HOW DOES LOCAL-LEVEL CONTACT SHAPE ATTITUDES TOWARDS EU MIGRANTS?

A comparison of British, Romanian and Polish residents’ views in two English local authorities in the context of Brexit

Alexandra Bulat

A thesis submitted to UCL School of Slavonic & East European Studies (SSEES) for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Sociology & Migration Studies

2020
Declaration

I, Alexandra Bulat, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis. I also declare I personally collected, transcribed and analysed all fieldwork data on which this thesis is based.
Abstract

This thesis examines how attitudes towards EU migrants are shaped at the local level. There is a large literature on ‘skill’ and ‘ethnic hierarchies’ in attitudes towards migration. Studies tend to employ quantitative methods, treating migrants’ skill level and origin as separate topics of inquiry, rather than qualitatively analysing how they intersect in people’s subjective expressions of attitudes. Migration research in the UK is mostly conducted either from British or migrant perspectives, as opposed to comparatively analysing both migrant and non-migrant voices. This thesis makes an original contribution by illustrating nuanced attitudes from both British and migrant participants within a comparative approach, showing how skill and ethnic hierarchies intersect in the construction of attitudes towards EU migrants. All empirical chapters are based on in-depth, reflexive qualitative analysis of local-level attitudes towards EU migrants, drawing on a framework of localised contact theory. To situate individual attitudes within national-level narratives, I analyse 120 EU referendum campaign materials (ephemera) containing text on immigration. My fieldwork in 2017-2018 includes interviews with 63 British, Polish and Romanian residents, 15 local politicians (councillors and MPs) and observations recorded through fieldnotes. I compare attitudes in one of the most multiethnic (the London Borough of Newham) and one of the most monoethnic local authorities in the UK (Tendring in Essex). I argue that EU migration, usually portrayed as a national issue in media and political debates, has asymmetric local-level impacts for my participants. Interviewees’ attitudes are informed, challenged and changed mainly through local anecdotal experiences, but are framed through mediated contact (media, political and community narratives). Direct localised contact shapes residents’ understanding of four key concepts – contribution, community, control and certainty. These understandings influence their overall attitudes towards EU migrants, which are situated within an overarching narrative of change.
Impact statement

This research impacted academic and non-academic audiences through different types of dissemination, from academic publications to informing university teaching and engagement through festivals, school talks, public lectures and the media. In its finalised form, this research has further potential to contribute to Politics, Sociology and Migration Studies through future publications, informing UK immigration policymaking and challenging public narratives on immigration.

Academic impact

This research has impacted Politics, Sociology and Migration Studies through publications and teaching. Three academic publications directly result from my PhD work. A book chapter (Bulat, 2018a) includes findings from Chapter 4 and a peer-reviewed academic article (Bulat, 2019) draws on key arguments from Chapters 5 and 6. Moreover, I wrote a short article on methodological choices and reflexivity in research on Brexit (Bulat, 2018c). I presented PhD findings at a variety of conferences, such as the BSA, PSA and BASEES annual conferences. I disseminated this research to wider academic audiences via academic blogs, such as LSE Brexit, Democratic Audit and the National Institute of Social and Economic Research blog. I used my expertise on attitudes towards immigration to explain key concepts when teaching Comparative Political Analysis and Researching Politics and Society at UCL SSEES. I delivered undergraduate lectures based on my PhD research: on UK immigration policymaking (Comparative Political Analysis, UCL SSEES, 2018), on UK attitudes towards immigration (Social Problems in Britain, University of Cambridge, 2019) and on migrants’ rights in the Brexit context (UCL Brexit Summer School, 2019). To continue this impact within academia, I plan to write at least two more articles, especially building on Chapters 6 and 7, to be submitted to UK migration journals. Other publication plans consist of an article containing the main findings of this thesis and a SAGE Research Methods Case Study on positionality and reflexivity in migration research.
Non-academic impact

I believe that migration research is of public interest and should be communicated to audiences beyond academia. My public engagement activity includes presenting my research at festivals (e.g. Bloomsbury Festival, 2017), a library exhibition (*What does Brexit mean to you?*, LSE, 2018), an art show (*Uncharted Territory*, 2019), policy and political events (e.g. APPG Reuniting Britain post-Brexit, 2018) and public lectures (e.g. UCL Knowledge Night, 2019). In 2019, I gave two guest talks in schools, on immigration in the EU referendum campaign (Dulwich College) and on the local impact of Brexit (St George’s School, Maida Vale). As a spokesperson for *the3million* and part of the NEON national spokespeople’s network, I am frequently invited to comment on immigration policy in the media. My recent appearances include BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera News, Channel 4 and Sky News, where I often communicate my academic research in addition to my activist work on citizens’ rights. This PhD research, particularly Chapter 6, has implications for immigration policymaking. This thesis and my public engagement activities add to a more evidence-informed public debate on immigration. My plans for non-academic impact include writing an accessible book based on my PhD fieldwork, from a more personal perspective.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the thousands of people who have spoken to me about immigration and Brexit since I started my PhD. It has been an intense period in which I got involved with a variety of groups and organisations, as a migration research student, migrants’ rights activist and an EU migrant myself. I do not see those three roles as contradicting each other, but as complementing, bringing different angles to the study of attitudes towards EU migrants.

