Living through the pandemic in post-Brexit Britain: emotional damage and resilience among middle-aged European citizens.

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Living through the pandemic in post-Brexit Britain: emotional damage and resilience among middle-aged European citizens

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Introduction

The life of the many European citizens living in the UK has been marked, in the last six years, by two major events that are producing a noticeable impact on both their public life (i.e. their citizens status) and on their private existence. The results of the 2016 referendum, won by the so called 'Brexiteers', transformed their status from cosmopolitan citizens into immigrants, while the spreading of the pandemic in 2020, and the consecutive lockdowns, further limited their freedom of movement and temporarily took away the possibility to travel to Europe to see friends and family. In this paper we present the results of a study we undertook between Oct 2021 and June 2022 where we investigated the emotional landscape of middle-aged EU citizens living in the UK during the lockdown periods.

When designing our study, we presupposed that the Covid-induced restrictions, put into force between 2020 and 2021, were producing an amplified negative impact on EU citizens because they were already destabilised by Brexit. This view is validated by prior studies, carried out in the wake of the 2016 referendum, which clearly demonstrate that EU nationals have become increasingly 'vulnerable', as a consequence of the results (Teodorowski et al. 2021). As these studies show, the changes to their status as citizens have been a major cause of distress due to both economic and existential concerns about jobs and an increasingly hostile environment validated by the Brexit win (Guma and Jones, 2019; Tyrrell et al., 2019). This situation is experienced by Europeans both in terms of objective vulnerability (external factors that impair a group's social status and standing) and of subjective vulnerability (the individuals' perceptions of precariousness and exposure to dangers) (Rzepnikowska, 2019; Lahuerta and Iusmen, 2021). Moreover, the double whammy of COVID and Brexit has led a significant number of EU nationals to leave the UK and return home (Markova and King, 2021; Sredanovic 2020). Official data show that UK's foreign-born population shrank by just over 1m, down to 8.3m in the first three quarters of 2020. About 481,000 (but many more had already left in the previous years since 2016) of those departing were born in the EU, reversing an influx that began in 2004. Data from the Migration Observatory at Oxford University show that net migration into the UK has gone in sharp reverse since 2016 with a very clear acceleration at the start of lockdown and the trend is continuing.

At the time of writing (June 2022) the negative effects of this reverse migration are already becoming increasingly evident. The number of job vacancies in March to May 2022 rose to a new record of 1,300,000; an increase of 20,000 from the previous quarter, and an increase of 503,900 from the pre-coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic level in January to March 2020 (Office of National Statistics June 2022). Back in 2021, business leaders had warned that a lack of overseas workers after lockdown would put a "handbrake on the recovery", with as many as 1.3 million estimated to have left the UK since late 2019 as many returned to their country of birth to see through the pandemic at home (The Guardian, May 17th 2021). Indeed this prediction seems to now be materialising: in the last few weeks the UK economy has recorded the slowest growth among European countries prompting some commentators to warn that it is in fact on the verge of recession. This is admittedly due to the sharp increase in the cost

of living caused by the war in Ukraine (with the hike in energy prices, as well as in some basic food categories), but it is likely compounded by the restrictions imposed by the exit from the European single market and the end to free movement of workers (Creasy 2022).

Against this (bleak) economic background, the combination of these two major events (Brexit and the pandemic) are highly likely to involve a human cost as well, impacting on European citizens mental health (Teodorowski et al. 2021), by questioning their citizenship rights and status and by exacerbating the sense of separation from their country of origin and the country where they reside. As the literature on migration amply documents, this situation often creates identity crises and feelings of displacement and instability. On the identity crisis experienced by migrants, Erdogan-Ertorter (2014: 272) argues: "they might feel a significant loss in their sense of continuity, in the style of their individuality, in the meaning they have for significant others and ask themselves 'who they are'". Moreover, the "politics of othering", emphasised during the referendum campaign and still pursued by some media outlets, which insinuates that EU migrants are to blame for socio-economic problems and crime, has given space to xenophobic views that jeopardise the safety of EU citizens, thereby adding to their insecurities. This situation has had a starkly negative impact on many European citizens wellbeing who have felt deprived of their voice at the very moment when the foundations of life in the country they have chosen as home were shaking[1].

