social affiliations are available in the Appendix.

Empirical reflections on (Br)exit citizenship

Abandoning the term "citizenship"

During the initial stages of the interviews, participants expressed a strong belief in the progressive nature of their senses of (Br)exit citizenship. This progressive nature was commonly attributed to their experiences of 'borderless travels' (Activist 1), the pursuing of 'international careers' (CEE 3, 17 and 18) and the maintaining of cross-border familial connections (for nearly all CEE and most Activists, 1–16).[2] These experiences in turn fostered an appreciation of what participants considered 'immense personal privileges' (Activist 6), which cultivated their willingness to 'move beyond states [and] join any community on an equal basis to others' (Activist 25).

In short, most participants initially appeared as supporters of the normative ideals associated with EU citizenship (European Commission 1993) and expressed criticism of several controversial aspects of Brexit, especially the calls to terminate free movement. However, it is worth noting that during these early discussions, only a few participants explicitly mentioned EU or European citizenship.

When this did topic surface, almost all participants, including migrants and activists, displayed some reluctance to use the term 'citizenship' and often suggested abandoning it. Their concerns appeared to stem from the possibility of citizenship serving as a backdrop for further differentiation processes between people along social and economic considerations or racialised practices. These concerns were voiced not only in relation to post-Brexit UK but also throughout post-Brexit EU. In doing so, participants raised three distinct points.

Firstly, the majority expressed criticism towards the exclusive and contentious nature of contemporary citizenship in Europe. They argued that there is a widespread preoccupation with the nation, which nourishes the 'idea of who we are [and] what we are' in national terms and reinforces conventional narratives rooted in a 'glorious national history or heritage' (Activist 12). When referencing the UK, for example, the national narrative was found to frequently invoke 'the outdated legacy of the British empire' (Activist 3), which then perpetuated unacceptable norms, such as 'everyone *has to* bend over backwards and contribute . . . before being *allowed* to become a full UK citizen' (CEE 2, echoed by CEE 5, 21; Activists 8, 9, 18–25 and Experts 1, 3–5). This portrayal also justified the country's obsolete 'imaginary as a global power state' (Activist 4) and long-standing 'failure to recognise the

opportunities offered by the EU and European citizenship' (Activist 8) among the UK public and political elite.

Accordingly, many participants noted that 'anything with the word "European" in it [has been] devalued' in broader discourses (Activist 24).

> English nationalism is based on superiority, imperialism ... this *shit* [idea of] where we were and [who we] still can be. A global power. Citizenship is valued as part of our national heritage. Based not on rights but on previous historical memories of being a superior country, our greatness to usurp other nations ... As a cultural thing and legal thing, European citizenship is not valued. It is written down. (Expert 5)

Secondly, Leave supporters, along with some CEE migrants, rejected the enthusiasm surrounding the notion of global citizenship and, by extension, EU citizenship, presenting them as ideals they had 'never bought into' (CEE 2, also mentioned by CEE 8, 9, 14–16, 19, 20 and Activists 26–30). They believed that accepting 'some breakages' and 'categories of people' was necessary because 'that is how we work best, as a tribe' (Activist 28). These participants were concerned that trying to make people 'belong everywhere' would result in them not truly belonging anywhere (CEE 19).

> I don't think about citizenship. I don't think of national citizenship. Claims of citizens of everywhere, citizens of nowhere. No such things. I have never bought in to this global citizenship. You can relate to everybody around the world. But trying to homogenise diversity ... Are you a citizen of this country or not? Now we have [citizenship] tests and lessons. Countries are trying to create something you aren't. ... And we have more talk of global citizenship. Do we want to divide people? Or let them belong everywhere? But then they don't belong anywhere. You need some breakages ... We do not want to divide people, but we need to categorise people. That is how we work as a tribe. It is difficult to appeal to everybody. (Activist 28)

The perceived lack of belonging was for some participants exposed by the limited contributions some migrants make to their host communities. This lead to suggestions that post-Brexit national welfare systems across Europe 'should preferably exclude those who do not contribute equally' (Activist 30, similar sentiments expressed by CEE 2, 8, 19 and 20 and Activist 28).

Thirdly, every expert voiced their concern regarding the lack of minority and migrant voices in pro-EU citizen groups – and not just during anti-Brexit mobilisations but more generally in the EU's activist sector. Even more, experts suggested that the EU has failed to accommodate the region's *actual* pluralistic society within its citizenship framework (see also Bhambra 2017). Europe's citizenship agenda, whether at the EU level or within individual nation states, was then interpreted through the lens of what one expert referred to as performed diversity. While there are many instances where political communities might give the appearance of welcoming 'others', the lens of performed diversity highlights their ultimate shortcomings in making or implementing meaningful changes that advance a more pluralistic society.

> My individual life is much easier in the UK than [it was in] Belgium or Italy, in mainland Europe. Simply, people are not staring at me in the streets. There is this political correctness which [means] people leave me alone ... I [am] more critical of it because I don't think there is any less racism in the UK. It is just different behaviour... I call it 'performed diversity' in the sense that it is very nearly a broad understanding of how to organise a multicultural society. The aim is not always to change the mainstream, just to allow other people to participate in it ... It is the promise that everything stays the same, just involve more people. The Benetton effect ... Not the same as *actual* plural society ... But the reality is, the world is not just white. ... Real diversity is not just about including people in the same system but understanding that the system has been created only to keep our small minority out. ... I will never feel [like a] British citizen or want to be one. Part of it is Brexit. I even resisted to ask for residency. One thing that sticks with me, I finally feel that the world is everyone ... I don't think *anyone* should have to ask to live. (Expert 1, emphasis during the interview)

Belonging: differentiating between classes of (EU) migrants and (UK) citizens

Participants made various references to their senses of belonging to different parts of the UK, the EU, and Europe simultaneously, highlighting the overlapping and intersecting character of this

dimension. The issue of performed diversity was particularly noticeable when they reflected on belonging within the context of the UK's increasingly divided socio-political landscape. This underscored the significance of class/race and migration-based hierarchies (Benson and Lewis 2019; Lulle, Moroşanu, and King 2018; Shilliam 2018).