I thank everyone who made my academic research journey possible. I couldn’t have pursued a PhD without the generous support from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) +3 studentship. My eternal gratitude goes to my supervisor Prof Anne White, who has always been there for me to offer feedback, as well as motivate me to finish writing the thesis. I would like to thank my secondary supervisors, Prof Richard Mole and Prof Alena Ledeneva, who offered valuable feedback at different stages of the PhD. I would also like to thank Dr Titus Hjelm for his detailed comments during my PhD upgrade process. I am grateful to my PhD colleagues at SSEES (Liisa Tuhkanen, Marta Kotwas and many others) with whom I discussed my research. Beyond UCL, I’m particularly thankful to Dr Jeff Miley from the University of Cambridge and Dr Laura Moroșanu from the University of Sussex, with whom I continued to collaborate after graduating from those two universities.

I am thankful to the 63 British, Polish and Romanian residents interviewed ‘on the record’ for this research, as well as the numerous others who offered me information ‘off the record’ in pubs, coffee shops, in their homes and on the streets of Newham and Tendring. I would like to thank the two MPs who gave up their time to be interviewed for this thesis, Giles Watling MP (Clacton) and Stephen Timms MP (East Ham). I thank all local councillors who kindly spoke to me during the fieldwork: John Gray, Terry Paul, Rachel Tripp, James Beckles, Delyth Miles, Richard Everett, Mark Platt, and those who wished to stay anonymous. I am grateful to other Remain and Leave local activists who helped me understand politics in those areas: Callum Robertson, Tasha Osben, and those who wished to stay anonymous.
Special thanks to Dan from Jaywick who put me in touch with many residents in Tendring, and Asad Abasi, who offered invaluable insight into the ethnic minority Leave vote in Newham. Chapter 4 would not have been possible without the three months PhD placement at the British Library. My thanks go to Jeremy Jenkins, Nicola Bingham and James Perkins from the BL, as well as Julie-Ann Lambert from the Oxford Bodleian Libraries and William Hale from Cambridge University Library. A thank you to the British Sociological Association (BSA), Political Studies Association (PSA) and the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) for their events and conferences where I could receive feedback on my work. My SSEES Politics seminar students deserve a special mention for their engagement with my Brexit and immigration case studies and examples.

During these PhD research years, I have been a migrant rights’ activist. Since 2017, I have been working with the3million, the largest grassroots organisation campaigning for EU migrants’ rights in the UK. Since early 2019, I moved from a volunteer role to working for the organisation as research project manager and being one of the media spokespeople. I would like to thank what I call the3million family for always being supportive and patient with my PhD work: Nicolas, Katia, Kuba, Dimitri, Ilse, Maike, Hedwig, Monique, Axel, Luke, Maria, Toni and all the other team members and volunteers, in no particular order!

I learnt a lot from many among my 15,000 followers on Twitter, some who read both my academic and non-academic work, often providing feedback. It has always been my aim to engage the public with migration research, and social media is a part of that conversation. I would like to thank the Public Engagement team at UCL for their training and the LSE Library (Daniel) and the LSE Brexit blog (Roch) for their interest in my research.

I wish to thank my family and close friends. Special mention to one of my good friends, Aistė, with whom I spent many hours discussing politics over ‘vino’ in London. Finally, and most importantly, my partner James – our ‘politically mixed couple’ enabled me to see immigration from various perspectives and ensure I was never in a politics ‘bubble’ at home.
Terms and abbreviations

**Brexit**: the process of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU

**EEA**: European Economic Area

**EU**: European Union

**EU15**: the countries part of the EU before 2004

**EU8**: the countries which joined the EU in 2004

**EU2**: the countries which joined the EU in 2007

**EU referendum**: the 2016 UK national referendum on continuing EU membership

**Leave/Leaver**: a person who voted for the United Kingdom to leave the EU or who supports this position

**MP**: Member of Parliament

**MAC**: Migration Advisory Committee

**NHS**: National Health Service

**ONS**: Office for National Statistics

**Remain/Remainer**: a person who voted for the United Kingdom to remain in the EU or who supports this position

**UK**: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
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And the world, to each individual, means the part of it with which he comes in contact; his party, his sect, his church, his class of society.

[...]

He is capable of rectifying his mistakes, by discussion and experience. Not by experience alone. There must be discussion, to show how experience is to be interpreted.

John Stuart Mill (1859)
Chapter 1. Introduction: context and case selection

This introduction sets the background which influenced the formulation of the research puzzle explored in this thesis. It focusses on the recent history of EU migration to the UK and the trends in attitudes towards migrants in the Brexit context. It justifies the choice of three participant groups by nationality (British, Romanian and Polish) and the inclusion of views from both ordinary citizens and local politicians. This is followed by presenting the two contrasting fieldsites, the local authorities of Newham and Tendring, explaining why this comparison is relevant in the current socio-political environment and how it can add to understanding attitudes towards migrants at the local level. The penultimate section summarises the contributions of this research (which are expanded on in Chapter 8, Section 8.2). The final section in this introduction outlines the thesis structure.