This sense of instability was then exacerbated by the pandemic and the travel restrictions which were imposed, denying these citizens the possibility to see friends and relatives in Europe and adding a feeling of guilt to their sense of isolation for the inability to be close to relatives when they were more likely to need help with the spreading of the dangerous new virus. In particular, we presupposed that middle-aged EU citizens, who came to the UK some time before Brexit, were likely to be the worst affected. They represent a "sandwich generation" of individuals who are likely to have attachments and affective bonds both in the UK and in their European home country. For them, the frustration caused by the inability to provide effective in person care for older people "at home"(with the sense of guilt this entails; Baldassar and Wilding 2019, DeRigne, LeaAnne and Ferrante 2012, Crisholm 1999), adds to an already heightened vulnerability caused by Brexit.

The study

The aim of our study was to understand the emotions and feelings experienced by this demographics during the periods of lockdown, when travel restrictions imposed to all the population added to the limitations introduced by the new Brexit rules coming into force between 2020 and 2021[2].

In our proposal we had set out to interview approximately 20 middle aged adults between 35 and 55 years of age recruited from all UK regions. The recruitment was carried out using a variety of channels: we used word of mouth among our contacts, posted calls on Facebook

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[1] This situation led a group of psychologists in the UK to set up, in 2017, a service called ESSE (Emotional Support Service for Europeans) whose declared aim is to help individuals affected in their mental wellbeing by what they call a "Brexistential crisis".

[2] A quick note just to remind that before Brexit, the UK was part of the European Single Market and Custom Union. This allowed for the free movement of people to live and work in any of the 28 (now 27) countries. After Brexit, European citizens (around 4 million people) who wanted to remain in the UK to live and work were required to apply with the Home Office for settled status (if they had been in the UK for 5 years or more before the referendum) or pre-settled status (if residents in the UK for less than 5 years). The process has proven to be smooth for some EU nationals, but very problematic for many others.

(in particular we used the platform the3millions[3]) and also took advantage of neighbourhood platforms in Scotland to reach potential participants. Although we experienced some initial hitches with the recruitment, the process suddenly speeded up with a lot of people answering our calls on social media and volunteering to take part. We ended up interviewing 26 participants; however we had to discard one contribution, as it turned out that, although in possession of an Italian passport, the participant had lived in Peru prior to coming to the UK in 2018 and therefore did not meet our recruitment criteria. In terms of spread across the UK, most of our interviewees live in Scotland and England, one in Wales and one in NI.

The methods and the analysis

The study used an art-based approach method combined with in -depth unstructured interviews conducted from a feminist epistemology perspective. For the initial exploration we asked the participants to produce a piece of artwork representing the dominant mood they experienced during the pandemic and the subsequent lockdown and we then used this as a stimulus or guide for the interviews (Frith and Harcourt, 2007). From a previous qualitative research study by the research team (Ruggerone et al. 2020) we found that asking participants to produce an artwork facilitates the communication about emotional states and feelings that might not emerge from the interview alone. Importantly the production of artwork allows the participant to take the lead in the research by producing form of artwork to illustrate their mood and their emotional states (Pink 2001; Sweetman 2009).

According to Brailas (2020) two basic strategies pertain to art-based qualitative research. The first he calls (p.4449) the "post-interview approach", where a full verbal interview is followed by the drawing phase and a reflection on the drawing verbalised in a second interview. The second strategy is the "pre-interview approach", where the full interview follows the production of the artwork and the discussion is based upon (but not limited to) this creation by the participant. In our study we adopted the latter approach. After a short contact giving our participants the context for the artwork, we allowed them to choose freely the type of artwork they wished to present. This included a variety of self-produced material such as collages, drawings, photos, a video, with one of the participants selecting a piece of classical music to represent their mood and feelings during lockdown.