Among activists, the reflection on class appeared to inform a general 'understanding of *who* is responsible for the country's suicide vote' (Activist 10). There were notable gender differences in whom activists held responsible, however. Among men, blame was often placed on 'economic illiteracy' (Activist 3), 'fundamental stupid[ity]' (Activist 12) and 'certain types of people, with single IQs' (Activist 2). Together with some CEE migrants (especially CEE 8, 9 and 16), they perceived Brexit as a disposition of the working class. Because 'poverty and insecurity make you shy away from difference ... fearful of the economic role of migrants, the colour [of people], other accents and, even, [of] sexual orientations' (Activist 7), they repeatedly categorised the working class as the UK's internal 'other'. In contrast, female activists often saw the Brexit outcome as a reflection of 'the many people struggle[ing] in the country' who had been 'deluded to by the rich', which is 'why they voted out' of the EU (Activist 8).

Reflections on class-based belonging also served as a buffer against the impact of cruel and xenophobic incidents that almost every CEE migrant seemed to have experienced. Despite their relatively hopeful attitudes at the beginning of the interviews, their everyday lives in the UK offered glimpses of an increasingly xenophobic environment in which they were particularly vulnerable (Jablonowski 2017). For example, CEE 4 was no longer 'only' asked 'to buy a day ticket' for his fishing adventures. He was now required to sign an admission statement at his local lake, with a subject line that read 'no ducks, no eastern European fisherman'. His subsequent social media posts about his fishing adventures hinted at further xenophobic reactions, including comments like 'Polish bastard, hope you are enjoying our English waters'. Perhaps not surprisingly, CEE 4 was one of six participants who had left the UK shortly after the initial interview and he has not returned since.

CEE participants attempted to alleviate their growing vulnerability by frequently convincing themselves that they were merely the unintended victims of the Brexit fiasco and the 'mistaken targets' of xenophobic rhetoric and, in some instances, personal attacks (CEE 15). However, when recounting obviously offensive incidents, it became quickly apparent that, regardless of their seemingly settled positions in the UK, the majority were uncertain about what they were permitted to say or do.

> I know I wasn't one of the targeted groups [of] and I overlook Brexit as it does not pose a threat to me... They are trying to say that I am the same as some construction workers that tried to get benefits. The working class are made to think that all foreigners need to go. And so, once at a Subway, someone called me names, shouted at me for no reasons. Uncalled for. I didn't react to it. I don't feel that I have the authority to speak out and say something. I don't know if they will call the police. I don't know if I would be recognised [as having a legitimate argument] ... When they continued to get angry, I tried and stayed silent as don't know what would happen ... I am scared [of] what I might say. I am afraid and not willing to take the risk. (CEE 7)

These examples showcase how Brexit's 'hidden tensions' and 'unresolved issues' probed many participants' senses of belonging. Brexit's negative effects were also noticeable along deeply personal identity axes, such as gender or sexual orientation, which then often spilled over into a more extensive identity crisis (Slootmaeckers 2019). This in turn led many CEE participants to question the actual extent of the 'liberal undercurrents' normally associated with UK and, by extension, EU citizenship (CEE 21, and mentioned in various formations by CEE 2, 6; Activists 20, 22, 23, 27 and Expert 2).

> When I first came to Britain, [I had a] pretty rosy view of [the country]. Post-Brexit arrangements, a lot of people and things, uhm, that's happened, made me revisit that. Would I prefer to be discriminated against because I'm gay or because I'm an immigrant? Brexit made me revisit these assumptions and my visions of the country being liberal, knowing there are so many hidden tensions and unresolved issues of how [people] perceive others from abroad. It soured my perception of Britain. (CEE 21)

Rights: excluding CEE migrants and establishing a new class of ex-Eurostar EU citizens

While the multiplicity in senses of belonging to and notions of community in the UK and EU was apparent across CEE and activist interviews, reflections on entitlements seemed much less allied. While CEE migrants focused on their rights and future in the UK, activists spoke of the impending curbs on their EU free movement. No longer feeling at home in Brexit UK, CEE migrants begun to reclassify themselves as (im)migrants, outsiders and foreigners. These categories were partially addressed through strategic means (Dimitriadis and Quassoli 2021), such as naturalisation, compulsory residency or EUSS applications. And, ultimately, these efforts were often accompanied by plans to 'return home for good' (CEE 15).