1.1. Research question: How does local-level contact shape attitudes towards EU migrants?

This thesis uses a localised contact theory framework, detailed in Chapter 2. Researchers tend to agree that contact with migrants can shape more positive attitudes, yet little is known about how local-level contact has influenced attitudes towards EU migrants in the Brexit context in the UK. There is also a gap in understanding the interplay between direct and mediated forms of contact. While there is a large literature on attitudes towards migrants, this is mostly based on quantitative surveys which are limited in their ability to capture nuances in public attitudes. Studies tend to explore economic and socio-psychological factors in shaping attitudes and look at either skill or origin-based hierarchies of migrants in public opinion. Most research asks whether economy trumps culture (or the inverse), rather than how they intersect.

There is a long list of unanswered or partly answered questions on attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK. How were EU migrants portrayed during the EU referendum campaign? How are British people’s attitudes towards EU migrants shaped in the context of Brexit? How are hierarchies of desirable post-Brexit
migrants constructed? How does contact with migrants impact attitudes towards them? How do different forms of contact impact attitudes? What influences EU migrants’ own attitudes towards EU migration and British people? How do these attitudes compare in monoethnic and multiethnic areas in the UK? To what extent do people feel their views on immigration are represented by local or national politicians? How do they reflect on the UK immigration debate? Most of these questions are part of solving one overarching question, which is the basis of this PhD thesis: **How does local-level contact shape attitudes towards EU migrants?**

### 1.2. Why study attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK?

This research is set in the context of Brexit, which inevitably shapes this thesis. Image 1 shows a selection of notes from my interviewees. They wrote the first thing that came to their mind when thinking about the EU referendum campaign. The answers illustrate how public opinion was and remains divided following the EU referendum vote and how immigration was an important topic. This thesis considers Brexit as a specific period and context in which attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK have been at the forefront of public debate, hence it provides an ideal opportunity to study attitudes in more detail.

Immigration was a central topic in the 2016 EU referendum campaign. The prospect of ‘controlling immigration’, a component of the broader political slogan ‘take back control’, resonated in such way that a sizeable enough proportion of the population (51.89% of the participating electorate) voted for the UK to leave the EU. Two years before the referendum, while 18% of Europeans considered immigration an important national issue, 38% of British people did so (Paluchowski and Marco-Serrano, 2016). Before 2016, British Social Attitudes surveys consistently found large majorities of British people wanting immigration reduced by ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’ (e.g. Ford and Heath, 2014). Attitudes have softened after the UK voted to leave the EU (e.g. Blinder and Allen, 2017).
**Image 1:** ‘What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think about the EU referendum campaign?’ (selection of participants’ written answers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative remain Campaign.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MIGRATION SHOULD HAVE STOPPED THE MOMENT WE VOTED OUT!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>MISINFORMATION</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>NEGATIVE BIAS</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>SCAPEGOATING</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Transcription (from left to right, top to bottom): ‘The Brexit referendum demonstrated the worst of Britain – Hubris and ignorance. At the time [1 illegible word] David Cameron could have been honest about how his policies had created national pain. He chose party over country.’ / ‘Negative Remain campaign.’ / ‘Shambles! Lies! Misdirection!’ / ‘Poor campaign [sic] migration was used to score political points.’ / ‘Migration should have stopped the moment we voted out.’
During the referendum campaign, I was writing my MPhil thesis at the University of Cambridge, focussing on Romanian migrants’ attitudes towards their conationals, ethnic minorities and the British. I had an ESRC scholarship offer to start my PhD studies at UCL in September 2016. My initial proposal was a qualitative study based on a frame analysis of UK media narratives about East European migrants and semi-structured interviews with East European migrants and British citizens about their attitudes towards East European migration. When the referendum result was announced, I was not surprised. Some of my Romanian participants in the MPhil research, although they could not vote in the referendum, expressed support for Brexit. A couple listed high migration among their reasons for this preference. Some of my British friends and acquaintances voted to leave the EU.

When I asked them whether immigration mattered at the ballot box, a few confidently said yes, but clarified that it was not about me – I was a desirable EU migrant, ‘contributing’ to the UK through my studies and work and, therefore, I was ‘going to be fine’, whatever the Brexit outcome. What surprised me was hearing some of my West European migrant friends, upset and shocked about the result, claiming that it was the first time they have ‘felt like a migrant’ in the UK. Some rejected the term ‘EU migrant’, insisting I used ‘EU citizen’ to describe migrants from the EU coming to the UK. They explained this was because ‘migrant’ and ‘immigrant’ were labels that have overwhelmingly negative connotations after years of negative media and political narratives about migration. I remember feeling confused and thinking that I, as a Romanian, had personally always felt like a migrant. These experiences construct my positionality as a researcher studying attitudes towards migration in the UK (Chapter 3, Section 3.3.5.2 details my selective positionality).