A brown envelope filled with a mixture of art materials that could be used by our participants to make a drawing or a collage was sent to all of our participants homes in advance of our discussion and although this was not used by all, it created a kind of dialogue of friendship.

All of the interviews took place on Zoom, which in many ways worked incredibly well as participants may have felt more at ease in their own environment, but also put them at a distance and perhaps not so intimidated to say what they felt. The participants were able to take the lead with what we discussed as they explained their artwork at the start. A couple of participants spoke about how they found the interviews therapeutic: "It's actually been really good, because when I did this artwork, I didn't have words in my head. I just had feelings and thoughts and stuff, but no actual words and it's been really interesting for me as well to eventually put words on it".

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[3] This is a grassroots association of European citizens in the UK which was created in the wake of the 2016 referendum results to lobby for the rights of EU citizens and help them with the process of applying for settled status as well as providing legal advice on matters concerning their rights. The 3million has since then become an important body representing Europeans in the UK and providing them with a network of contacts and a public voice.

The long interviews elicited by the artwork always expanded beyond the discussion of the art piece into a range of topics connected with the research focus. The style in which the interviews were conducted was inspired by a feminist constructive epistemology which was to an extent autobiographical. In our view, the interview has to be an authentic encounter between humans, which means that the traditional dogma of neutrality has been abandoned in favour of establishing an "authentic-not-gimmick" rapport (Brailas 2020). The interviewer(s) participates to the encounter with the aim of opening a meaningful dialogue which can then produce data for the analysis. However this production remains secondary to the communication and the relationship that permeates the encounter. This process is very different from the widely used semi-structured interviews, where the predominant aim is to collect the information relevant to the research questions and where often efficiency is prioritised over rapport.

The materials produced by the participants contained varied entry points into the discussion. Denzin (1994) writes about bricoleur in relation to mixed methods and in many ways we applied this to how we approached the interviews. The analysis followed a similar pattern with the research team reading the transcripts and then meeting together to discuss. We also frequently returned to the recordings that we had on Zoom to relisten to the emotions, stutters, pauses, sadness and demeanour. When we were reading the transcripts or listening to the recordings we referred back to their artworks.

Our aim in the analysis has been to identify themes that accurately describe the feelings that the participants expressed in their artwork and elaborated upon in the interviews. As our main interest was focused on the emotional states engendered by the double whammy of Brexit and Covid, the themes presented in the following passages use the vocabulary of emotions and feelings. The titles that we have given to these themes are sometimes our own labels, but more often replicate some of the words the participants themselves used to describe their feelings and moods.
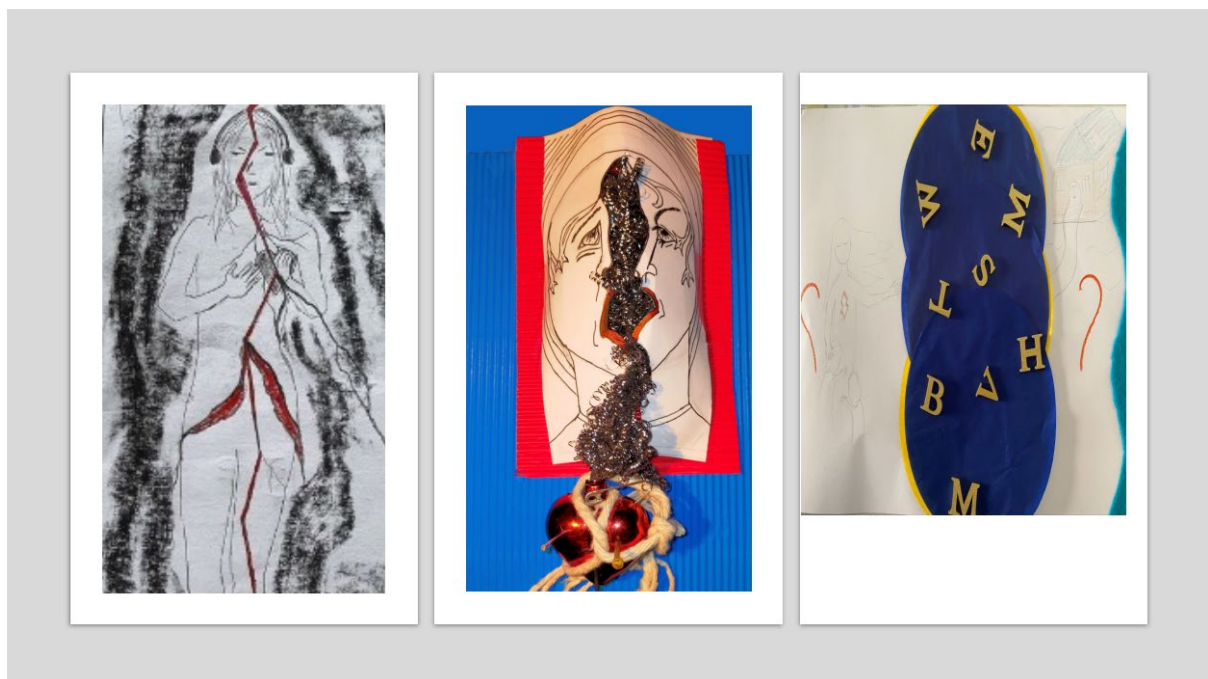
CRACKS…..Breakages, tears, ruptures