The first option, applying for UK citizenship, was only viable for a select few participants who met the eligibility criteria and possessed the financial means to complete the process (CEE 3, 19, 20, and Expert 4). Given that 'belonging or identity; were perceived as 'very strong and relevant for citizenship, I am Hungarian after all' (CEE 18), their newly acquired UK status was perceived as 'citizenship on paper only'. As an example of 'shotgun citizenship' (Expert 4), it failed to evoke emotional resonance among its holders. The second option, mandatory residency, appeared more acceptable and accessible to most CEE participants than full UK citizenship. For many, it was also the 'only' viable option 'if there [was] a no deal Brexit' (indicated by CEE 1, 4, 6–8 and 21). However, EUSS was at times seen as inconvenient, with some participants facing challenges in completing the online application due to language barriers, identification issues and operating system requirements (namely CEE 1, 10–17). Other participants were eligible only for a pre-settled status (CEE 12–15). The third and final option, to leave the UK, was eventually selected by six CEE participants (CEE 2, 4, 14, 15, 17 and 18).[3]

In stark contrast, activists, who were formerly part of the exclusive Eurostar club (Favell 2008), seemed to consider their 'EU civil rights and citizenship' as a given (Activist 2, together with Activists 1–14, 21, 22). Their perception of EU citizenship as their fundamental status replicated some of the differentiation processes that have been observed in the blending of free movement and EU citizenship as cultural and cosmopolitan capital – neither of which could be possessed by stayers (Siklodi 2015, 832).

> Over the last 3 years, joining the anti-Brexit campaigns, I have been appalled by what I have seen in this country . . . that education is shockingly poor, and ignorance is so deep. I speak fluent Dutch, and French. I am native in Spanish and [have] fair Italian [language skills]. I am not limited to where I settle or retire . . . But my right as an EU citizen to retire and live anywhere has been taken away from me. The thing about civil rights, you can't take those away . . . They are rights, not privileges. . . I think this is illegal and unconstitutional (Activist 2)!

Even more, by seeking to extend their 'European lifestyle' beyond periods of free movement, their contributions highlighted the inherently political nature of mobile citizenship in Europe (Siklodi 2020). Therefore, their primary goal was to protect EU citizenship during what they described as an appalling Brexit process. Being mostly retired and middle-class nationals in the UK, many activist enjoyed relatively secure financial and legal positions, which in turn facilitated their participation in pro-EU citizen and anti-Brexit groups. They had both the time and the inclination to participate, along with what they described as the necessary knowledge and resources that such participation demanded. The issue of knowledge was seen as important especially among men, who perceived the average UK national as having an 'obscure knowledge about EU and local politics, maybe they know their MPs, but have little awareness of what the EU has done for them' (Activist 4). There was even some distinctions made between pro-EU groups along these lines.

> [Our group] is full of people with the purest and the most informed knowledge of Europe. Also, [there is] commitment in a way perhaps other organisations aren't necessarily able to compete. Very intellectual about the whole Europeanness . . . . It is perhaps too intellectual, too over the top in terms of support. Other organisations that are going to emerge might be more involved with economic or regional factors as they see the costs of leaving. (Expert 5)

In comparison, none of the CEE migrants claimed intellectual property over their Europeanness. Since many engaged in back-and-forth travels between the UK and their home countries to fulfil family obligations and economic needs throughout the timeline of the project, they did not seem to have time for Brexit debates and activism. In the light of the longer-term abstention of EU free movers from host country politics (Recchi 2015, 105–122), it is possible that (pro-EU) citizen groups had no choice but to draw their members from the UK's post-Eurostar population.

The contrasting positions of CEE migrants and (mostly UK national) citizen activists mirrored the long-standing categorisation processes inherent to EU mobile citizenship (cf., Juverdeanu 2021). This issue was a prominent concern voiced by experts during the interviews. They conveyed unease with both 'the intrinsic homogeneity of EU citizen groups' (Expert 4), and how these groups perpetuated preconceived notions of 'who migrants supposed to be' or 'may look like' (Expert 1). However, these issues did not come as a surprise to experts, who frequently contemplated on how socio-economic factors influenced the composition and activities of the activist sector. As Expert (4) put it, 'I value activism, but there is a risk of elitism. Activism is extremely important but not very democratic… There is a question of time, and time costs money'.

Even more, the involvement of EU migrants within the activist sector was regarded as something that should be somewhat downplayed. For instance, Expert 3 felt her own socio-economic position as a migrant played a significant role in her interest and dedication to building a career 'concerned with the rights and integration of migrants and refugees in the UK and the EU'. Nonetheless, her activist fellows questioned her classification as a migrant, preferring to reserve this category for non-EU, third country nationals.

> Any job I've done has been migrant and refugee society relevant … But I have to say this sector of industry is white, British [and] middle class. They have the money to volunteer or to take not well-paid jobs. They are often privileged. … I alienate part of 'myself' to be perceived as a professional expert of this subject. I am so proud of myself of being a migrant and then they say, 'We don't mean *you*'. It is frustrating …. (Expert 3)

In the EU context, such reflections were interpreted as the symptom of the limited reach of citizen groups, especially in comparison to private and business interests, as well as the inconsistent progress of the EU's equality provisions in the long term.

> Europe is not citizen friendly, which needs to change. … [EU] institutions are full of trade unions and businesses… There are some branches about citizens but, generally, these are weak [and] indicative of the fact that people don't have a voice in Europe … Europe wouldn't go near antidiscrimination, though there was some start with previous treaties on women and migrants. Still, tackling this issue, I don't think it is in the European DNA. (Expert 2)

Participation: abstention v activism during Brexit

Zooming in on reflections on Brexit activism, a clear national focus emerges from activist and CEE migrant interviews. Not one mentioned trying to reach out to EU politicians or indeed to the EU branches of their citizen groups. In other words, Brexit activism was in many cases perhaps acts of UK rather than EU citizenship.

