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European Migration to the United Kingdom:

The Belief in Free Movement Post-Brexit

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Abstract

After the UK left the EU in January 2021, the concept of free movement changed for Europeans. The ability to travel cross-border the European nations has been limited between the borders of the UK and mainland Europe. Although Europeans are still allowed to enter as tourists for six months, they must now apply for visas for a more extended stay. This thesis uses interview data to examine the different experiences and beliefs of European citizens' right to free movement after Brexit. Ten participants have shared their migration experience from an EU country to the UK. Reasons for migration are relationships, job or study opportunities. This thesis includes my migration story from the Netherlands to the UK in a semi-autoethnographic methodology. The main finding of this thesis is the different experiences and beliefs around the post-Brexit free movement. There is a hierarchical structure of visa procedures, and within every level, there are layers of factors based on individual privileges. Although every person has a right to apply for a visa, individual's position and, therefore, the privileges impact the accessibility of means and the challenges in procedures.

Keywords: Brexit, European citizenship, Free Movement

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1. Introduction

If we are hit by something, we become conscious of something. Those who do not come up against the materiality of the borders would not recognise the materiality of the right to move and thus would not be able to enact the ethics embedded in the materiality of the world and its possibilities of access, movement and residence. (Ahmed, 2013)

While walking towards the town hall of Redbridge[1], to apply for a notice of marriage[2], I am questioning whether or not I know my fiancé well enough. What were the names of the two cats again? An interrogation like this has never been my strong suit. Only to think this is the beginning of a lengthy procedure, and, as a born European citizen, I would have never expected to be in. The town hall is a Renaissance-style building built in the early twentieth century. Although the buildings are mesmerising, entering a government building can take away the charms when one can only focus on the reasoning behind the visitation. As soon as my fiancé and I reach the entrance, security asks us the reason behind our visitation and the proof of identification. After waiting for an hour, we see the registrar walking towards us. The moment she reaches us, my fiancé starts giving her a detailed story about the moment we met until now and our reason for wanting to get married. His move made me question whether our story sounded suspicious. I awkwardly smile at the registrar, hoping our story will be convincing. The registrar politely stopped my fiancé and invited me for a separate interrogation. The stress of the interrogation made me give her long extended answers, which our solicitor later told us explicitly not to do. She asked me different questions, including about my parents' approval, my plans after moving to the UK, and even the religious obligations of an Islamic marriage. After sitting for an hour with the registrar, she politely guided us to the exit. We left the town hall with mixed feelings. On the one hand, we are very sure of the genuineness of this relation, but on the other hand, we do not know whether the registrar was convinced. My fiancé later received a letter from the Redbridge council informing us that we were directed to the Home Office, the British government department for Immigration, meaning we had to go through the extended procedure to prove our relationship. The registrar was unconvinced, which gave us a lot of insecurity and anxiety about the procedure.

In the 2016 referendum over the United Kingdom's (UK) membership in the European Union (EU), discussions arose about how Brexit would impact migration to the UK. In January 2021, the UK was no longer a member of the EU. Now, after more than two years, the predicaments are showing. What does this mean for European citizens' right to free movement to the UK? The concept of the free

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[1] Redbridge is one of the seven boroughs in East London.
[2] In the UK, a notice of marriage must be given before the registry to give the community room to raise objections to the marriage. This notice stems from the historical assurance that the marriage is not bigamous or illegal. Without the notice of marriage, getting married legally is impossible.

movement of bodies has created a distinction between internal[3] and external[4] EU borders (Bigo, 2009, p. 580). In the mid-eighties, nations within the EU border stepwise led to an agreement for the gradual abolition of checks at the borders and enlargement of the Schengen Area, which resulted in free cross-border movement of all signatory states (Havlíček, Jeřábek & Dokoupil, 2018, p. 14-16). This right of free movement through the Schengen Agreement is for individuals[5] living in the territory of the EU (Bigo, 2009, p. 579). The right of free movement has allowed millions of European citizens to move effortlessly across borders to change their lives and careers, look for work in a foreign city, study, retire, and so on. The old nation-state society no longer appears inevitable as one's ultimate identity or the framework to live out your life (Favell, 2008, p. 8). With the impact of globalised social networks and the growing usage of the internet, nation-state borders have become more blurred. Although the UK was never a part of the Schengen area, European citizens still had the right to free movement because of the UK's contingent on the EU law (European Commission, 2015, p. 4). European citizens only underwent a minimum verification check on their identities, like an identity card or a passport (European Commission, 2015, p.4). They did not have to apply for a visa for extended stays.

However, a political phenomenon such as Brexit has been deemed a violation of free movement or effortless cross-border mobility. Although, one can argue that the whole Schengen agreement has always violated the external EU nations' right to free movement. Nevertheless, this thesis will focus on the changes in mobility post-Brexit through the lived experience of European citizens migrating to the UK. Since Brexit was official in January 2021, the decades of blurred borders have turned around to how it was before the agreements of Schengen and, in particular, EU law agreements between mainland Europe and the UK. Although many studies predicted the afterpains of Brexit, this thesis mainly focuses on the lived experience in the past two years since the official leave of the UK. The experiences of post-Brexit migration in everyday life will add to sociological research on the EU borders politics and the discussions around Brexit. The following research question will be assessed: How do European citizens migrating to the UK post-Brexit give meaning to free movement? This thesis will examine changes and difficulties around free movement and participants' pre and post-Brexit privileges derived from the interview data. Lastly, a hierarchical structure will be analysed based on the individual's privileges around free movement post-Brexit. This thesis includes my experience and a small portrayal of my ontological insecurity[6], which was the initial motive for this research.

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[3] Internal borders are referred to borders of countries in the Schengen agreement.

[4] External borders are referred to as national borders that also serve as the outer borders of the Union.

[5] These are citizens of the Member States of the European Union, plus all third-country nationals residing legally within Europe's borders.

[6] In the theoretical framework, the concept of ontological security, by Anthony Giddens, is explained as a stable mental state derived from a sense of continuity regarding the events in people's lives. This explains ontological insecurity as the insecurity of this continuity.

2. Theoretical framework

This chapter explains a few concepts relevant to this research's theoretical context. The theoretical framework first sheds light on Europe and its borders, how the theory explains the free movement and a general explanation of a European identity.

2.1. Europe: Borders and Free Movement

2.1.1 Borders

Rumford (2012, p. 888) describes borders as "an instrument of exclusion constructed between two nation-states", which leads to questions such as 'what constitutes a border?', 'where are borders to be found? and especially 'who is doing the bordering?'. The meaning of borders changed with the Schengen Agreement in the mid-eighties when Europe created a trade and travel-free zone for all members. Geographically, all the member-states of the EU have their borders, but the concept of borders got another meaning to the countries outside Europe (Havlíček, Jeřábek & Dokoupil, 2018, p. 2). The meaning of this extra border, outside of the nation-state's borders, created a new control point outside the EU border for every individual entering the EU borders, whether it is a European citizen or a national of other countries (Havlíček, Jeřábek & Dokoupil, 2018, p. 2). The authors describe borders as the main function of a control line, where "the movement of people and goods is controlled" (Havlíček, Jeřábek & Dokoupil, 2018, p. 2). The state's accurate overview of people entering the territories and hence border control is justified as a significant safety effect (Havlíček, Jeřábek & Dokoupil, 2018, p. 2). Whereas in the Schengen area, this control line fades, and the borders, as described earlier, do not apply. Thus, European citizens who are travelling within the Schengen area can cross borders anytime and anywhere (Havlíček, Jeřábek & Dokoupil, 2018, p. 3).

Nonetheless, the EU's open, integrating space still has many boundaries, such as national and regional cultures or ways of being (Favell, 2008, pp. 10-11). As mentioned in the introduction, the UK was never a part of the official Schengen agreement. However, due to EU laws and the UK being a part of the EU, exceptional agreements were made where the free movement[7] to and from the UK existed. These socially constructed borders never replaced the cultural borders, which resonates with the following theory of identity and citizenship, explaining the reasoning behind Brexit and Europe's *pseudo*-collective identity, or a pan-European identity.

2.1.2. Free Movement

Taking the train to Brussels is almost as easy as a journey from Rotterdam to Amsterdam, without any border control, which is a way to understand free movement. As a right attached to

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[7] The term free movement, as mentioned here, includes movements of people, goods, capital, social practices, and ideas etc.