Figure 1

All these pictures show cracks, breakages, ruptures… This has been a recurrent theme in our participants' artwork and interviews. They talk of cracks across their heart, but also cracks across their whole beings and/or cracks in their lives and their sense of identity, caused by Brexit and/or the impossibility to see their families in Europe during the lockdown periods. Some say their heart is irremediably split, others that their beings are barely held together by the effort to be strong for their kids and/or in the hope that things will get better, or just by the need to remain a whole person and avoid mental distress. These efforts are sometimes described as strenuous, effortful, fighting against difficult circumstances and a powerful feeling of negativity emerging from the sense of being questioned in their status as citizens and/or by the isolation, hardship and fear of the pandemic. I'll now read some quotes from our interviews explaining the cracks that have been pictured in the drawings or collages.

Talking about the first image on the left, in the context of her emotions during the lockdown and the home schooling of her two sons which cause her depression, this participant (French, woman) says: *feel like I was cracking from the inside. It really did feel like that, like I wasn't whole or strong and it felt that ….what I like about myself I couldn't find anymore and I was all broken. So even at night I would wake up and… So the red as well is the blood, the pain, it's everything that's raw, the rage, the anger, it's all of that*

the black is all the negativity…I am completely surrounded and stuck in it. I just, I'm full of it and I contribute to it, I am making it, I am. I feel it's all the guilt as well…. The black is this heavy heavy feeling that I can't be initiating that, it's like I don't know if it was water I would be completely wrapped with an algae or whatever and the black because it's negative.

About the artwork shown in the middle, our participant (Danish, woman) says Brexit caused an identity crisis for her, as it put her whole personal identity in question: *I felt very split as well, I started almost splitting into two halves I thought, well what am I really don't belong here don't belong somewhere else, and then often I felt it was just couldn't keep it in.*
Talking about her home country of Denmark she adds that her Danishness is actually in her own words "outdated" and based on a feeling of nostalgia for a country that doesn't even exist anymore: *I don't belong here completely and I certainly don't belong in Denmark, either, so where do I belong? is that is that kind of split.*
The metallic stuff coming out of the split face represents: *the huge mess of disbelief and anger and hurt and upset* caused by the referendum results, which were feelings that, the participant says, could only be understood by fellow Europeans but never by the British people. In many ways this hurt made her heart weaker, after that she disconnected herself a lot from politics and just mainly concentrated on keeping herself whole, although she admittedly is struggling to do it: *Yeah it's that kind of split and trying to remain one person but I'm not. I'm split many ways…. When I'm over there I want to be here and when I'm here I often think I'd like to be over there so there is that split.*