For example, in line with long-standing patterns of the EU movers' political abstention abroad (Recchi 2015, 105–122), CEE migrants largely abstained from Brexit politics, suggesting that it was preferable to remain on the periphery or entirely absent from Brexit-related discussions (similarly to the findings of Vathi and Trandafoiu 2020). However, their reasons for this choice varied. Some CEE participant expressed a 'hope that everything will turn out fine' (CEE 16) believing that the UK – rather than the EU – is 'capable of finding a solution on its own' (CEE 12). Others wanted to focus on 'fighting for [their] life' in the country, especially because it had been their 'home' previously (CEE 17).

However, CEE participants were genuinely surprised by the extent to which Brexit had succeeded in making people more inclined to stress that

> you *are* a foreigner. . . I understand that it is interesting to ask where each people with different accents is from, but I can see these are not 'well-meant' questions or expressions of interest. In fact, 98 out of 100 times the next question is how long I plan on staying here. . . . I *am* British!. (CEE 3, emphasis during interview)

As Brexit compelled CEE participants to redefine themselves as migrants, outsiders and foreigners – a reflection of their lack of formal status in the UK, compounded by the introduction of EUSS – it is likely to have contributed further to their reluctance to engage in UK politics. Thus, instead of accentuating the importance of EU citizenship, Brexit developments seemed to have emphasised the connection between national citizenship and political participation (Favell 2010).

> Well, as a foreigner, I don't think you can engage too much in politics regarding Brexit. All these changes are only intensifying this nationalistic [and] xenophobic context. Obviously, if [life] goes bad, you *have to* find someone to blame. Even if you are a British citizen. When you look around, there are people who are born here to migrant families and if they get involved in politics, they get slaughtered. Look at the Mayor of London, for example. High profile politician and he lived all his life here. But, from time to time, he's sent back to Pakistan. (CEE 2, emphasis during the interview)

There were six particularly active national citizens who had previously organised and mobilised their local diaspora to participate in the national elections of their country of origin within my CEE sample (namely CEE 5, 6, 7, 8, 21; Expert 4). Despite being regular voters and some even being party members, Brexit prompted only two of them to openly participate in pro-EU and anti-Brexit activism. CEE 5, a dual Czech-UK citizen by birth, participated in pro-EU marches and volunteered in various anti-Brexit efforts in and around London. Expert 4, who had recently acquired dual UK-Polish citizenship, chose to redirect his activism, seeking membership in and even convening new pro-EU citizen groups with a cross-national scope.

In stark contrast, most activists seemed enthusiastic about the opportunity to 'do something' about Brexit that pro-EU citizen groups offered (Activist 12). Even though many had admittedly arrived 'late to the Brexit party' (Activist 24). Almost all of them, including those who later assumed leadership positions, joined pro-EU citizen groups when the tumultuous Brexit negotiations suggested that 'okay, Brexit means Brexit, but no one knows what Brexit means' (Activist 7). The growing sense of uncertainty that Brexit 'is *not* a done deal . . . and it is not too late to reverse the referendum', provided 'an immense sense of hope' to many (Activist 11, emphasis during interview, also mentioned by most pro-EU activists).

For the leaders of local pro-EU citizen groups, the delay in Brexit negotiations was frequently welcomed. This additional time seemed to have provided a real opportunity for many people to learn about the personal benefits of EU citizenship. It also allowed for better preparation of pro-EU citizen groups, in contrast to their shortcomings in the lead-up to the referendum.

> I can only tell you from my experience, there has really been a big change. People now realise that there's something worth battling for. It's not all over! The People's Vote is now an umbrella organisation and effectively we're working with all the other affiliated organisations, Open Britain, Scientists for Europe, Healthier In. But what we've lacked [is] a leader at the top. And I just got a good feeling about Lord [Andrew] Adonis coming on board. He's going to have the time and the inclination, really, to give us a much greater lead on how we should be campaigning [and] where we go from here. (Activist 1)

While unified groups and distinct leadership emerged as relevant – and challenging – issues throughout the interviews, most activists I spoke to pursued unique goals. These included the cancelling of Brexit in its entirety (common among women), the taking of a no-deal and a hard Brexit off the table (common among experts, activist leaders and men), and, mostly, to offering a second vote on different Brexit scenarios (nearly all supported this option, apart from the experts). According to Activist 10, the overlap and the multiplicity in activists' goals reflected the state of contemporary UK politics – 'a fudge that works rather than an ideal that does not'.

A shared sense of responsibility towards younger generations and the broader UK community were identified as key motivations for continued activism. Many activists believed that, for young people, the guarantee of free movement would, 'without a shadow of doubt, showcase that we are part of something bigger – [an] ethos, where people feel they belong, not always where they were born or grew up' (Activist 23). Simultaneously, many activists emphasised the vital role of EU migrants within the 'country's citizen, open door, thriving community' (Activist 14), which was perceived as consisting of 'neighbours who not just know of each other but also help each other out' (Activist 22).

The emphasis on nurturing the UK's neighbourly community was a prevalent theme mentioned by nearly all participants, including Leave supporters. It appeared to hold particular significance for women, who felt that, by addressing local issues such as women's well-being and education, seemingly small actions could have broader 'global implications' (Activist 29). However, some cautioned against overly prioritising such a neighbourly community, fearing it might inadvertently signal the exclusion of the 'other' (Activist 13 and 20). These concerns echoed previous academic assessments of Brexit, which warned that prioritising the neighbourly community could potentially reinforce the normative whiteness associated with Britishness (Benson and Lewis 2019, 2212).