While politicians advanced their arguments about EU migrants, freedom of movement, or immigration in general, the EU migrants in question were rarely, if
ever, given a voice. Testimonies from EU migrants, such as those collected by Remigi et al. (2017), illustrate their frustration with how migration was spoken about during the referendum campaign. One such contributor speaks for many EU migrants when asking: ‘Why did no one run a campaign introducing some of the different scenarios of EU nationals who had come to the UK and contribute to this country? Making it personal, introducing mixed EU families, explaining their stories’ (Remigi et al., 2017: 133). Although EU migration was a central issue in the campaign, it was difficult to see a positive case being made for EU migrants living in the UK. Even more apparent was a lack of a ‘human face’ of migration, the invisibility of stories from ‘mixed EU families’ (households in which one or more members are an EU migrant). This depersonalised debate allowed migration to be mostly discussed in terms of numbers and economic impacts, rather than giving voice to people whose lives have been embedded within UK society, in many cases, for several decades.

The referendum result announcement was a defining moment in developing my PhD research plans. After listening to discussions on immigration in which EU migrants did not have a voice (or a vote in the referendum), I felt it was crucial to include both British and migrant perspectives when researching attitudes towards migration in the UK. The surveys and opinion polls on immigration used to justify some arguments in the referendum campaign were limited in capturing the complex and nuanced narratives of Brexit that I was hearing ‘on the ground’. I thought it was essential to explore attitudes towards immigration through an in-depth, qualitative study.

In many ways, the subject of this thesis is a product of the Brexit context. The research progressed in parallel with the UK-EU Brexit negotiations during the May Government, later during the Johnson administration and, at the time of writing, under a Johnson majority Government and a transition period after the 31st of January 2020. Repeated surveys show how attitudes towards migration are significantly more positive after 2016 (Blinder and Allen, 2017; Duffy et al., 2017). However, this is not necessarily how migrants feel when hearing about a recorded rise in hate crime (O’Neill, 2017) and seeing more of their conationalists
leaving. EU net migration to the UK reached pre-2004 EU Enlargement levels in the last quarter of 2019 (Blake, 2019).

There are mixed views on whether the immigration concerns that informed the Brexit vote were about the scale of migration or more specifically directed towards certain types of migrants (such as the ‘lower skilled’ or the East Europeans who prominently featured in media and political narratives). While analysing EU referendum campaign materials (henceforth, ephemera) on a PhD placement at the British Library in the summer of 2017, I found ‘Pug’s tour through Europe’ (1824), a children’s book published two centuries ago. The protagonist, a monkey, describes his adventures in Europe. The story and its illustrations reveal Pug’s attitudes towards different groups of people in Europe: finding gracious ladies in Paris, running away from Spain, criticizing art in Italy, making friends in Venice, meeting ‘brave Greeks’ and then ‘brutes’ in Turkey, ‘sincere and honest’ but ‘rough’ Germans and, last but not least, encountering ‘rude and trackless’ Russians. This is one illustration of how stereotypes about particular nationalities are historically rooted.

I explored data from various surveys which contain items about attitudes towards immigration in the UK. The vast majority of questions include a general category of migration from the EU, with a few separating Western and Eastern Europe. An exception is the Citizenship Survey (DCLG, 2001-2011), where participants who were sceptical about immigration were asked as a follow-up to name the country or countries from which they wanted immigration reduced. After writing this thesis, a more comprehensive survey-based report on British public attitudes towards migrants by Blinder and Richards (2020) found similar hierarchies, based on several survey datasets. In terms of EU migration, West Europeans are preferred. Similar to the Citizenship Survey, more respondents wanted to reduce migration from Romania than from Poland.

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2 I use the term ‘ephemera’ to describe the political leaflets, newsletters and other materials distributed by campaign organisations, political parties and individuals during the EU referendum campaign. This is the term used by the British Library, Cambridge University Library and the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, where the EU referendum ephemera collections analysed in this thesis are located.

3 After writing this thesis, a more comprehensive survey-based report on British public attitudes towards migrants by Blinder and Richards (2020) found similar hierarchies, based on several survey datasets. In terms of EU migration, West Europeans are preferred. Similar to the Citizenship Survey, more respondents wanted to reduce migration from Romania than from Poland.
EU migrant groups by nationality in the UK? Or does it tell something much more complex about how Romanians and Poles have been perceived in the UK throughout time?

The trends in these attitudes surveys are discussed at length in the literature on attitudes towards migrants in contemporary Europe (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2). The highly skilled migrants are welcomed, while lower skilled migrants are less desirable. Europeans are preferred to non-Europeans and East Europeans are less desirable than West Europeans. These patterns have implications for UK immigration policymaking. During the referendum campaign, politicians advocating leaving the EU proposed a more restrictionist immigration policy for EU migrants, with a preference for the highly skilled. After the result, this policy was presented as being underpinned by majority support. The 2018 Immigration White Paper reached the same conclusion based on quantitative survey data. The UK’s ‘points based’ immigration system was announced in early 2020 (HM Government, 2020a), claiming it delivers on the British people’s vote in 2016. There is little nuance behind the attitudes captured in the surveys used to shape policy affecting migrants’ lives. What do the respondents understand by highly and low skilled migration, for instance? What shapes their attitudes towards certain types of migration? Do national-level narratives about migration correspond to people’s local-level experiences with migrants?