European citizens and their family members, free movement is traditionally considered an essential right (Cambien, Kochenov & Muir, 2020, p. 4). The practical easiness of this concept, yet the complexity of the legislation and politics behind it, makes this concept multi-layered but important to understand European citizens' freedom of movement better.

Favell (2011, p. 16) describes how freedom of movement[8] is part of European citizens' everyday lives. Reasons for moving across the border may vary from romantic reasons to career-related or just visiting friends you met whilst travelling. The author explains that freedom of movement of persons may be the most remarkable achievement of the EU (Favell, 2011, p. 3). The free movement of individuals has allowed European citizens to move effortlessly across borders (Favell, 2008, p. 8). Because of these 'blurred borders' and the possibility of free movement, individuals can build lives – careers, networks, relationships, families – beyond their nation-state that once defined "personal identity and personal history" (Favell, 2011, p. 3). Nation-states, and therefore the borders, no longer appear as one's ultimate identity (Favell, 2008, p. 8). Although we can discuss that every nation-state still has its autonomy, the right of free movement outside the nation-state borders is a "unique legal and political construction in the modern world, in which one has the right to move, travel, live, work, study and retire without frontiers", and where restricting this opportunity is being considered as discrimination (Favell, 2008, p. 3). Besides discrimination, any change in social space can shape and reshape relationships and interactions.

2.1.3. European identity

Lastly, to understand Europe and its borders, it is essential to comprehend the concept of European identity. Although different scholars attempt to identify the idea, it remains a complexity that revolves mainly around Europeans' shared sense of belonging, historical connections, and political and cultural values (Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009, p. 6). While there is not one definition explaining the European identity exactly, certain rights serve as a unifying force contributing to stability and leading to a shared identity. This stability reflects the right of free movement, which translates into the more profound belief of being entitled to these rights (Favell, 2011, p. 4). However, if this stability were to dissipate, it can question the primary factor that unites the European identity. COVID-19 has shed light on this matter, as the EU member states unblurred the European borders by reinforcing nation-state borders, highlighting the potential fragility and fluidity of European identity in the face of external challenges.

Europe has a division in how nation-states adopt the European identity through European collective governing rules regarding market transactions, single currency, and established European courts and sorts (Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009, p. 132). Therefore, the nation-states' stability reflects

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[8] The terms free movement and freedom of movement are used interchangeably and do not have a separate meaning in this thesis.

the belief in a European identity towards its nation-members. Checkel and Katzenstein argue that not everyone in Europe will likely adopt a European identity and that this opportunity "tends to be the most privileged strata of society: managers, professionals, white-collar workers, educated and young people" (2009, p. 133). Moreover, the political discourse on a European identity also reflects the desire to avoid alienating the core groups of Europeans (Checkel & Katzenstein, 2009, p.134). Concluding, a European identity is complex and based on many factors of the nation-state and the positionality of each individual to believe in a shared identity which upholds a belief system of given fundamental rights through the creation of the European Union.

2.2. Brexit: Ontological (in)security and Fragile Transnationalism

2.2.1. Brexit

In 2013, David Cameron, former Prime Minister of the UK, gave a speech regarding the referendum on British membership of the EU. This speech and, thereupon, the referendum led to a historical decision of Britain to leave the EU. The speech started by mentioning the achievement of the historical aim for peace within the European continent. According to Cameron (2013), peace was achieved, but securing prosperity and the support of its people was needed. Although many reasons were given in favour of the referendum, the former Prime Minister also acknowledged that hundreds of thousands of British people now take for granted their right to work, live or retire in any other EU country (Cameron, 2013). However, Cameron (2013) describes that they should split with the EU for the good of Europe and the better of Britain. "I do not just want a better deal for Britain, I want a better deal for Europe too" (Cameron, 2013), reasoning that resembles a relational split with the quote 'it is not you, but this is for the best for both of us'. In this speech, a strong nationalist feeling is created towards continental Europe and the independent British Island that, according to Cameron, was a strong force for Europe for decades. It is not the first time a nation feeds its citizenship with a shared national identity based on nation-state borders.

Although Europe consists of nationals of all European member states, we can certainly speak of political privileges under the guise of collective European citizenship and, thus, European citizenship (Cambien, Kochenov & Muir, 2020, p.2). However, with Brexit, this so-called European citizenship came under stress. Cambien, Kochenov and Muir (2020, p. 3) argue that, in some sense, European citizenship emerges as almost in danger, which allows us to understand the significance and the value of European citizenship. During the negotiations of Brexit, after Britain voted to leave the EU, the Council and the Commission stated that their foremost priorities would be for those affected by Brexit to agree on guarantees to protect the rights of European citizens and their family members (Cambien, Kochenov & Muir, 2020, p. 2-3). Nevertheless, the UK explicitly wanted to limit the pre-existing rights of European citizens, particularly their rights to free movement and residence (Cambien, Kochenov & Muir, 2020, p. 2-3). This is, therefore, one of the most pressing topics in the current European context,

which equally impacts UK and European nationals and their family members and questions the rights of free movement post-Brexit.

2.2.2. Ontological security

Ontological security refers to 'security as being' (Krahmann, 2018, p. 358). Ontological security is a concept developed by Anthony Giddens (1991, p. 92), who describes it as "the confidence that most people have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the social and material surrounding". Browning (2018, p. 338) explains that anchored belief systems, like the belief in free movement within socially constructed European borders, can break down, impacting the emergence of so-called "existential anxieties". As mentioned, Brexit is an example of an external event that can or does impact people's ontological security. This explains how people cope with such anxieties.

Ontological security does not necessarily derive from individuals seeking to secure the coherence of self but rather the coherence and stability of their broader social context (Browning, 2018, p. 338). This also means securing the various sets of collective signifiers, e.g. national identity, with which they then identify and provide a basis for an agency (Browning, 2018, p. 338), which will be examined later by discussing the theory of identity and citizenship. Furthermore, Browning (2018, p. 339) assesses the results of Brexit on individuals changing behaviour in their everyday routines. Therefore, the idea of 'taken-for-granted practices' provides this sense of ontological security and is thus experienced as 'fragile'. The author relates this concept to the results of the Brexit referendum, which created ontological insecurity for supporters who voted to remain, to which this concept can be shifted to the ontological 'in'-security of relocating from the EU to the UK post-Brexit.

2.2.3. Fragile transnationalism

Transnationalism is a social process by which immigrants build social fields that link their country of origin and their country of settlement (Schiller, Basch & Blanc-Szanton, 1992, p. 10). However, Nehring and Hu (2022, p. 184) explain that in the era of globalisation, transnationalism is debated as "the emergence of post-national forms of social solidarity, belonging, and citizenship". Nowadays, we can speak of the many societal benefits of globalisation. Nevertheless, the rise of nationalist politics opposes the idea of a growing globalised world (Nehring & Hu, 2022, p. 185). As the British conservative party put forward, the idea of leaving Europe can be seen as an example of a 'withdrawal' from growing globalisation and the quasi-blurred borders. Brexit may be seen as reasoning for what might be described as 'fragile transnationalism' (Nehring & Hu, 2022, p. 184), where a political phenomenon such as Brexit is a siege for growing globalisation and, thus, transnationalism.

Furthermore, with fragile transnationalism comes transnational immobility, which is explained as the interruption of transnational mobility infrastructures (Nehring & Hu, 2022, p. 186). The post-Brexit era gives a new meaning to the service towards European citizens, which Nehring and Hu (2022, p. 186) explain as service and support scarcity. The scarcity reflects the limitations for European citizens

of settling in the UK with the same ease as before Britain left the EU. European citizens post-Brexit must apply for a residency visa for an extended stay of six months and longer or settlement due to work, study or marriage. Additionally, these applications often come with long and expensive trials, where solicitors are often needed. Not everyone can pay for this, which creates a new group of privileged and less privileged European migrants to the UK.

David Cameron's comment about British people and their right to work, live or retire in any other EU country links to Nehring & Hu's (2022) fragile transnationalism. The researchers explain that in the era of globalisation, transnationalism is debated as "the emergence of post-national forms of social solidarity, belonging, and citizenship" (Nehring & Hu, 2022, p. 184). Although European member states retained their nation-state and hence cultural borders, European citizens took for granted their privileges of the cross-border movement. Henceforward, Browning (2018, p. 338) describes that "ontological security derives from securing the various sets of collective signifiers, e.g. national identity, with which they then identify and provide a basis for an agency", like free movement and the freedom to work, study or reside wherever an individual pleases. That agency may, in return, give an idea of a shared identity based on these collective signifiers. Can we speak of ontological 'in'security whenever this agency disappears?