Figure 2

A crack, a big rupture appears also in the picture above that represents the participant's (Italian, woman) feelings during the lockdown: *I was already stuck that was a fact right. I was here and there was this huge blue dark barrier, the yellow ... represents the sea of words and nonsense and confusion and that's why I scattered letters over it and it's just I couldn't get through. ... for the first time since I've been living abroad which was, let me think, seven to eight years I missed home. I really missed it.*
The two red marks are the halves of the heart, and on the left hand side of the picture, in the woman's figure there is *just a hole where my heart should sit hole. But it's actually ripped out and half here and half there.* And later: *I wouldn't have done it any other way. I don't know I think because it's been pulled out. You know I think if it's been pushed from the inside it would have come out as a hole but because it's been pulled out then it's not such a nice circle, clean shape.*

Home and nostalgia

Figure 3

The sense of displacement caused by Brexit and the isolation from Europe caused by the lockdown periods has led many of our participants to interrogate themselves on the meaning of "home" leaving many of them very ambivalent about where "home" might be for them. In some of the artworks produced, houses or specific rooms are pictured, sometimes to signify a sense of entrapment (due to lockdown), many times to hint at the nostalgia they feel for their original home that has never before seemed so far away. Sometimes the home is depicted as unreachable, perched on mountains that cannot be climbed or situated far away across deep, dangerous waters that can no longer be crossed.

In Figure 3, the picture on the left represents a village in the participant's home country of Germany. During the interview our participant (German, woman) describes it: *It's a very cute little village but right next to this is an old monastery with an old chapel, that's where we got married so it is very picturesque. The river there, that river is very close to my parents house so when I was little that's where I walked, well not quite every day …. The kids swim there in the summer so yeah again it's a sort of place with a lot of meaning.*

The theme of home is clearly present also in the picture on the right, but with a definite note of positivity attached to it. The author of the collage (Italian, woman) says: *is my house so that's you know a home. A house slash home because of course during lockdown we were locked in basically in my very small apartment in….but also it felt quite protected because my partner was at home…. it was lots of family time, lots of love because we felt like we re-connected and we decided that if times were changing that was maybe a good time to have a second child then I got pregnant.*
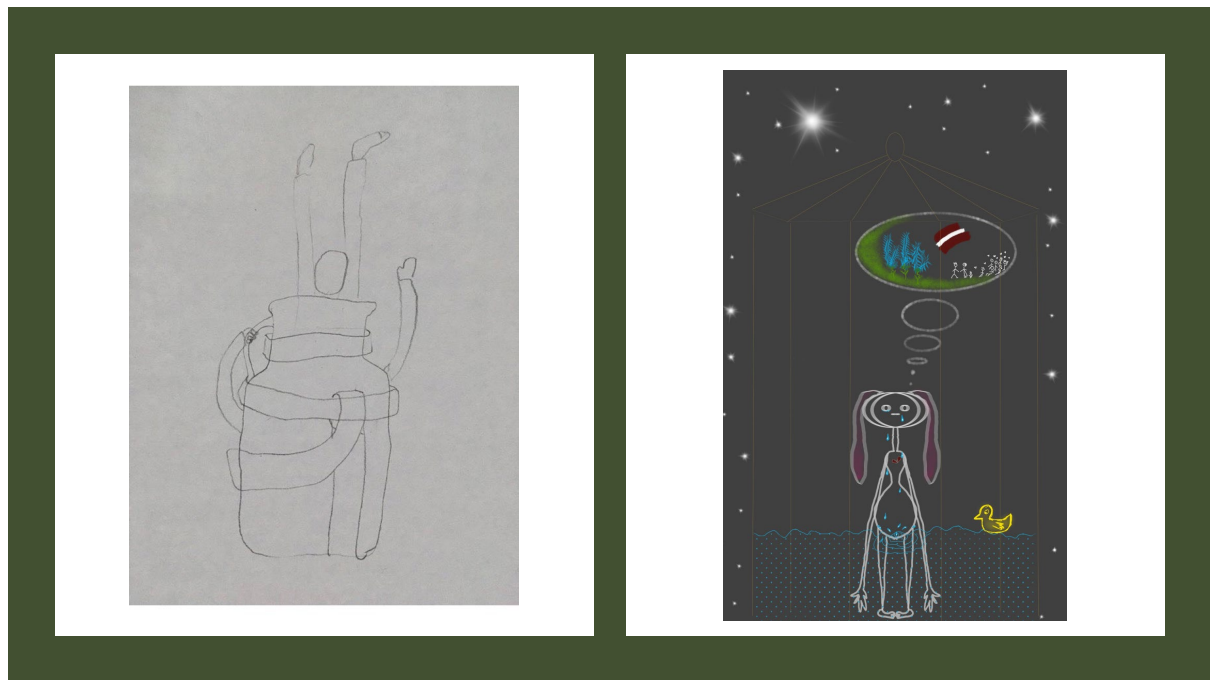
Figure 4