For Leave supporters, their ongoing activism was no longer solely about opposing what they considered to be the 'unacceptable' rule 'to take in some people because they have a right to be here' in the UK (Activist 28). Instead, their frustration seemed to gradually shift towards Brexit negotiations. While observing politics as more of a practical compromise than an idealistic endeavour, in their view, this compromise was largely due to the EU's unyielding position in the negotiation process. The EU 'wants to be a super state . . . it is all in or all out. I don't understand why it takes so long to set a deal, why take hard Brexit off the table. I feel it is like a bad marriage, where the husband is keeping you down all the time' (Activist 26). Consequently, most Leave supporters wished to see public funding directed towards initiatives that would benefit people rather than what they now considered to be a potentially wasteful endeavour, like Brexit (Activist 27, a self-proclaimed Bregretter). On this last point at least, both Remainers and Leavers appeared to find common ground.

Conclusion

The tumultuous Brexit process marks a significant moment for contemporary citizenship in Europe. Against this backdrop, this paper explored the persistent and potentially novel aspects of EU citizenship in times of crisis. It integrated key themes of EU mobile and EU political citizenship, termed as (Br)exit citizenship, and set out to examine its relevance through 56 semi-structured, original interviews and follow-up conversations with experts, CEE migrants and citizen activists.

The evidence provided original insights into how perceptions of Brexit citizenship seemed to fuse experiences of intra-EU free movement with deeply political senses of belonging, claims to rights, and varying levels of activism or abstention during Brexit. A notable issue that arose from this fusion is the shared reluctance of nearly every participant to continue using the term 'citizenship', primarily due to its association with nationalist and exclusive traditions across Europe. This is significant, as it may indicate a growing public appetite for establishing direct EU or European attachments for the first time. However, it is important to note that a political EU citizenship, if pro-EU citizen activism is an indicator of such (highly debatable, as suggested by Brändle, Galpin, and Trenz 2018; Galpin 2022; Seubert 2021), was primarily enacted by full members of the host state, i.e. by UK nationals. By comparison, only two (out of 21) CEE participants claimed to be active in Brexit politics. Hence, the voices and contributions of EU movers in potential 'acts of EU citizenship' during Brexit appeared to be marginal at best, especially in the case of CEE migrants. Together, these findings seem to confirm the continued role of the nation state in shaping practices of political citizenship and claims for legal status.

The contradictory character of (Br)exit citizenship intensified further as participants described their senses of belonging, (re)asserted their entitlements and shared their motivations for Brexit in/activism. This granted a nuanced yet exclusionary notion of (Br)exit citizenship akin to national models. For example, most activists expressed concern about losing their EU citizenship, emphasising its fundamental nature. Subsequently, many male activists presented rather divisive narratives of their own senses of belonging, often with ambiguous boundaries between the UK and the EU, effectively excluding the UK's working class from their budding EU community, who were also perceived as responsible for the Brexit outcome.

CEE migrants, mostly the men, also referred to 'lower classes' frequently, though they identified two distinct groups within this category: Brexiters and welfare-reliant CEE migrants, with the latter group seen as the primary targets of Brexit. While every single CEE participant was aware of and many had first hand experience of the highly divisive, racialised and negative stereotypes targeting CEE migrants, not one of them claimed to be a member of such 'lower classes'.[4] These findings suggests that the lack of EU social provisions may feed some of the differentiation between classes of EU free movers. Together with Leave supporters, they frequently rejected the concept of global citizenship and emphasised the importance of maintaining certain 'tribal' references for the sake of societal functioning. As these examples illustrate, there was also a notable difference in participants' perceptions of (Br)exit citizenship based on gender, with women expressing support for more inclusive and more expansive causes from local to global levels than men.

Experts seemed to keenly aware of these societal divisions. They were the sole group to both notice and express concern about the absence of minority and EU migrant voices in the anti-Brexit activist sphere. They even suggested that such dynamics were applicable on a broader scale, encompassing the EU activist sector and citizenship frameworks. This insight prompted them to introduce the concept of performed diversity. Despite the growing trend of embracing previously excluded groups based on intersecting factors such as ethnicity, nationality and migration status, they believed that European political communities still predominantly emphasise the integration of these 'others' rather than implementing more substantial changes that could foster a more pluralistic society. Therefore, the findings on the dimensions of (Br)exit citizenship strongly hint at a 'business as usual' juncture, wherein the enduring significance of free movement and intersecting social factors shape perceptions of (Br)exit citizenship – and, as a result, require further assessment.

Some of these findings could be attributed to case study selection and research design. Firstly, the UK has a historical tendency to categorise its population along class, often intersecting with racial and migration factors (Shilliam 2018, 107).[5] Secondly, EU citizenship itself has institutionalised differentiation and exclusion related to mobility and migration (Juverdeanu 2021; Maas 2021; Siklodi 2020). Thirdly, my personal background as a CEE migrant and my research interests may have influenced both the recruitment of participants (as seen in the ratio of Leave/Remain supporters in the Appendix) and the nature and depth of information they shared with me. For instance, consider the divisive tone of EU activists regarding the Leave camp and the apparent restraint of moderate Brexiteers when discussing their reasons for supporting Brexit.