3. Methodological framework

I used an inductive, qualitative approach for this research using semi-structured interviews and semi-autoethnography. With the recent developments around Brexit, I assessed the lived experience of individuals holding European citizenship and migrating to the UK after Brexit. This approach aims to gain in-depth knowledge about the sociological impact of Brexit on European citizens.

Although Brexit has been a recurring topic of conversation since 2013, the political, economic and sociological consequences are recent and, therefore, very interesting to study from different perspectives. Researchers have been analysing the impact around EU borders, the consequences of the phenomenon, political analysis, and general reflections on Brexit. This research is exceptional because it focuses on people's experiences where the phenomenon's consequences are noticeable in individuals' everyday lives. The most noticeable change is the right of free movement, which includes movement for work, study and residency. Because of this complex political change, I am profoundly interested in the afterpains of post-Brexit migration from EU member countries to the UK.

3.1. Sampling, data collection and analysis

In 2022, approximately 224,000 European citizens migrated to the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2022). According to the Office for National Statistics (2022), the migration of European nationals to the UK remained stable in the last year, accounting for 21% of the total immigration. This thesis' primary data collection method was conducting semi-structured interviews of approximately ten European citizens who initiated or are in the process of migrating to the UK post-Brexit[9]. Due to the research's inductive qualitative approach and the narrow time frame, the anticipated sample size is limited to ten. This thesis mainly focuses on the post-Brexit era, and therefore, individuals who already migrated with the EU settlement scheme[10] are excluded from this research.
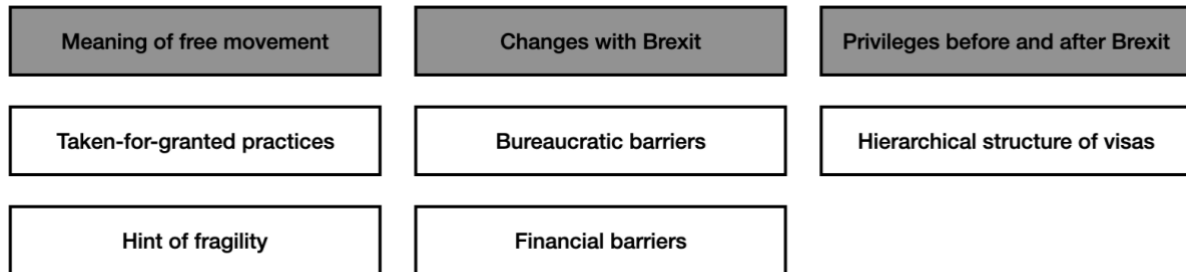
The participants are individuals relocating from an EU member state to the UK for at least one year, regardless of the reason. These individuals are all holding European passports. For the relevance of this research, it is crucial to know the citizenship status of these participants so that the analyses are based on the difference in the free movement for European citizens. Besides their citizenship status, participants were asked about the visa procedure, their current status in this process, their political opinion about Brexit, their citizenship and ethnicity, their age[11] and gender.

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[9] For this thesis, the post-Brexit era is defined as the period from the official establishment of the UK exiting the European Union dating from January 2021 onwards.

[10] The EU Settlement Scheme is a Home Office scheme to provide European citizens and their families status who wish to stay in the UK after Brexit (Sturge & Wilkens, 2020).

[11] There is no reason for this research to include participants younger than 18 and therefore all participants must be of the age of 18 or older.

To gain access to the data, I used my network to find participants for this research, and through the snowball effect, I reached out to other participants. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between thirty to sixty minutes. The interviews have been audio recorded and saved in a password-protected external hard drive. Afterwards, the interviews were transcribed and coded. The following three themes are categorised based on the qualitative coding:

Meaning of free movement	Changes with Brexit	Privileges before and after Brexit
Taken-for-granted practices	Bureaucratic barriers	Hierarchical structure of visas
Hint of fragility	Financial barriers	

3.2. Positionality, ethics and privacy

One of the reasons for choosing this topic is my experience of the changing situation regarding free movement post-Brexit. I relocated from the Netherlands to the UK and applied for a spouse visa. I am aware of my bias[12] as a researcher, and because of this, I choose to include my own experience as part of this research. Therefore, I used a combination of semi-autoethnography and interviews as methods for this research. Cultural Anthropologist Reed-Danahay (1997) is the first to explore the link between ethnography and autobiography and explains how autoethnography both reflects and transforms identities and cultural meanings. According to Reed-Danahay (1997), autoethnography is "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context". The writer explicitly emphasises not adopting the objective outsider but rather entailing the elements of the researcher's own life when writing about others. Although I was transparent about my own situation towards the participants, this was not the main focus of the interviews, nor will it be this research's main topic.[13] Instead, the thesis has the storyline of my migration process, whereby the participants' experiences and beliefs are centralised in working towards the conclusion of the research.

There are no possible ethical concerns for this research. However, this topic involved the risk of causing negative emotions in participants and taking precautionary measures is essential. Therefore, participants were asked to sign an information and consent form[14] before the interviews were taken.

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[12] This bias refers to my experience around migrating to the UK having a negative experience.
[13] I specifically use the term semi-autoethnographer because of my focus on the participants rather than using my own experience as the main subject of this research.
[14] The information and consent form, and the ethics checklist can be found in appendix 2.

3.3. Biography participants

Bellow follows a short description of the participants and a more detailed context of each participant is attached to appendix 1. The participants names are anonymised and therefore will be cited by pseudonyms.

Participant	Name	Age	Nationality	Reason migration
1	Anisa	28	Italian, Algerian roots	Relationship
2	Tuba	26	Dutch, Turkish roots	Relationship
3	Samya	27	Dutch, Egyptian Surinamese roots	Relationship
4	Daya	25	Dutch, Moluccan roots	Work
5	Lei	24	Italian Japanese	Study
6	Vera	29	Dutch	Work
7	Laila	36	Dutch, Moroccan roots	Work
8	Zoé	27	French	Relationship
9	Inès	27	Dutch, Moroccan roots	Study
10	Anne	34	Dutch	Relationship

4. Findings and analysis

4.1. Meaning of free movement

4.1.1. Taken-for-granted practices

February 2022, I am taking the train towards King's Cross St. Pancras station in London to see my fiancé again. I have been back and forth many times, but this time I was being questioned at customs. "What is the purpose of your visit?" Although I know my reason is valid and I have the right to travel, the questioning made me very nervous. I gave him a stammering answer, "I am coming to see my fiancé again". He looked at me, and we locked eyes. "Alright, here you go". Why did it feel like I was not welcome? Why did I feel so nervous? Crossing the blurred borders of the European continent has never felt as challenging as it was at that moment. We hop on the train, and a beautiful journey of 3,5 hours from Rotterdam to London starts. Enough time to reflect on my previous feelings. Why did it make me nervous, and why was I surprised by the questions asked? I have travelled in Europe many times and expected this journey to be the same. But it felt different this time. London felt further away than it ever felt before. As Cambien et al. (2020, p. 4) mention, free movement has been considered an essential right for European citizens, and that essential right was challenged. What does free movement mean to European citizens? Specifically, how were free movement practices in the period before Brexit?

In the mid-eighties, Europe was gifted with the freedom of movement. Although the concept feels like an old phenomenon for many, the free movement of persons was introduced officially in 1992 (Marzocchi, 2022). The free movement of persons made the nation-borders in the European continent blur. For me and the participants, the concept of free movement has always been a part of our lives. Lei has been growing up travelling a lot. For him, travelling to different countries and cities during high school and university was not a problem:

> I think that you notice as well how much of a privilege [it] is actually to have a European passport. The fact that you can move without a visa [...]. But absolutely, yes, it's been a way sometimes it's almost a no-brainer, like, you don't even think about it. Oh, yes, I can go to the Netherlands to study. Why can you go to the Netherlands to study? You know, you don't even think about it. (Lei)

Lei did not ask the questions of 'why' when he was travelling from a young age, exploring different cities to study. After his master's study in the Netherlands, he dug his options in the UK. As he describes it, he got accepted to Oxford University in the UK with great luck. With his past experience, going to another country for him was a 'no-brainer'. Like Lei, Anisa took the opportunity to participate in the Erasmus Exchange programme as a student. These educational programmes are designed around the right of free movement and allow European nationals to explore other cities within the EU borders.