The picture on the left (Figure 4) also speaks of home during lockdown. Our participant (Hungarian, woman) explains *mug is for me, is the home, is the comfort, yeah it's a homeliness but at this point you just getting tired of always being at home ... it comes to a point when you're just going around in circles*…and then elaborating on the drawing, she adds: *a quick drawing and ...there's not much joy in this drawing. It doesn't express any... It's quite a bleak drawing. I would say it's quite a bleak feeling that it expresses…. so I tried to draw here a body and not a face, just a body that represents how my thoughts going around and because they don't have an outlet, another person to have them on, you know they became something that just goes... [sigh] goes around in circles... that's what the elongated body is and this whole knotted up, tangled up stick….it didn't need a face it was... urm... yeah... It was just this... urm... Something that didn't yield any product, that kind of thought process but just urm a bit of urm... [sigh] Going around, becoming a bit compulsive, becoming a bit unproductive*

In the picture on the right, the dwelling in Edinburgh is a cage, a cage that is full of tears. The participant (Latvian, woman) describes: *that's a cage, like trapped in a cage and it's kind of, well, a golden cage because comparing to others we were in a very good situation like we could be at home with our kid but at the same time you feel like you are trapped and it's not the best situation because we can't do anything and no ones around and yeah… Golden cage.* The water at the bottom are tears: *there were lots of those….and the rubber duck [*says that*] you still have to play and do things (with little son) even if you don't feel like having fun*

It is important to emphasise that many of the themes we extracted from the field study are interconnected and found repeatedly in many of the artworks produced. Here we are just focusing on some of them to selectively point to an aspect that, however, should not be considered in isolation. So for example this last picture, like many others, also talks of sadness and love. Again the heart of the main figure is split, broken. The current dwelling is a cage and the dream (in the little cloud to the top) is the wish to be "home" in Latvia. The participant explains that the green in the picture *is life*, her home country *is green, you are out in nature….. and I think I didn't realise that before… how much I need the feeling that you are home…. with*

the kid I started to feel like I wanted to feel like home and I don't feel like home here and at least there you have people that makes this feeling like you feel at home.

Love and sadness

Love is another emotion that is mentioned by a lot by our participants. Love is sometimes directed to the home country, like in the last example above, but also often participants declared that they had been 'in love' with Britain and some say that this love was broken by Brexit.