To answer the research question underpinning this thesis (how the local-level shapes attitudes towards EU migrants), there is a need to first understand how EU migrants were portrayed during the referendum campaign. The first part of Chapter 4 fulfils this task, through analysing 120 EU referendum ephemera, the form of political communication which has not been systematically studied before in the Brexit literature. After setting the context, the next step in the research was to choose whose local-level attitudes I focus on and where.
Map 1: Which countries do you want immigration reduced from?
(Citizenship Survey)

Scale explanation

0-700 represents the number of participants who gave a certain country as a response to the question ‘which country in particular’, after previously answering that they want immigration reduced. The more towards the dark red end of the spectrum, the more participants said they would like immigration from that country to be reduced. 0-700 (white to dark red on the colour gradient below) represents the number of individual responses.
1.3. Why British, Romanian and Polish participants?

During a referendum debate (The Spectator, 2016), Nigel Farage, a well-known politician in favour of leaving the EU, commented: ‘And forty years on, we are fighting a referendum where the Remain side – or, the “Remainians”, as I think they’re now known...but I’ll...I’ll come onto immigration later.’ Many in the audience laughed when hearing the word ‘Remainians’, but Farage’s comment goes beyond an inspired pun. It exposes how the debate on EU migration in the UK has been mainly about particular migrant nationalities (such as Romanian or Polish) or regions of origin (such as East Europeans). Documentary titles following the referendum, such as ‘Who should we let in?’ (Hislop, 2017) and ‘Immigration: Who should we let in after Brexit?’ (Robinson, 2018), illustrate that the framing of immigration is not only about numbers, but also about the type of migrants. ‘EU migration’, despite its categorisation as such in surveys, is not seen as a homogenous category where all group members receive equal attention due to their ‘EU citizen’ status.

In UK media and politics, migrants are usually spoken about (rather than spoken to or speaking for themselves). They are classified by their skill level or geographical origin, mirroring the literature on skill and ethnic hierarchies addressed in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.6. The UK immigration debate intensified following the Enlargement of the EU in 2004 and 2007. Scholars note that we live in the ‘age of migration’ (Castles and Miller, 2009), but also in an ‘age of uncertainty’ (Bauman, 2007), bringing many often unexpected changes in people’s everyday lives.

Migration is usually linked to the concept of change – changes to cultures, economies and communities. With the expansion of EU freedom of movement to more countries and less predictable movements of people in Europe, migration research also entered a ‘mobility turn’ (Faist, 2013). Increasing uncertainty makes planning for the impacts of migration more challenging. In the case of Eastern EU migrants to the UK, it is notable how some researchers significantly

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4 This example of Nigel Farage’s comments is adapted from a published book chapter I wrote on the EU referendum ephemera (Bulat, 2018a).
underestimated the number of people who would arrive after 2004 (e.g., Dustmann et al., 2003). Others noted that a large increase in the number of Romanian and Bulgarian workers after 2014 (when transitional work restrictions ended) was unlikely (Fic and Portes, 2014). Overall, the UK had the second largest immigration flow of EU citizens after Germany (Eurostat, 2014, in Teney, 2016: 7).

Romanians and Poles are not only frequently spoken about in the media, but they also form the two largest EU migrant groups in the UK. Both Polish and Romanian migrants were present before EU expansion, but in different settings. While there was a visible Polish community after World War II, migrants from Romania began to be noticed later, when they arrived as refugees escaping political oppression. According to Romocea (2013), after the Romanian political refugees fleeing communism, there was a migration stage of ‘post-1989 professionals’, followed by the ‘post-EU economic migrants’ after 2007, corresponding to a larger group of Polish migrants arriving in the UK mainly for work after 2004.

In the rather short period of a decade, the number of Romanian and Polish migrants in the UK has grown rapidly. The 2011 UK census notes that Polish is England’s second most spoken language. In the year of the referendum, the most common five countries from which people migrated in 2015 were Romania, China, Poland, India and Spain (Office for National Statistics, 2016: 23). Romania became the most common country of last residence in the UK for the first time in history in 2015. Romanians made up 10% of all migrants arriving that year (Office for National Statistics, 2016: 23). This situation is similar to how Poles topped the ‘migrant by nationality’ lists immediately after Poland joined the EU in 2004. Kaczmarczyk (2016: 33) observes that ‘in the context of Central and Eastern Europe, the scale of migration from Poland is comparable only with the migration propensity of Romanians.’