Anisa reflects positively on her experience with Erasmus Exchange in Norway. Creating these opportunities for European citizens in the name of free movement establishes an idea of a collective identity. Zoé explains that in high school, the discussion "do you feel French, or do you feel European" occurred regularly in conversations. "I also did Erasmus [Exchange programme], and Erasmus is the thing that makes you feel European" (Zoé).

Lei grew up going to different EU countries, Tuba always considered the UK an option to live or study in, and Anisa and Zoé did their Erasmus programme. Daya also dreamed of studying abroad, especially in the UK. None of them saw any hindrance from this. Anisa moved from Italy to Germany after marrying her Scottish husband. Since her work was remote, she was not bound to one country and could easily relocate from Italy to Germany. Inès worked twice in the UK before Brexit became official:

> It was so nice, and I just went to England. I distributed my cv, and I immediately found a job pretty much without thinking. I could even start without having my national insurance number. [...] Everything was just easy. I did not have to think about it. I booked my tickets, got on the flight, and started working after three days. [...] It went very flawless. (Inès)

A no-brainer, just like Lei mentioned before. Many participants have experienced different practical advantages of holding a European passport. Europe created a shared identity and the belief that free movement is a part of European's everyday life and, therefore, almost taken for granted.

4.1.2. A hint of fragility

Nevertheless, this essential right showed its fragility. COVID-19 was the first time Europeans encountered the fragility of their right to free movement since the freedom of movement was introduced in the mid-eighties. During the pandemic, travelling was nowhere as easy as it was before. Borders became much more apparent, and it had its toll on the growing globalised world we are living in. As Havlíček, Jeřábek and Dokoupil (2018, p. 2) describe border control as justification for a significant safety effect. The pandemic was an understandable reason for stricter border control.

There was a period during which my fiancé and I did not see each other for eight months. The borders were physically closed, and because we were in our early stages, proving the 'seriousness' of our travel and relationship was complicated. Tuba does not feel that her freedom of movement is impacted when travelling to London to see her boyfriend. Still, she did notice that travelling during the pandemic was an extraordinary experience. At customs, they asked her, "What are you doing here?" and "Are you thinking of living here? Because you have been visiting quite a few times". Sarcastically, she told the customs officer she was happy in the Netherlands. "I think that COVID-19 was a great life lesson!" comments Laila, and Zoé agrees that people with many privileges should experience difficulties like travel restrictions. Laila talks about the travel restrictions towards the Europeans during the pandemic:

And suddenly you could not go to certain countries, which also depended on the country you are coming from. Suddenly, we were not allowed to travel to Africa; that was the moment that I thought it was such a great experience to finally feel how it is not being allowed to enter [a country]. I was also bothered by the fact that I started to question just then about who is deciding for us to travel or not able to travel somewhere? (Laila)

This a contemplative question that might not have been asked if the situation had not changed. Although practices were not questioned outside of COVID-19, individuals know the differences between being a European citizen and not. Their European identity is something to relish, which makes them aware of their differences compared to other people.

I have had an elective course about Borderlands during my studies, about Borders and what borders are. And not just literally the physical border, but the experience around that. [...] What does it mean to have a European passport? And what does it mean to have an Indian passport? (Samya)

Like Samya, all participants were well aware of the position of holding a European passport. Since Daya researched more about her heritage, she started to reflect more on the passport's meaning:

It weighs heavy on me, you know. I know I have my [Dutch] passport, and I am happy with it. I remember flying from London back to Amsterdam when I saw the queues for EU passport holders and non-EU citizens. There was a super long queue [at the non-EU side], and then a lady guided those who held an EU passport to follow a certain queue where you eventually can scan your passport and face while going through the customs, and then you are out in no time. It makes you realise, like, wow, it certainly has such benefits. (Daya)

Daya has many friends who are not fortunate with an EU passport, and she has many encounters where she can physically see the differences in opportunities that she has, unlike her friends. For Samya, it is the same when she compares her situation to her family, who have Egyptian citizenship. Even though Daya is very well aware of the differences and, at the same time has her critical points towards the EU, she also acknowledges and 'enjoys' the privileges that come with it. On the other hand, Laila feels somewhat ashamed sometimes because of the differences created by having a particular passport.

Being able to travel cross-border, make plans or even think about new challenges outside their national borders is a straightforward everyday practice for Europeans. Many Europeans already experience the ease of these rights. At the same time, the differences are being felt, but nonetheless, the

taken-for-granted continues. Since the pandemic, these taken-for-granted practices have been challenged, and thereupon Brexit added another layer to the fragility of the right to free movement.

4.2. Brexit: Difficulties and challenges in free movement

4.2.1. Bureaucratic and financial barriers

After safely arriving in London, my fiancé and I are discussing our next steps. The families were introduced, and we decided to stay in London due to my partner's career. I agreed to start a visa process for me. With the confidence of our relationship and my European citizenship, we did not see any reason for stress or problems. At the same time, I used my network of people to ask about their relocation from the Netherlands to the UK. A family friend told me not to worry and advised me to go through the UK government website. It is a simple WhatsApp conversation that we had. She sent me the link to the government website and told me it should be a click on a button to arrange my relocation and stay. I reminded her of the recent changes due to Brexit, and she told me she did not realise that it would impact citizens. I click on the government website, and worry starts when I notice the overload of information and the many different visa applications you can apply for. I started questioning whether this process was as easy as I had assumed. We looked at the website and realised that we must pay around two to three thousand pounds for my spouse visa: something free and a click of a button just one year ago.

Inès' story is similar to Lei's; they both got accepted at a Russel Group institution, an equivalent of Ivy League in the US. Getting into these universities is known to be challenging. For both of them, this was a chance they did not want to miss out on. Inès and Lei had to go through bureaucratic changes due to Brexit. Inès' past experience is significantly different from her current situation:

> I worked twice in England before, and that went very easily. I only needed a national insurance number, which I still have. But since Brexit, it just has become difficult to stay in England. Especially in my field, there are so many opportunities, so I saw it as a good chance just to pay the fees for my studies, hoping to get a [student] visa. But even that was impossible because I would not spend enough hours in England to be eligible for that [university] fee. To be eligible for the student visa, you must be in England for an x number of hours, and unfortunately, I was just under that, literally with just a few hours. [...] Without a visa, employers won't hire you; nevertheless, that was what I noticed when I applied for work in England. In this field, it's really different– if they saw you didn't have a work visa or you didn't have a graduate visa or a student visa, they would end the conversation immediately, just because it would be too much of a hassle for them. (Inès)

For Inès, it was a painful transition from not experiencing difficulties coming to the UK and starting to work to struggling to get a student visa while studying at a top-notch university in the UK.

Even though Inès sees the benefits of pursuing a career after her studies in the UK, she also recognises the difficulties that come with the post-Brexit era of Europe, making her question what is worth to risk. "I am not actively searching in England anymore, purely because every time I have been asked about having a work visa or not [...] I really feel betrayed by the UK". Her experience of betrayal reflects on Favell's (2008, p. 3) description of restricting citizens from opportunities being considered discrimination.

Tuba, Samya and Zoé experience the same difficulty as I do. Samya has a British partner, Tuba is dating a British man, and Zoé's partner Parveen lives and works in the UK. All three of them recognise the changes and difficulties after Brexit. The conversation quickly changed into me advising them on their next step in a spouse visa and explaining the amount of fee I already paid. Samya was shocked to hear about the expenses of a visa application. Her partner tried to get a work visa in the Netherlands but was unsuccessful. They live separately because her husband cannot stay longer than three months within six months.

On the other hand, Samya is overwhelmed with the new regulations due to Brexit. She is still unsure whether she wants to relocate to the UK: "The problem is that now he is back in England, is that we are in an in-between phase, like– he told me today as well, just to come to England, but you know, it is not that easy to make that decision". For Tuba, the decision is hard to make because, due to Brexit, she does not get to 'taste' how it is to live in England. Stepping into a relationship is already complicated, and considering relocation for your relationship gives an extra dimension to the situation. For the four of us, these matters are constantly discussed with our partners.

Zoé wants to move in July and enter the country as a tourist to stay with her partner for a few months. Although she can remain a tourist for six months, she is highly stressed that something will go wrong. "And I plan to move to the UK. Well, I would actually move my stuff in early July, but not officially. I am a bit scared of being asked by the border force why is your trunk so full? whose bike is that?" This feeling of anxiousness reflects on the ontological security, which Giddens explains as the confidence in the continuity of self-identity and the constancy of the social and material surrounding (1991, p. 92). This experience is a shift from security to insecurity, where the previously taken-for-granted practices show their fragility, and the same practices question the continuity of self-identity and the constancy of the social and material surrounding. Elaborating on insecurity, Browning explains existential anxieties for breaking down anchored belief systems (2018, p. 338). An anchored belief system for Europeans is the right to free movement. As seen with Zoé, changes around free movement made her question her ease of free movement and added a layer of fear in her pre-Brexit everyday practices.