Figure 5

In this picture (Figure 5) again the split between Britain and the French coast is vividly represented and that separation feels unbridgeable, with all the dangers coming from the sky like bombs (Covid, lockdown restrictions and the Settled status) and the flying away of the free movement of people. This acute sense of separation is caused for this participant (French, man) by falling out of love: *I have clearly thought a lot about going back and I think, yeah I think it's a bit like a… The love story I have with England has been stained a bit and you know it's funny because I definitely see Scotland as different to England so it's not so much with Britain my love story has ended, it's more with England.*
However, again the feeling of being split resurfaces when this participant hesitates to define where "home" is and makes appoint of distinguishing between "home" in terms of where the heart is from his national identity *I would say currently my home is in (place in England) because that's where my wife is and you know I don't feel… I would say currently that's where my home but I'm very French. I don't think this will ever change and I still feel very strongly European but yeah no home is still in England at the moment.*

The love story with Britain is indeed emerging as one of the reasons some of our participants moved her in the first place. An Italian woman, who produced a music piece to express her feelings, narrates: *The first few years I was in Britain I was in love with it, I was in Oxford by the way when I first came. I had the most wonderful time in my life…. they have so many links with different countries all over the world and I always thought, you know, gosh they are so tolerant. So with this Brexit, basically I felt like a big slap in the face…. when you have a best friend and you admire them so much, and you just truly admire them and they give you so much and they teach you so much and then all of a sudden they turn their back on you and I don't quite understand why and I just felt like that.*
in life you think certain people or certain situations are in a certain way and they turn out everything but. That really disappointed me, big massive time and I think it's the beginning of the end of Britain as we know it.

Figure 6

A feeling of sadness also dominates the picture above (Figure 6), taken by our participant (Czech, man) on a foggy autumn morning in Edinburgh, where he lives. When we asked him to produce artwork expressing his feelings, our participant says: *it immediately popped to my mind this photo and even without looking at the photo at the time I knew there were the chains and empty benches and the fog and black and white because I put it on black and white. There is, you know plenty of metaphors like the chains….you know we can't travel, the lockdown the empty benches you know people are ill or dying you know, the (paler light or pane of white) which is sort of blurry you know the life is gotten gloom you know and not happy all the time. The perspective for the railing is a point for somewhere, you don't actually know where it going so I thought maybe this photo would be good, pick up some of the moods* This feeling of gloom and isolation certainly represents the mood during the lockdown, but also, he adds, *it also has a meaning for the Brexit you know. Maybe even stronger during Brexit. It was felt like you were being detached from the rest of Europe. Really you stayed on the Island and you didn't want to travel you know for many family members you didn't know whether they'll be able to come, whether they'll be needing a visa to come to Britain so you just felt chained actually to Great Britain because …. the common place between you and Britain just stopped existing you know so felt much more detached*

The weight of emotions

Figure 7

This collage was quite different from the other art works in that, unusually, this participant, Hanna, living in the south of England expressed her feelings visually but also through weight. During the Covid pandemic people painted collections of stones with patterns, pictures, and messages. In many ways these were memorials representations of bodily feelings and this participant latched on to this concept of the weight of stones to express her worries in her collage. She says; "*Ok so nature was a big part of the lockdown so as you see on the pictures you have ants and flowers and bees, but you can also see some stones from the beach they represent all the challenges so like anxiety, stresses, fear. … there's friends and homes stones and between it there are like little shiny glass pebbles on the left. So, they represent tears. So, you can see the stone with anxiety, stress, it was really heavy to represent how we felt and all the stresses we kept inside. So, all the emotions I put on the big stones, so I felt really anxious and stressed, panicked even*". We were aware of how these heavy emotions had all been boxed in together whereas *all the rest of the collage, the flowers, the beautiful sky and the feather and the nature element are in the open air and are not boxed in.* Hanna explains *"I boxed them in because that's how we felt, we had to box everything inside but then do as much as we can to support others and cope. So, boxing all the negative feelings at the bottom of the page*". Within her collage the light and airy feelings and emotions that surround love, family, home, friends are at the top so there is almost a comparison to heaven, "*the very light ones are at the top. Hope is like a white stone on the very top right cloud*".