Importantly, this paper strongly suggests continuity in perceptions and practices of (EU) citizenship during Brexit. Other research, such as studies on everyday nationalism at borders, has also hinted at continuity rather than a rapture in public perceptions during Brexit (e.g. Leddy-Owen et al. 2022). This paper similarly highlights the contradictory and overlapping character of (Br)exit citizenship between categories of movers/stayers and Leavers/Remainers. This largely confirms the legacy of EU mobile citizenship, emphasising the significance of free movement as a source of cultural, economic and other forms of capital (Siklodi 2015, 830; Antonucci and Varriale 2020; Blachnicka-Ciacek and Budginaite-Mackine 2022). However, it also serves as a basis for differentiation not only among movers/stayers but among former EU citizens and EU emigrants – the latter referring to EU citizens remaining in the UK post-Brexit. These categories and their implications for perceptions of (EU) citizenship require further investigation. On a perhaps more positive note, the willingness of moderate Brexiters to share their

personal views, however restrained, as part of this research may indicate an appetite for dialogue across these divides. The potential for and nature of such conversations therefore also require further study.

Future research should also examine the potential tensions arising from people's reluctance to continue using the term 'citizenship'. This is especially relevant as attempts to articulate a European political community have invoked rather than reversed categorisation processes between people along gendered, racialised and class-based groupings (Ammaturo 2019; Guerrina, Exadaktylos, and Guerra 2018; Siklodi 2020). Similar sentiments were apparent in the interviews with migrants and activists that this paper drew upon. It would also be important to probe the extent to which acts of citizenship, with their dynamic undertones and focus on right claims (Isin 2008) can genuinely challenge the exclusionary framework of contemporary citizenship. Focus groups may prove to be particularly useful for such research, possibly facilitating an exchange of ideas and allowing for plural views on citizenship, activism, European and national politics to emerge organically and simultaneously.

Considered together, this paper emphasises the limited space for migrant and citizen input in UK and EU politics during crisis, a space that is likely to have diminished further in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis and the Russian war on Ukraine, which swiftly followed Brexit and the numerous debates on European dis/integration. This tumultuous political climate appears to provide policymakers with an(other) opportunity to make centralised decisions within a top-down, largely bureaucratic framework. In the context of 'permacrisis', the exclusionary aspects of EU citizenship perceptions and practices, as seen in (Br)exit citizenship, may serve as a justification for not guaranteeing routes of policy influence for citizen and migrant groups. Therefore, (Br)exit citizenship serves as a warning sign of what may lie ahead – a secondary role for pluralistic citizenship considerations and stronger, more pronounced processes of differentiation and exclusion amidst current and future European socio-political crises.

Notes

1. Ethics approval for fieldwork was secured from the university prior to the fieldwork (reference: FHSS 2018–054).
2. I do not claim representativeness in my data. The references in the brackets to participants other than those quoted in the analysis section are intended to signify the instances where similar themes and ideas were conveyed by others explicitly. There is no space to quote them all in this paper. The number of participants in these brackets does not mean that similar discourse or sentiments did not come up in other interviews, but serve as identification for when equally strong, explicit claims were made elsewhere.
3. It took some time to persuade them to keep the possibility of returning to the UK open – a decision that has proven valuable since the interviews. While six CEE participants left the UK at various points between 2019 and 2022, CEE 2, 17, and 18 returned relatively quickly due to the challenges of securing suitable employment and re-establishing their (sense of) home, which were complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. CEE 4, 14 and 15 originally made plans to return to the UK in late 2022 or 2023 but have not done so at the time of writing (August 2023).
4. There was clearly a difference made by participants between what working/lower classes signified, since in fact many CEE participants suggested they were working class in the pre-interview demographic questionnaire (see Appendix).
5. This issue is also apparent in participants' self-ascriptions to classes in the demographic survey in response to an open-ended question about their social affiliation (see Appendix).

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to my participants for their invaluable contributions to this project. Their insights have resonated with me deeply, and I continue to learn from them. I really appreciate the time and effort that Olivia Rutazibwa, Aleksandra Sojka, Annabel Tremlett and Mark Field have put into our various conversations around this paper and the broader project and for their advice. Special thanks to the members of the CESTE2 project, the Democracy and Citizenship in Education research group and the anonymous reviewers for their extremely helpful comments and feedback.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the CESTE 2 Funding.

ORCID

Nora Siklodi http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0061-5449

References

Ammaturo, F. R. 2019. "Europe and Whiteness: Challenges to European Identity and European Citizenship in Light of Brexit and the 'Refugees/Migrants Crisis." *European Journal of Social Theory* 22 (4): 548–566. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431018783318.

Antonucci, L., and S. Varriale. 2020. "Unequal Europe, Unequal Brexit: How Intra-European Inequalities Shape the Unfolding and Framing of Brexit." *Current Sociology* 68 (1): 41–59. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392119863837.

Baas, T., A. Brücker, and A. Hauptmann. 2009. "Labor Mobility in the Enlarged EU: Who Wins, Who Loses?" In *EU Labor Markets After Post-Enlargement Migration*, edited by M. Kahanec and K. F. Zimmermann, 47–70. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

Barbulescu, R., and A. Favell. 2020. "Commentary: A Citizenship without Social Rights? EU Freedom of Movement and Changing Access to Welfare Rights." *International Migration* 58 (1): 151–165. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12607.

Barnard, C., S. F. Butlin, and F. Costello. 2022. "The Changing Status of European Union Nationals in the United Kingdom Following Brexit: The Lived Experience of the European Union Settlement Scheme." *Social & Legal Studies* 31 (3): 365–388. https://doi.org/10.1177/09646639211032337.