All three of them also consider looking into the options of work visas which might be easier to get, primarily when being sponsored by the company. Like Inès' case, Daya also explores working in the UK, as she fell in love with London last year. Daya's biggest struggle right now is that she would love to work for a non-profit organisation or an NGO, but often these companies do not have the means

to sponsor a visa. "A lot of times I am scrolling down Glassdoor, and I see many relevant roles, but I just know already that I won't make a chance because I am a European citizen." According to Daya, another option could be a big corporate organisation, but she clarified that it feels wrong as they often operate unethically. The exciting dream of last year also starts fading for her when logistics are harder to arrange.

For Laila and Vera, the situation is different. Laila works as a doctor in the health sector, and just like in the rest of the world, the demand for health workers is currently high. Laila got sponsored by her work and got many benefits from it, like free healthcare. The same goes for Vera, who works for one of the big four consultancy businesses. "A work visa cost me, I think, around seven or 780 pounds or something. Well, that was ok for me when I had to pay for it, although I must say, I did get that amount reimbursed by my employer again". Vera's company is already international, so it was not a significant change for them. They have much experience with sponsoring employee visas. However, both recognised some challenges in applying for the visa. Vera's company has a third party arranging most of her administration, but Laila had to figure out the logistics herself:

> I had to sort that [visa] out myself. [...] You do not get enough guidance, so you must figure things out yourself. I must say that the visa procedure was fairly simple, but where it was not simple was the fact that a lot depended on the system. If you don't have a specific piece of paper that you need, you won't get the other one either. (Laila)

Laila sat down with her supervisor from work to go through the visa application, and she noticed that even he struggled with the constantly changing legislation. International employees come together at work and help each other with their visa applications. Laila realises that, because of the rapid changes, it is the best way to help each other out. Laila made an essential point: I should examine whether things have changed because of Brexit or whether the British bureaucracy is how it always was.

In the participants' experiences, the two main changes have been bureaucratic and financial. Before Brexit, no fees or nominal fees were involved with relocating to the UK. The political change challenged people more as the visa fees are high. Bureaucratically, many of them face the challenges of applying for a visa. Laila's point of Britain's chaotic bureaucratic processes must be separated from the difficulties of Brexit. Nevertheless, many Europeans did not face a visa procedure before, so facing these difficulties again challenges their taken-for-granted practices and, in some cases, impacts their relocation decision.

4.3. Brexit: Change in privileges

After an unsuccessful meeting with the registrar, we were redirected to the Home Office to prove the legitimacy of our relationship. Ironically, my partner and I still prepared a couple of days for this interview to be on the same page. We had to know all the dates we met to the name of the hotels we stayed in. It was unpleasant to realise that many people go through similar processes more often than I would as an individual holding an EU passport. Many times, I convinced myself that I should not be in this position. Still, it reminded me again that these past privileges were given and are not necessarily de facto my right, even though, like many others, I have considered it a fundamental right.

We enter the building of the Home Office. At the entrance is a security checkpoint with two security guards, a psychological and physical border created between me and a government entity, reminding me of Rumford's description of borders as an instrument of exclusion (2012, p. 888). This border creates an unequal position between me and the state. Finally, after waiting for an hour, it was my turn. I enter a separate space, where I am asked to put all my stuff and electronics in a locker. I am getting instructions about what to do and what to expect. I am not allowed to have any form of contact with my partner during our two separate interviews. Although our relationship is real, these formalities add up to my nervousness. Before I enter, I must sign a declaration stating the interview rules, reminding me that a false statement is an offence carrying a maximum jail term of fourteen years. With that statement in mind, I enter a separate room. The room is empty, with only a table in the corner with a shield in the middle. I am unsure whether this shield is a remnant of the pandemic or a usual safety distinction between the officers and the participant. The door shuts, and the two officers sit opposite me with the shield between us. The second questionnaire starts, and after a few minutes, the nervousness disappears.

After half an hour, one of the officers told me she did not understand why we had been sent to the Home Office for a second round of questionnaires. It gave me more confidence and reassured my feelings. After my fiancé finished his interview, we waited another half an hour. We have a pleasant conversation after the officers returned, and they gave us the good news that our request for marriage has been approved, which means that we can officially get married by British law. Although, the experience did leave us with a sour aftertaste.

> I don't think we were, erm, well prepared for the consequences of Brexit, and we definitely didn't realise the consequences it would have on, literally, seeing each other. We thought that Brexit wouldn't impact travelling and relocation, but unfortunately, that is not the case. (Samya)

Samya and her husband are separated because the Netherlands and the UK have changed their relocation legislation. Her husband Omaid could not get a work permit in the Netherlands, and because of Brexit, he is not allowed to stay longer than three months within a time of six months. Samya, on the other hand, is still working in the Netherlands, cannot settle in the UK without a visa and hence cannot

decide on how and when to move or whether that is something they would want to do. She knows this would not have been a problem before the official start of Brexit. Although she has the right to apply as a spouse and thus somehow a gate to the UK, she gives me the impression that the path would not ease their process.

On the other hand, Anne is very confident in her visa procedure. Anne, born and raised in the Netherlands, believes she has much to give the UK. She is convinced that, because of her fiancé's background, her process won't be that challenging:

> You know, he is really a model citizen with a good credit score and all that sort of thing. I think he also has some confidence that it will be easy for us. I am blonde, highly educated, and know I can do much. [...] It's just that if I can show that I can contribute to society– I don't mind picking up litter, doing some voluntary work or helping out in an animal shelter– I think this is the person that will be accepted in British society. [...] There are indeed a bit more hoops [to jump through], but on the other hand, you don't want to give the impression that you are a postal bride. (Anne)

Anne mentioned postal brides (also known as mail-order brides) a couple of times, referring to women brought over from other countries to be married. This made me think she wanted to ensure she was not one. Although one can argue 'even' that should be a valid reason for relocation. Nonetheless, I understand her point of giving back to society, which can give the idea of valuing your societal position. While having this conversation with Anne, it made me think about whether privileged people tend to believe working and therefore earning your spot is something you can achieve instead of it being ascribed. Vera is more aware of the privileged bubble that she is in. Besides her employer sponsoring her visa and reimbursing the paid fees, she recognises that she is in an environment where travelling for work is not a big challenge. Other than the Brexit water cooler talks at work, not much has changed for Vera:

> I think I am a bit in an odd position because of my job and my Dutch passport. I never had the feeling that I couldn't work somewhere. That's why I chose London. Although, my first choice was the US. I even checked; it would take around a year to get a visa [for America]. So, maybe if I waited a year, my company could arrange a visa for me. I realise I'm in a double privileged bubble with my work and passport. [...] I would rather be worried about a war breaking out or the world changing in a way that my children would suffer more. [...] But I don't think I would see in my life that the Dutch passport will deteriorate so much. (Vera)

Vera mentions many factors that put her in an advantageous position compared to the other participants. She is Dutch, owns a Dutch passport, has been travelling a lot, is highly educated, and has

a highly skilled job. On top of that, the company she works for is a big corporate working internationally.

Vera's situation is not unfamiliar; Daya realised the enormous gap between the possibilities at a big company and smaller organisations like a non-profit. Daya firmly believes that she should be able to travel around because she feels young and mobile, and Laila strongly agrees that young people should get the opportunity to discover the world at ease. Daya tells me that she is highly educated and thus believes she has something to offer. Her double master's degree is a factor that would distinguish her from others.

On the other hand, Inès realises now that a bit of that privilege has been taken away from students and young professionals. Inès tried to get a student visa, even though she is studying part-time. She regrets not applying for the EU Settlement Scheme[15] before, and now she encounters many difficulties of not having the privileges she had previously. She could have used her privilege of working earlier in the UK to her advantage to apply for the settlement scheme to get a permanent stay in the UK. Inès' position is unfortunate as she is studying in the UK but is still not eligible for a student visa because she would not pass the criteria of the amount of time spent in the UK due to her part-time studies. I heard the frustration in Inès' voice which is similar to mine. We talk about the disbelief of your privileges being taken away and how hard the path to achieving our goal has become. For her, the dream of moving and working in the UK lessens every day, and for me, my trust and belief in my Dutch passport reduces every single day.