Some predicted a ‘Brexodus’ (a large number of EU citizens leaving the UK) after the EU referendum. While many EU citizens left the UK since 2016, there are different patterns depending on their country of origin. Compared with other EU migrant groups, Romanians were among the least likely to leave or be
disincentivised from arriving in the UK immediately after the referendum (Office for National Statistics, 2018c: 2). In the year ending September 2016, there were 11% more NINo registrations for A2 migrants, contrasting with decreases in every other EU category (European Union total, EU15, EU8) and even non-EU migration (Office for National Statistics, 2016: 14). However, in the last quarter of 2019, while net non-EU migration increased to its highest levels since 2004, net EU migration was as low as in 2003 (Blake, 2019). Although with a slight increase since the last quarter, overall there is a continuing decreasing trend in EU migration. Notably, 2019 saw the lowest number of EU citizens coming for work-related reasons since 2004 (Office for National Statistics, 2020). All UK EU migration statistics are based on estimates and should be interpreted with caution, particularly as this migration to the UK was significantly underestimated before (White, 2019). Among other factors, research indicates how EU migrants often expect to reside in the UK for a shorter period than they end up staying, which limits the ability of some surveys to capture reliable data (Paluchowski and Marco-Serrano, 2016: 25).

Because Romanians and Bulgarians both joined the EU in 2007 and have had full rights to work in the UK since 2014, media and political debates, but also research, tend to mostly refer to A2 migration or ‘Romanians and Bulgarians’. These two migrant groups have usually been depicted homogenously in UK public narratives (Maeva, 2017: 11). Research on EU migration in the UK is dominated by studies on Poles, partly due to the size of this migrant group, but also facilitated by more researchers of Polish background. This does not mean that Romanians and Bulgarians are the most suitable comparison in a study of attitudes towards migration, or that Polish migrants should be researched on their own, or in comparison with other East European groups who became EU citizens in 2004. This thesis chooses to compare the views of Romanian and Polish participants alongside British interviewees, given they are the largest EU migrant groups in both fieldsites.

Polish and Romanian migrants’ attitudes are shaped alongside British attitudes towards migration. As Chapter 2 illustrates, most research on attitudes towards EU migrants is either quantitative and from a British perspective or qualitative and
from a migrant perspective. This thesis is original in considering how British and migrant voices intersect in the construction of attitudes towards migration at the local level in the UK. The views of migrant and non-migrant residents are complemented by more ‘official’ voices at the local level. I chose to interview MPs, local councillors and other political campaigners in the two fieldsites as they are particularly knowledgeable about their local areas. Moreover, they have a wider perspective on local attitudes through listening to residents’ concerns on the doorstep when campaigning during the referendum or in local and national elections. Their own views and political messages on migration can influence the attitudes of those residents with whom they interact. Thus, combining ordinary residents’ voices with those of local politicians builds a more nuanced picture of local-level attitudes towards EU migrants.

The selection of British, Romanian and Polish residents is driven by a ‘case study logic’ (Small, 2005: 6), given that this research aims to answer a ‘how’ question through examining the nuances in people’s expressions of attitudes towards EU migrants. The thesis does not attempt to generalise the views of British residents or consider Romanian and Polish migrants’ attitudes as representative of EU citizens. As illustrated in this section, Poles and Romanians are the two largest EU migrant groups in the UK, but they are also the groups that experienced the fastest paced migration process. Moreover, they represent the two EU migrant nationalities which have arguably attracted the most negative political and media coverage in the UK. In asking how attitudes are shaped at the local level, the value of this qualitative research consists of adding meanings to the number-based explanations and positioning local-level experiences within national narratives.
1.4. Why Newham and Tendring as fieldwork locations?

The two fieldwork locations, Newham and Tendring, are also chosen based on their substance as case studies (Small, 2005: 6) and potential to explore local-level contact with migrants in two apparent extreme situations (in terms of the likelihood of encounters with migrants). This thesis compares British, Romanian and Polish residents’ attitudes in areas hosting relatively deprived neighbourhoods but having different demographic compositions. The fieldsites have been strategically chosen from various possible types of location. One is an area which is broadly monoethnic, with EU migration lower than the national UK average and strong Leave support in the EU referendum. The other has been multiethnic for decades, with high non-EU migration and high EU migration especially after 2004, but with a narrow Remain win in 2016. I considered the possibility of a third case, a largely monoethnic, Leave-supporting area which has low non-EU migration, but a recent increase in its EU migrant population. Another possible point of comparison could have been an area with high recent EU migration which overwhelmingly voted to Remain.

Selecting the fieldsites was informed by both theoretical literature and empirical research on attitudes towards migrants. The literature explaining attitudes towards migrants is divided between economic and socio-psychological explanations. As Chapter 2 (Section 2.1.2) details, these correspond with conflict and contact theories, respectively. Conflict theories look at how competition over resources can shape hostility towards out-groups, including migrants, while contact theories are interested in how interpersonal encounters can reduce prejudice.

Place-based knowledge (cf. Fisher, 2012) is relevant in the study of attitudes towards migrants. Locations in the UK differ both regarding economic resources and the likelihood of intergroup contact with migrants. These variables impact attitudes towards migrants and voting behaviour. To illustrate, people in areas most affected by austerity in the UK were more likely to vote to leave the EU (Fetzer, 2018a). Those are also areas which tend to have relatively small migrant populations. The qualitative approach of this thesis enables comparison and
reflection on the nature of local-level contact with migrants and how this shapes attitudes. It adopts a broad definition of ‘contact’ encompassing both ‘meaningful’ and ‘fleeting’ interactions (detailed in Section 2.2.1) between British and migrant residents. It also considers the places in which these encounters occur, such as the workplace, neighbourhoods or other local community spaces mentioned by participants. Thus, a qualitative, case focused and data-driven approach will refine traditional conceptualisations of intergroup social contact (Bogardus, 1947), which have been criticised for being unable to reflect the complexities of relationships in multiethnic societies (see Section 2.1.2 on constrict theory).