BBC. 2019. "Brexit March: Million Joined Brexit Protest, Organisers Say." Accessed August 5, 2023. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-47678763.

Bellamy, R. 2008. "Evaluating Union Citizenship: Belonging, Rights and Participation within the EU." *Citizenship Studies* 12 (6): 597–611. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020802450676.

Benson, M., and C. Lewis. 2019. "Brexit, British People of Colour in the EU-27 and Everyday Racism in Britain and Europe." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42 (13): 2211–2228. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1599134.

Benson, M., and K. O'Reilly. 2022. "Reflexive Practice in Live Sociology: Lessons from Researching Brexit in the Lives of British Citizens Living in the EU-27." *Qualitative Research* 22 (2): 177–193. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120977795.

Bhambra, G. K. 2017. "Brexit, Trump, and 'Methodological Whiteness': On the Misrecognition of Race and Class." *The British Journal of Sociology* 68 (S1): S214–S232. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12317.

Blachnicka-Ciacek, D., and I. Budginaite-Mackine. 2022. "The Ambiguous Lives of 'The Other Whites': Class and Racialisation of Eastern European Migrants in the UK." *The Sociological Review* 70 (6): 1081–1099. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261221121218.

Blachnicka-Ciacek, B., A. Trąbka, A. Budginaite-Mackine, A. Parutis, and P. Pustulka. 2021. "Do I Deserve to Belong? Migrants' Perspectives on the Debate of Deservingness and Belonging." *Journal of Ethnic & Migration Studies* 47 (17): 3805–3821. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1932444.

Bosniak, L. 2008. *The Citizen and the Alien: Dilemmas of Contemporary Membership*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Brändle, V. K., C. Galpin, and H. J. Trenz. 2018. "Marching for Europe? Enacting European Citizenship as Justice During Brexit." *Citizenship Studies* 22 (8): 810–828. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2018.1531825.

Brändle, V. K., C. Galpin, and H. J. Trenz. 2022. "Brexit as 'Politics of Division': Social Media Campaigning After the Referendum." *Social Movement Studies* 21 (1–2): 234–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2021.1928484.

Dennison, J., and A. Geddes. 2018. "Brexit and the Perils of 'Europeanised' Migration." *Journal of European Public Policy* 25 (8): 1137–1153. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2018.1467953.

Dimitriadis, I., and F. Quassoli. 2021. "Identity, Belonging and Strategic Citizenship. Considerations About Naturalisation Among Italians and Spaniards Living in the EU." *Journal of International Migration & Integration* 23 (3): 1127–1146. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-021-00870-w.

European Commission. 1993. "First Report on Citizenship of the Union." *COM* 93 (702). final. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:1993:0702:FIN:EN:PDF.

Fagan, A., and S. van Kessel. 2023. *The Failure of Remain: Anti-Brexit Activism in the United Kingdom*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Favell, A. 2008. *Eurostars and Eurocities: Free Movement and Mobility in an Integrating Europe*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Favell, A. 2010. "European Identity and European Citizenship in Three "Eurocities": A Sociological Approach to the European Union." *Politique Européenne* n° 30 (1): 187–224. https://doi.org/10.3917/poeu.030.0187.

Frazer-Carroll, M. 2019. "Brexit is Set to Hit People of Colour the Hardest, so Why is Nobody Asking Us What We Think?" *Gal-Dem*. Accessed July 5, 2022. https://gal-dem.com/brexit-is-set-to-hit-people-of-colour-the-hardest-so-why-is-nobody-asking-us-what-we-think/.

Galpin, C. 2022. "Contesting Brexit Masculinities: Pro-European Activists and Feminist EU citizenship." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 60 (2): 301–318. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13216.

Goodman, S. W. 2023. "EU Citizenship: A Tool for Integration?" In *Revising the Integration-Citizenship Nexus in Europe: Sites, Policies, and Bureaucracies of Belonging*, edited by, R. Barbulescu, S. W. Goodman, and L. Pedroza. IMISCOE Research Series. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25726-1_11.

Grütters, C. A. F. M., E. Guild, P. E. Minderhoud, P. V. Oers, and M. H. A. Strik. 2018. *Brexit and Migration: Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs*. Brussels: European Parliament.

The Guardian. 2019. "Government Rejects Brexit Petition to Revoke Article 50 Signed by 5.8 Million People." Accessed August 5, 2023. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/mar/27/government-rejects-petition-to-cancel-brexit-signed-by-58-million-people.

Guerrina, R., T. Exadaktylos, and S. Guerra. 2018. "Gender, Ownership and Engagement During the European Union Referendum: Gendered Frames and the Reproduction of Binaries." *European Journal of Politics and Gender* 1 (3): 387–404. https://doi.org/10.1332/251510818X15395099987095.

Guma, T. 2020. "Turning Citizens into Immigrants: State Practices of Welfare 'Cancellations' and Document Retention Among EU Nationals Living in Glasgow." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46 (13): 2647–2663. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2018.1535313.

Hobolt, S. B., T. J. Leeper, and J. Tilley. 2021. "Divided by the Vote: Affective Polarization in the Wake of the Brexit Referendum." *British Journal of Political Science* 51 (4): 1476–1493. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000125.

Isin, E. F. 2008. "Theorizing Acts of Citizenship." In *Acts of Citizenship*, edited by E. F. Isin and G. M. Nielsen, 15–43. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Isin, E. F., and P. M. Saward. 2013. *Enacting European Citizenship*. Cambridge: Cambridge.