4.3.1. Hierarchical structure of visa applications

A few months later, after our marriage had been registered under British law, I moved in with my husband. Due to our financial limitations and the British bureaucracy, the spouse visa application played a significant role in the first few months of our marriage. We have been going through the application a few times with our solicitor. Since you pay a high fee for just applying for a visa, you would want to make sure that everything is answered correctly and the proofs are being sent properly. With much hope and the confidence of an earlier stage approval of the Home Office, we click on the 'send the application' button and pay the fee. "It will be alright", the solicitor tells us, because our case is too good to be rejected. A few days later, we received an email in bold letters stating: "Your application is refused". The refusal was unexpected and emerged a sense of existential anxiety. That moment was when my confidence in the continuity of my self-identity as a European citizen broke down. After a week of being demoralised, we started our appeal process. Why did I think my visa would not be rejected to begin with?

"Can I ask you a personal question, and I apologise if it may come across as rude?" Anne asks me. She continues: "But do you think the outcome was negative because you are a Muslim?" It was a

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[15] See footnote 12.

question I did not even ask myself. I did not think my religious or ethnic background would be something to my disadvantage regarding this straightforward bureaucratic visa process. Do I not have the same privileges as any other European citizen? What factors play a role in the status of applicants applying for visas? And do these factors contribute to a hierarchical structure of visa applications?

I envy Anne as she talks about how she never experienced discrimination against her in England. She explains that it might come because she looks continental European, which she does not mind. Anne believes that everyone will understand her reason for relocation and her genuineness: "I think everyone will get it– that I will have the best interest by coming to the UK". Comparing the reasoning of migration for each of the participants and understanding the different emotions that are involved within the process, I notice a hierarchical structure in the privileges and opportunities that are linked to the form of application as well as external factors that influence the degree of difficulty or degree of success and ease of access. These factors are mainly based on the participants' experience combined with their beliefs and self-reflective analysis. The visa applications are limited to the applications mentioned by the participants. The following figure (figure 1) shows the hierarchical structure of visa applications.

**Figure 1. Hierarchical structure of visa applications**
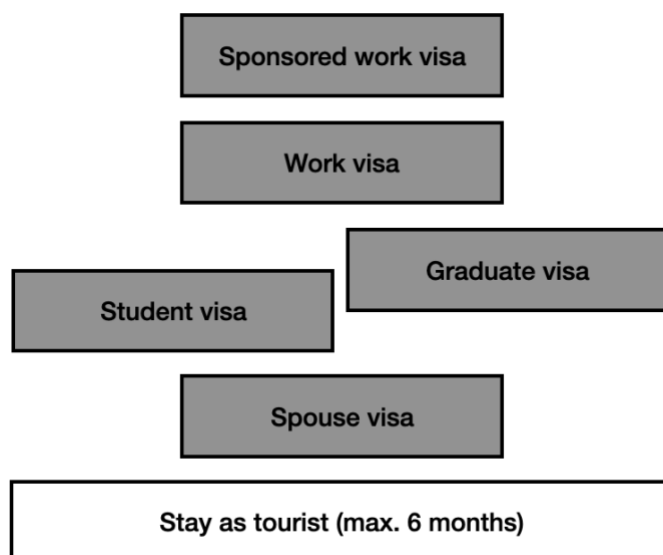
As seen in Figure 1, European citizens are still allowed to enter the UK on tourism grounds. The only difference between pre and post-Brexit is the passport control at the border between mainland Europe and the UK. European citizens can stay in the UK for up to six months without a visa.

Above the tourism entrance is the application for a spouse visa. The spouse visa is on the lowest level of the hierarchical pyramid of visas. The highest barrier with the spouse visa is the large application fees. Compared to the other applications, the spouse visa is in the range of thousands of

pounds, whilst other visas are under the thousand, around a couple hundred. Another difficulty with a spouse visa is the need for a sponsor; in this case, the sponsor is the spouse or partner of the applicant, which means that the applicant is dependent on another person. Hence, all of the participants wanting to relocate to the UK because of their partners also consider applying for a work visa as that gives them a sense of independence and the belief of a higher chance of success in the application.

There were different degrees of experience and beliefs around spouse visa cases. On the one hand, Anne is convinced of the success of her visa application mainly because of the good citizenship of her partner and her benefits to British society. Anne is highly educated, and she is confident that she will succeed in participating in the society. Samya, who is also highly educated, has already experienced difficulties with her husband's application process in the Netherlands. She is less hopeful, more anxious about the spouse visa application, and more conscious about the challenges that bureaucratic barriers can bring. Anisa and her husband are still planning their relocation, and because of her remote work, and her husband's Scottish citizenship, they are less worried. Tuba and Zoé are in an in-between stage where they would want to explore the idea of relocating to the UK and, often enter the UK as tourists. Due to those limitations after Brexit, Zoé plans moving to the UK this summer, hoping she can apply for a spouse visa.

**Figure 1.1. Layers of the spouse visa**
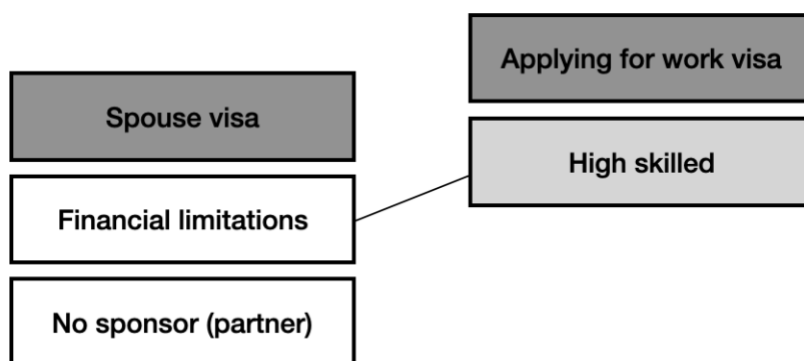
In the second category, there is the student and the graduate visa. With a student visa, a person can study in the UK, whereas with a graduate visa, a recently graduated student can work as a young professional in the UK. Although Inès is studying in the UK, due to her study being part-time, she is not eligible to apply for a student visa or a graduate visa.

On the other hand, Lei is a full-time student qualified for a student visa. Lei is, therefore, eligible for a graduate visa which lasts for two years. Although Lei is in a more advanced position than Inès, he recognises the bureaucratic difficulties. He instead chooses a European country like Denmark to settle with his girlfriend and pursue a career. Although you cannot extend a graduate visa, you can apply for a skilled work visa. Inès enters the UK as a part-time student, but because there is no formal application for students like her, she enters the country as a tourist. She must share her itinerary with the Home

Office to ensure she won't stay longer than necessary. When Inès told the customs officer the first time entering the country for her master's that she was a student, she got problems entering the country since she could not prove her status as a student. Since that negative encounter, Inès tells the customs officers that she enters as a tourist.
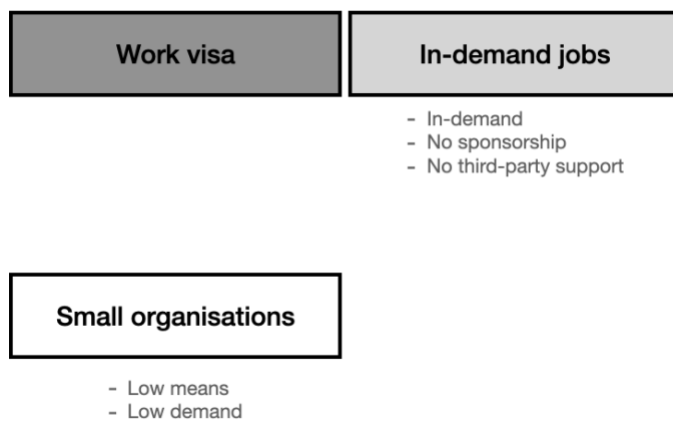
Figure 1.2. Layers of the student visa
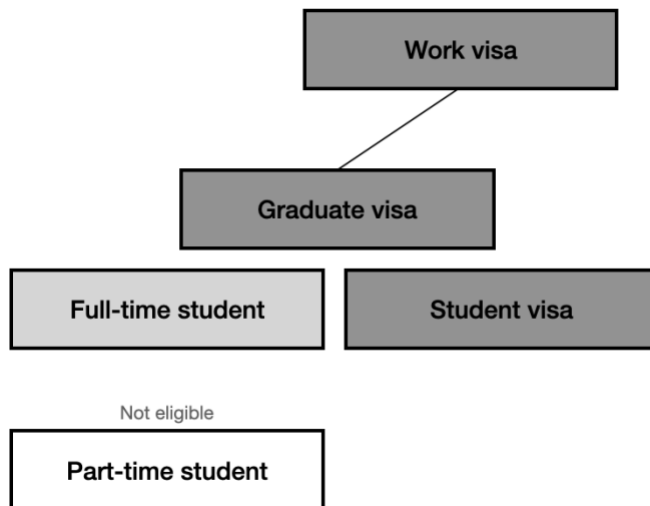
That brings us to the third and fourth category; the work visa, which has many layers depending on the degree of skills you developed, and the sponsored work visa. Laila has been working in the health sector, which gives her an advantage since it is an in-demand job. Laila applied for the Skilled Work Visa and got help from her employer. She had to pay the fees for her application and did not receive third-party support. Because she is in the health sector, she receives healthcare benefits.