Given the time and financial constraints of this research, I decided to focus on the two most different cases to explore contact theory at the local level. Newham and Tendring were particularly suitable for comparison given the history of British internal migration from the East End of London to East Anglia. Tendring is one of the few UK local authority areas which never witnessed a high migrant population, either from the EU or the rest of the world. Despite this, it returned a UKIP MP to Parliament before the EU referendum and was one of the heartlands of Leave support in 2016. The next paragraphs detail on the characteristics of these two fieldsites.

Newham is a borough in east London, containing two Labour Parliamentary constituencies: West Ham and East Ham. James Keir Hardie, who became the first Labour Party leader, was initially elected in 1892 as an Independent Labour MP for West Ham South. Although Hardie lost his seat three years later, he laid the foundations of the Labour movement and ‘the area has remained solidly Labour ever since’ (Powell, 2004). West Ham was also first in the UK to run a Labour majority local council. In 1997, boundaries were redrawn, resulting in the current two constituencies. East Ham is represented by Labour’s Stephen Timms and West Ham by Labour’s Lyn Brown. They both have a majority with over 70% of the total vote share, even after Labour suffered a substantive decline in almost every seat (including these two) in the 2019 general election. In 2016, both constituencies voted Remain with a small majority (52.7% in West Ham and 53.1% in East Ham), much lower than many multiethnic London constituencies.
In contrast to Newham, Tendring is an overwhelmingly Conservative, Leave-supporting area. It is located outside the capital, on the east coast of England. Following a review of constituency boundaries, Tendring is divided in two, Clacton and Harwich & North Essex, both represented by Conservative MPs. Bernard Jenkin increased his majority in Harwich & North Essex having over 60% of the total vote in the 2019 general election, while Giles Watling in Clacton won over 70% of the vote. Both constituencies voted to Leave the EU in the 2016 referendum – 70% in Clacton and 61% in Harwich & North Essex. Prior to the referendum, Clacton made the news headlines as the constituency represented by a UKIP MP, Douglas Carswell. UKIP, with its then leader Nigel Farage, promoted a sceptical message towards immigration. Commentators pointed at how UKIP won most votes in low immigration areas (e.g. Danzig, 2014), a trend confirmed by researchers who studied the Brexit vote (e.g. Fetzer, 2018a).

Some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK are found in Newham and Tendring. Deprivation is often explained in reference to declining industries, a context used in Brexit discussions to distinguish between the ‘left behind’ and the ‘metropolitan elite’ areas which shape the ‘two Englands’ (Jennings and Stoker, 2016), the losers and winners of globalisation. By comparing one such area in London and one outside London, I challenge the reductionist geographies (Gordon, 2018) portraying the ‘metropolitan elites’ in London against the people living in more rural areas outside London, showing how the ‘left behind’ can also mean multiethnic urban areas with high levels of precarisation (Furlong, 2018).

Over a hundred years ago, the east of London had a booming industry. Railwaymen founded the Stratford Co-operative Society, which was the basis of the London co-operative societies in the 1920s. The 21st century Newham is heavily reliant on retail, business & administration, education, healthcare & social work and accommodation & food services, each with over 10% of the local employment share (Office for National Statistics, 2018a). Some of these sectors tend to employ high numbers of migrant workers in lower-paid jobs. The economic and demographic changes in Newham over time are richly captured through journalistic accounts (e.g. Bermant, 1975), selections of photographs (e.g. Evans, 1993) and documentary film (e.g. London Screen Archives, 1986).
Tendring’s local economy has also changed. For instance, Clacton used to be a popular holiday destination with a strong tourism industry (Thornton, 2012). This is evidenced through collections of historical photographs (e.g. Rouse, 2011) and the writings of local historians and residents (e.g. Jacobs, 2012). Tendring kept more manufacturing activities than Newham, but it is still mainly reliant on jobs in health & social work, education, retail, accommodation & food services (Office for National Statistics, 2018b).

In addition to their different demographics and political backgrounds, the two fieldsites were also selected due to the media attention they received. Poverty in Tendring has attracted extensive media attention. In 2019, Jaywick, a village in Clacton, was named the most deprived area in the UK for the third time according to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government indices of multiple deprivation (BBC News, 2019). A decade ago, the BBC (2010) ran a news report describing Jaywick as the ‘most deprived place in England.’ Channel 5’s (2015) ‘Benefits by the sea’ series and, more recently, Channel 4’s (2019) report titled ‘Jaywick: the most deprived town in Britain’, were widely disseminated and criticised. When I interviewed participants in Jaywick in 2018, some were reluctant to speak to me, asking if I was another journalist trying to misrepresent their experiences. The voices of Jaywick residents were heard beyond the mainstream media, such as through a theatre play called ‘Carry on Jaywick’, which was also published as a short book (Murphy, 2018).