Isin, E. F., and B. S. Turner. 2007. "Investigating Citizenship: An Agenda for Citizenship Studies." *Citizenship Studies* 11 (1): 5–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621020601099773.

Jablonowski, K. 2017. "You Don't Have Rights, You Use Them: Brexit and European Citizenship." *The Sociological Review*, July 13. Accessed July 5, 2022. https://thesociologicalreview.org/collections/sociology-of-brexit/you-dont-have-rights-you-use-them-brexit-and-european-citizenship/.

Juverdeanu, C. 2021. "The Different Gears of EU Citizenship." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 47 (7): 1596–1612. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1632697.

Leddy-Owen, C., J. Dennis, and N. Siklodi. 2022. ""Slaughterhouse Cattle are Treated Better Than this": Exploring the Salience of Everyday Nationhood at British Airports." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 45 (16): 544–567.

Lulle, A., L. Moroşanu, and R. King. 2018. "And Then Came Brexit: Experiences and Future Plans of Young EU Migrants in the London Region." *Population, Space and Place* 24 (1): e2122. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2122.

Maas, W. 2007. *Creating European Citizens*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Maas, W. 2021. "European Citizenship in the Ongoing Brexit Process." *International Studies* 58 (2): 168–183. https://doi.org/10.1177/00208817211002008.

Manolova, P. 2017. "From European 'Free-Movers' to Circular Labourers: Bulgarian Migration Experiences in the UK and Back." *Euxeinos: Governance and Culture in the Black Sea Region* 22:44–59. https://web.s.ebscohost.com/abstract?direct=true&profile=ehost&scope=site&authtype=crawler&jrnl=22960708&AN=123300688&h=fnSMGW6YuNa8Q90MRMDHHKaT7%2bmMRXJ6GG1zDzNjcS%2fa3E7UK68prkXxgfBnj45x8eJ9tu6WJdYKbQIisiaCeA%3d%3d&crl=c&resultNs=AdminWebAuth&resultLocal=ErrCrlNotAuth&crlhashurl=login.aspx%3fdirect%3dtrue%26profile%3dehost%26scope%3dsite%26authtype%3dcrawler%26jrnl%3d22960708%26AN%3d123300688.

Mason, J. 2018. *Qualitative Researching*. 3rd ed. London: Sage.

McMahon, S. 2015. *Immigration and Citizenship in an Enlarged European Union: The Political Dynamics of Intra-EU Mobility*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Migration Observatory. 2022. "EU Migration to and from the UK." https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/eu-migration-to-and-from-the-uk/.

Ni Mhurchú, A. 2016. "Unfamiliar Acts of Citizenship: Enacting Citizenship in Vernacular Music and Language from the Space of Marginalised Intergenerational Migration." *Citizenship Studies* 20 (2): 156–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2015.1132566.

Pietka-Nykaza, E., and D. McGhee. 2020. "Complexities of Polish Migrant's Citizenship Attributions in the Context of Brexit and the Scottish Independence Referendums." *Scottish Affairs* 29 (3): 386–402. https://doi.org/10.3366/scot.2020.0330.

Ranta, R., and N. Nancheva. 2019. "Unsettled: Brexit and European Union Nationals' Sense of Belonging." *Population, Space and Place* 25 (1): e2199. https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2199.

Recchi, E. 2015. *Mobile Europe: The Theory and Practice of Free Movement in the EU*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Seubert, S. 2021. "Reframing Political Space: Pro-European Mobilisation and the Enactment of European Citizenship." *Citizenship Studies* 25 (1): 72–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2020.1860907.

Shilliam, R. 2018. *Race and the Undeserving Poor: From Abolition to Brexit*. Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Agenda Publishing.

Siklodi, N. 2015. “Active Citizenship Through Mobility? Students’ Perceptions of Identity, Rights and Participation in the EU.” *Citizenship Studies* 19 (6–7): 820–835.

Siklodi, N. 2020. *The Politics of Mobile Citizenship in Europe*. London: Palgrave.

Slootmaeckers, K. 2019. “Constructing European Union Identity Through Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality Promotion: Crises and Shifting Othering Processes in the European Union Enlargement.” *Political Studies Review* 18 (3): 346–361. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929919877624.

Sredanovic, D. 2022. “The Tactics and Strategies of Naturalisation: UK and EU27 Citizens in the Context of Brexit.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 48 (13): 3095–3112. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1844003.

Turner, J. 2016. “(En)gendering the Political: Citizenship from Marginal Spaces.” *Citizenship Studies* 20 (2): 141–155. https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2015.1132569.

van Kessel, S., and A. Fagan. 2022. “Mobilising Around Europe: A Conceptual Framework and Introduction to the Special Section.” *Social Movement Studies* 21 (1–2): 169–179. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2022.2029392.

Vathi, Z., and R. Trandafoiu. 2020. “EU Nationals in the UK After BREXIT. Political Engagement Through Discursive Awareness, Reflexivity and (In)action.” *Journal of Language and Politics* 19 (3): 479–497. https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.19028.vat.

Vathi, Z., and R. Trandafoiu. 2022. “A Post-National EU Diaspora? Political Mobilization of EU Citizens in the UK Post-Brexit.” *Global Networks* 22 (4): 752–765. https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12373.

Vathi, Z., and R. Trandafoiu. 2023. “The Politics of EU Diaspora in the UK Post-Brexit: Civic Organisations’ Multi-Scalar Lobbying and Mobilisation Strategies.” *European Political Science* 22 (1): 28–43. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-022-00407-4.