On the other hand, Daya explores the possibilities of applying for a work visa. She has a double master's degree and categorises herself as highly skilled. Although Daya sees many applicable vacancies, she has been unsuccessful in applying due to not having a visa and not being eligible for sponsorship from any organisation yet. She aimed to apply to smaller organisations, where she realised the means were less than in big corporates.

Figure 1.3. Layers of the work visa

Work visa	In-demand jobs

- In-demand
- No sponsorship
- No third-party support

Small organisations

- Low means
- Low demand

Lastly, the highest form of application is the sponsored work visa. Amongst the participants, Vera has been the only one benefitting from sponsorship from work where her fees got reimbursed, and her company arranged a third party to deal with the bureaucratic barriers of an application. This means that Vera was not facing any financial or bureaucratic obstacles and received all the help she could get. She is highly skilled and works for a big corporate.

This hierarchical structure only reflects on the participants for this thesis and thus does not reflect the range of all visa applications. This structure is to understand the unequal position and factors impacting an applicant's status, reflecting on the difficulties of post-Brexit European migration in the UK. The layers of the structure are complex, and these reflections try to give an overview of the participants' experiences.

5. Discussion and conclusion

There are direct and indirect changes in European citizens' right to free movement migrating from the EU to the UK after Brexit. Staying for less than six months often comes with less direct, therefore, indirect changes. Participants can move across the border of the UK with a minor difference at the customs. Some participants are asked more about their visit, while others only face a difference with travelling with a passport.

On the other hand, as multiple participants experienced, direct changes occur when there is an intention of settling for longer than six months. The most tangible process with this is the visa application. There are different applications to apply for, and in the scope of this thesis, there has been a distinction between work, study and spouse visa applications. Interestingly, many factors determine the process of an application. Therefore, hierarchical layers are analysed, explaining the level of difficulties relating to elements of opportunities and privileges. Based on the participants' experiences, the spouse visa comes at the bottom of the pyramid. This visa comes with a dependent sponsor and large financial requirements. Participants often consider the spouse visa deliberate over a work visa, believing it would be easier to access the UK.

Within the work visa, there is a sense of giving back to society, which relates to the level of educational background and the belief of deserving a spot in that society, and hence seen as a gate without many difficulties. Nonetheless, participants are aware of the financial requirements and aim for a sponsorship from the employer. The highest range is the sponsored work visa, where companies fund the financial requirements. Although this is the most desired form, many participants come across the difficulties of finding a job willing to provide this sponsorship. Between the work visa and the spouse visa, there is the student visa which does not necessarily provide a long-term visa but allows education with the perspective and possibility of a graduate visa, which can lead the way to a work visa and hence a more extended settlement period.

Participants generally know their situation and the meaning of their European identity. These conversations about Brexit shed light on the disbelief of changes in their right to free movement. Because of bureaucratic and financial barriers, existential anxieties emerge, which can break down anchored belief systems, as mentioned by Browning, of European citizens. Consequently, the ontological security changes into ontological insecurity, referring to the insecurity in the continuity of self-identity, that is their European identity. Brexit has made it more challenging as a European citizen to settle in the UK and see the experiences impact transnationalism. Where Europe was the dream of blurring borders, Brexit changed the discourse and interrupted transnational mobility infrastructures.

Each category comes with difficulties, but strikingly, the higher you are in terms of societal advantages, the easier the process is. Although this thesis made a distinction only based on the visa application, there are details regarding individuals' ethnic, religious, and academic backgrounds that influence their position and belief in changes regarding the free movement of European citizens. I

acknowledge the limitations of this thesis by not making generalisations based on a small scope of participants. Nonetheless, these differences are interesting to research to enlarge the knowledge in academia of societal impact due to UK's leave from the EU.

For the past month, I have been refreshing my mailbox, hoping to get a reply to my appeal request. I again opened the Home Office's email saying my visa application was refused. Scrolling down in the email, they are giving me instructions about the remaining days left for me to leave the country if I decide not to appeal this decision. I never thought I would go through this process with many hurdles. I am thinking about my conversation with Inès, where she spoke about her frustration. When asked about her thoughts on Brexit, she could only say: "It just doesn't make sense, f**** Brexit." And somehow, that made sense.

I hope this thesis invites readers to reflect deeper on their beliefs, assumptions, and societal roles. Shedding light on Brexit as a phenomenon that shapes our lives encourages us to question the taken-for-granted practices that have become ingrained in our daily routines. Brexit serves as a powerful life lesson, offering valuable insights. Let us embrace the invitation to be in a constant state of learning and development. Thank you.

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1: Detailed description participants

The aim is that these short biographies give the reader a better understanding of the participants' context.

Participant 1: Anisa, 28 years, Italian with Algerian roots. The interview was conducted on April 4th 2023. Anisa is married to a Scottish man, and they have been living together in Germany for the past seven years and planning to move to Scotland. She can work everywhere in the world, and they plan to apply for a spouse or work visa.

Participant 2: Tuba, 26 years, Dutch with Turkish roots. The interview was conducted on April 5th 2023. Tuba has had a British boyfriend for over 3,5 years, and they are planning to enter the next stage of moving together and getting married. She has not decided whether to relocate to the UK but is exploring spouse and work visa applications.

Participant 3: Samya, 27 years, Dutch with Egyptian and Surinamese roots. The interview was conducted on April 6th 2023. Samya is married to a British man, and since their marriage, they have been going back and forth between the Netherlands and the UK. Her husband Omaid did not get a work sponsorship in the Netherlands, and Samya is not sure about relocating to the UK because of her job and life in the Netherlands. Since January this year, they have been living together since Omaid is not allowed to stay in Europe for over three months within six months. If Samya decides to relocate, she will apply for a spouse visa.

Participant 4: Daya, 25 years, Dutch with Moluccan roots. The interview was conducted on April 7th 2023. Fell in love with London last year after her studies and inquired about working in London. She has not been successful so far due to needing a work visa.

Participant 5: Lei, 24 years, Italian and Japanese. The interview was conducted on April 12th 2023. From a young age, he travelled a lot with his European passport. During high school and university, he had the chance to study abroad. After his previous studies in the Netherlands, he got accepted to Oxford University in the UK. Since September, he has been a full-time student in the UK.

Participant 6: Vera, 29 years, Dutch. The interview was conducted on April 15th 2023. Vera has work experience abroad in countries like Spain, Belgium and Japan. She works for a corporate consultancy firm which is known for having a lot of international employees. She asked her company to relocate her to London, and with third-party support, she got a work visa and started working in the London office from October 2022 onwards.

Participant 7: Laila, 36 years, Dutch with Moroccan roots. The interview was conducted on April 17th 2023. She has been a medical doctor in the Netherlands for years, and this year, she chose to work in London. Her former and current job helped her with her work visa application. Since September 2022, she has worked as a medical doctor in London.

Participant 8: Zoé, 26 years, French. The interview was conducted on May 2nd 2023. She is currently finishing her master's degree in the Netherlands. She has been in a relationship with her Indian partner Parveen for two years. Parveen lives and works in the UK. In their early stage, they got into a civil partnership to ease Parveen's visa process in France. Zoé and Parveen want to live together in London, but Zoé does not wish to apply for a spouse visa yet. She will enter the UK as a tourist, and when the time is ready, she will either consider a spouse visa application or search for sponsored jobs.