Isolation and entrapment

The sea and being trapped was a common theme through many of our participants artworks including a participant video and unusually an orchestral piece of music called 'Unfold' that had been chosen by one of our participants to express her emotional feelings about migration

and the dangers of the sea. Some of our participants spoke about the UK as showing *an island mentality* and being cut off from Europe & the rest of the world. One participant saw the sea as a barrier of words and nonsense and confusion. The combination of Brexit with the added restrictions of Covid had created barriers, a mass of impenetrable cold blue sea had become a border control that was difficult to navigate. There were even differentiations in the colour of the sea with the channel being coloured deep blue, cold and dangerous while the Mediterranean was pictured as turquoise warm, homely and nice. The sea routes between the UK and Europe had once been a safe passage but had now become inhospitable. The explanations given by participants of their artwork exposed nuances around the sea being a danger zone. Because of Brexit, the sea is more than just sea, it becomes a liquid barrier, a messy fortification that disallows people to conduct and live their lives as they did till just two years ago. But the sea is also an emotive barrier.

Figure 8

The author of the collage shown in figure 8, a German woman living in England, explains: *I mean before Brexit the sea was a geographical feature of my life but neutrally so yeah and it was also, yeah it was a conduit, it was a passage, it was a link between bits of landmass. I have completely changed my perspective on the sea now, it has become a source of conflict*'. The sea was also used as an emotional narrative and picture to describe the participant's inner feeling. A French woman (her artwork is in figure 9) tells us "*the sea is a lot more tormented, it's like with lots of waves and agitated so that would be what I felt. This agitation where you're not calm at all, you're constantly waiting for the situation to change, like the good news to come or trying to reassure yourself and calm yourself down. It takes more energy than just fighting against the wave*".

Figure 9

Unreachable families and emotions in relation to caring for elderly family. Participants spoke about the double whammy of the effect of Covid and Brexit on worries about elderly family that they could not reach because of only having an ID card and not a passport so they could not travel. One participant drew a Damocles sword (figure 9), an emotional motif above her elderly father in France, and although she did not explain until asked, this drawing was emotive. "*Father was not well, and not able to say goodbye. I couldn't even call him as its better not to know. He said he wanted to go now but I kept on telling him to wait. Please wait, feel it's the end, can you wait and hold on*".

Concluding remarks

At the time of writing, our analysis of the data collected has just been completed and we just only started reflecting on some of the themes that emerged from our field work. As it is often the case with qualitative studies, we predict that another revisitation of the artworks and transcripts could bring to surface more themes worth reflecting upon. For example, we are starting to reflect on the theme of time and the perception of time during lockdown that some of our participants drew attention to. Connected to time, there is also their perception of their future lives, post-pandemic and in a country now politically and economically positioned outside Europe. As a very recent survey of EU nationals in the UK shows (Sigona et al 2022), there is a "profound and long lasting' impact ("an open wound") of Brexit on the EU citizens' sense of identity.

Many of the findings of both this quantitative study and of our own art-based exploration highlight that the emotions engendered by Brexit and compounded by the pandemic are not some short-term malaise easily and quickly reabsorbed by the return to 'normality'. On the contrary, on the basis of our results, we argue that the imposed isolation during lockdown gave a much more definite shape to the fear of loss and separation from their home and loved ones that EU citizens felt in the wake of the referendum. Their fears of being cut off from their origins and their opportunities to lead a dual life in the UK and Europe have been starkly materialised through the lockdown regulations, but, unlike the latter, the fears will not go away with the return of a so called "normality", as most of our participants cannot envisage what a post-Brexit normality would look like for them and their families on both sides of the channel.

As discussed, a lot of them feel that the informal 'pact' they had with the UK, when they first moved here, has been broken and that the tables have been turned unilaterally against them. Their reactions to this state of affairs is taking and will take many different directions: some have already returned to Europe to kick start a new life, others decided to stay in the UK mostly due to family attachments and work commitments, others are just living their life day-by-day, leaving the door open to the possibility of going "home". But will that be really "home"? Will that still feel like "home" especially if they have been in the UK for many years?

Many of the questions and issues that migrants traditionally had to face in terms of their sense of identity and citizenship, and that had never before pertained to EU citizens in Britain, are now clearly presenting to them with urgency, in the wake of Brexit and amplified by the pandemic. How they will move on from here is a matter for many future studies.

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