Participant 9: Inès, 27 years, Dutch with Moroccan roots. The interview was conducted on May 5th 2023. She works in the Netherlands and does a part-time master's at Cambridge University in the UK. She has always been interested in pursuing a career in the UK. Because of her part-time studies, she is not eligible for a student visa and has found it hard to find her way into the UK job market since Brexit.

Participant 10: Anne, 34 years, Dutch. The interview was conducted on May 22nd 2023. The only participant I connected with on a Facebook group of Dutch people living in the UK. Anne recently got engaged to her British fiancé and shared this news in the Facebook group celebrating and asking for tips regarding the UK spouse visa. Although they plan to apply for a spouse visa, Anne also considers looking for sponsored jobs in the UK.

Appendix 2: Information and consent form

Information and consent form

EU Migration Post-Brexit

Introduction

I am Handenur, and I do research for Erasmus University Rotterdam. I am researching the belief in the free movement of EU citizens post-Brexit. I am conducting this research independently.

I will explain the study below. If you have any questions, please ask me. While reading, you can mark parts of the text that are unclear to you.

If you want to participate in the study, you can indicate this at the end of this form.

What is the research about?

The research is about how EU citizens think about migrating to the United Kingdom after Brexit has been official since January 2021. The migration can be about a family reunion, residency, work, study etc.

Why are we asking you to participate?

I ask you to participate because I am interested to understand more about the experience of different people regarding the change in free movement in Europe to limitations after a political change. If you are an EU citizen and moved to the United Kingdom after Brexit for any reason, I would like to hear about your experience with the process, the expectations and your opinion about Brexit and the practical outcome of it.

What can you expect?

The study lasts three months, and I will take interviews in one month, starting in April. The interview will be semi-structured, meaning I will have guiding questions, but I will have enough space for you to hear your personal story. The interview will take around an hour, and I will audio record the conversation. The interview will be in person unless you cannot meet up; then, the interview will be taken online. The interview will be anonymised, and If you do not want to answer a question during the interview, you are not required to do so. After the interview, you will have the opportunity to comment on your answers. If you disagree with my notes or if I misunderstood you, you can ask to have parts of them amended or deleted.

You decide whether to participate

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You can stop at any time and would not need to provide any explanation.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

During the interview, personal questions about potentially upsetting events you may have experienced (i.e. regarding the visa process or any other bureaucratic encounter) will be asked. There will be space for any moment of discomfort, and you are not obliged to answer questions you do not feel comfortable with.

What data will I ask you to provide?

I will store your data so that I can be in contact with you. For the study, I will also need other data from you. During the interview, the following personal data will be collected from you: Age, gender, citizenship status, audio recordings, occupation, cultural background, ethnic background, feelings and opinions about Brexit. I also need your email address to send the study results to you by email.

Who can see your data?

Everything will be stored securely. Only the people involved in the research can see some of the data (excluding names and audio recordings). Recordings are transcribed, and your name is replaced by a pseudonym. I will write a research about the results of the study, which will be published in the University data bank after

approval of the supervisors. I may use your specific answers in the paper. If your answer can be traced to you, I will ask your permission first.

How long will your personal data be stored?
Your data will be retained for a minimum of 10 years. I retain the data so other researchers can verify that the research was conducted correctly.

What happens with the results of the study?
You may indicate if you would like to receive the final paper.

Do you have questions about the study?
Please contact me if you have any questions about the study or your privacy rights, such as accessing, changing, deleting, or updating your data.

Name: Handenur Taspinar
Phone number: +44 7789 775886
Email: 625869ht@eur.nl

Do you have a complaint or concerns about your privacy? Please email the Data Protection Officer (fg@eur.nl) or visit www.autoriteitpersoonsgegevens.nl. (T: 088 - 1805250)

Do you regret your participation?
You may regret your participation. Even after participating, you can still stop. Please indicate this by contacting me. I will delete your data. Sometimes we need to keep your data so that, for example, the integrity of the study can be checked.

Ethics approval
This research has been reviewed and approved by an internal review committee of Erasmus University Rotterdam. This committee ensures that research participants are protected. If you would like to know more about this RERC/IRB, please contact ethics@eur.nl

Declaration of Consent

I have read the information letter. I understand what the study is about and what data will be collected from me. I was able to ask questions as well. My questions were adequately answered. I know that I am allowed to stop at any time.

By signing this form, I

1.   consent to participate in this research.
2.   consent to the use of my personal data;
3.   confirm that I am at least 18 years old.
4.   understand that participating in this research is completely voluntary and that I can stop at any time; and
5.   understand that my data will be anonymised for publication, educational purposes and further research.

Check the boxes below if you consent to this.
Required for research participation,

Data [about specify].

I consent to the researcher's collection, use and retention of the following data: ethnicity, cultural background, citizenship status, and political opinions. ☐

Audio recording
I consent to the interview being audio recorded. ☐

My answers in the article
I give permission for my answers to be used in papers, such as an article in a journal or book. My name will not be included. ☐

Use for educational purposes
I hereby consent to have my personal data, namely my experience regarding migration and settling in the UK, used for educational purposes. ☐

New research
I give permission to be contacted again for new research. ☐

Name of participant:

Participant's signature: **Date:**

Appendix 3: Ethics and privacy checklist

ERASMUS UNIVERSITEIT ROTTERDAM

CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with the help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about your research study's ethical or privacy aspects, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: **Migration EU citizens post-Brexit**

Name, email of student: **Handenur Taspınar, 625869ht@eur.nl**

Name, email of supervisor: **Bonnie French, french@essb.eur.nl**

Start date and duration: **April 5th – June 26th (3 months)**

Is the research study conducted within DPAS   YES - ~~NO~~

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1.   Does your research involve human participants?   YES - ~~NO~~

       If 'NO': skip to part V.

       If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research?   ~~YES~~ - NO
       Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2.   Does your research involve field observations without manipulations
       that will not involve the identification of participants?   ~~YES~~ - NO

       If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3.   Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary
       data that has been anonymized by someone else).   ~~YES~~ - NO

       If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what
    participants can expect during the study be withheld from them?   ~~YES~~ - NO

2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written
    'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study?   ~~YES~~ - NO

3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation
    at any time be withheld from participants?   ~~YES~~ - NO

4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants?   ~~YES~~ - NO
    *Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to
    think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study
    is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they
    harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).*

5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or
    negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by
    participants?   YES - ~~NO~~

6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as
    defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions,
    religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic
    data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person,
    data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's
    sex life or sexual orientation)?   YES - ~~NO~~

7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or
    other groups that cannot give consent?

    ~~YES~~ - NO

8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study?   ~~YES~~ - NO

9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the
    confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured?   ~~YES~~ - NO

10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study?   ~~YES~~ - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why
this issue is unavoidable in this study.
**For this research, I will ask participants about their experience regarding visa
procedures which may cause negative emotions due to the stress level of a visa
application (i.e. lengthy process or negative outcome).**

The participants will be asked to share a racial or ethnic origin because my study explicitly targets EU citizens, so it is essential to know their citizenship status.
Lastly, this research focuses on political views, especially regarding the Brexit referendum. This information is an essential aspect of the study.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).
All participants will be informed about the research content before attending the interview. Afterwards, they can review the notes and adjust the content if needed. Names will be anonymised, so there is no possibility of tracking back to the individual.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.
As mentioned, any negative connotation regarding the visa procedure, relocation or current status can cause distress. Therefore, I will be transparent in preparing the participants beforehand and ask the questions carefully during the interview. Every participant has the right not to answer the questions.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?
Most of the interviews will be in person in London. However, for the participants who are not in London during the period of the interviews, the interviews will be taken online.
Most of the participants I reached out to were via my network. The rest of the participants will be contacted via different Facebook groups related to Dutch citizens living in London.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?
The anticipated size of my sample is 12 participants. The reasoning for the amount of sample is based on the limitation of time (conducting interviews in 1 month) and the qualitative method of the interviews (interviews will be around 1 hour per participant).

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?
According to the Office of National Statistics UK, about 224,000 EU citizens migrated to the UK in the year ending June 2022.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?
I will upload the interviews to a personal hard disk with a password. Then, after revising the interviews and anonymising the names, I will share them with my supervisor in the Google Drive folder.
Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?
Handenur Taspınar

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?
The data (voice records and minutes) will be uploaded in the hard disk immediately after conducting the interviews.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?
All names used for the research will be anonymised, and the participants will be referred to pseudonyms.
Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: **Handenur Taşpınar**   Name (EUR) supervisor: **Bonnie French**

Date: **21 March 2023**   Date: **21 March 2023**