Newham is also a topical place for the media. It is the London borough reporting the highest levels of homelessness (Caritas Anchor House, 2017) and it is the UK council with the highest LOBO (lender option borrower option) loans, sometimes being depicted as the UK’s ‘debt capital’ by commentators (Research for Action, 2017). Sex work in Newham also made the newspaper headlines, prompting hospitals to evaluate the available support in east London, including for the sex workers from migrant backgrounds (Homerton University Hospital, 2013). Immigration raids aiming to detain undocumented migrants are common in areas of high migration in east London (Gentleman, 2019), such as Newham. Local organisations such as Newham Anti-Raids were set up to oppose deportations and the ‘hostile environment’ immigration policies. While the media
highlight poverty in Tendring, they tend to emphasise more the links between deprivation and immigration in Newham. A highly criticised BBC (2016) documentary, ‘Last whites of the East End’, argued that Newham became the area with the lowest percentage of white British people in the UK not only due to increased immigration, but also because of the large numbers of white British residents moving to Essex.

The internal migration of British people between the east of London and Essex is what makes the comparison between Newham and Tendring particularly insightful and original. The qualitative approach enables exploring how attitudes can ‘travel’ from one location to another (see Section 2.1.4). Like Jacobs, a historian of Clacton, many Tendring residents grew up in the East End (e.g. Jacobs, 2015). Almost half of my interviewees in Tendring had a connection with the east of London, usually being born or spending their childhood and youth there. This internal migration has roots in Clacton’s successful tourism industry from decades ago. When its holiday market was peaking, the improved railways gave access to middle class clientele, but also working class East Londoners. Historical accounts mention how Clacton’s resorts were ‘largely populated with migrants from London’ (Thorton, 2012: 6). Some of the working class East Londoners who used to spend their holidays in Clacton, such as some of the participants for this study, became long-term internal migrants to the east coast of England, usually for retirement purposes.

Newham and Tendring are linked through the internal migration of primarily white British residents. These local authorities contrast when considering international migration. In 2018, when most fieldwork for this research was conducted, only 3.5% of Tendring’s population was foreign-born – 2.8% in the EU and 0.7% in a non-EU country. 47.5% of Newham’s residents are foreign-born - 12.4% in the EU and 35.3% outside. Newham has the fourth highest foreign-born population in the UK, after Brent, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster. 72.8% of births are to non-UK born mothers, suggesting an even more diverse population in the future. Tendring is among fewer than 100 local authorities with foreign-born populations lower than 5%, while 6.8 % of births in Tendring are to non-UK born mothers. In both local authorities, the largest EU migrant groups are Romanian
and Polish. In September 2019, Newham was the local authority with the highest number of EU migrants applying to the EU Settlement Scheme (Home Office, 2019a). Research on Newham and the East End analysed these ‘geographies of diversity’ (Jivraj, 2013), observing segregation in some communities (Glynn, 2010) and evidencing some hostility towards new migrant groups (Dench et al., 2006: 171). Chapter 4 in particular shows how EU migrants were pitted against non-EU counterparts by some EU referendum campaigners in Newham.

Newham and Tendring are two contrasting cases that are used to analyse how the attitudes of its Romanian, Polish and British residents are shaped at the local level. While Newham is one of the most multiethnic areas in the UK (and the world), Tendring is overwhelmingly white British. While Newham is one of the safest areas for Labour, Tendring has strong Conservative (and previously, UKIP) support among its residents. While Newham is in the ‘London bubble’ and is urban, Tendring consists of many towns and villages, yet they both witnessed high levels of deprivation. Newham is therefore a location where contact with migrants is expected to be frequent, while Tendring would theoretically have fewer opportunities of direct interpersonal contact with migrant groups. This thesis shows how despite the demographic and political differences in these local authority areas, participants speak about EU migration in similar ways and justify their attitudes mainly through direct local-level contact. Table 1 summarises how Newham and Tendring contrast regarding their EU referendum vote preferences and ethnic composition.

Table 1: Newham and Tendring - key differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Tendring</th>
<th>Newham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leave vote, 2016 (%)</td>
<td>69.5</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign-born population, 2018 (%)</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Births to non-UK born mothers, 2018 (%)</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>72.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU migrant population, 2018 (%)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data sources: Migration Observatory (2018) local data guide & 2016 EU referendum result

5 Demographic data by local authority are extracted from the Migration Observatory (2018) local data guide, which is based on various of sources, including the ONS.
6 All EU, EEA, Swiss migrants and their non-EU family members (with a few exceptions, such as those who can apply via the Windrush scheme) have to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme before 30 June 2021 to be able to reside lawfully in the UK.
1.5. Thesis structure

This thesis is structured in eight chapters. This chapter explained why researching attitudes towards EU migrants in the Brexit context is timely and topical. It justified the focus on British, Romanian and Polish participants and the comparison of Newham and Tendring. It outlined the originality of this qualitative in-depth study of local-level migrant and non-migrant attitudes towards migration.

Chapter 2 defines the key terms of this research and reviews the theories used to explain attitudes towards migration, considering both economic and socio-psychological perspectives. It critically assesses the empirical studies on attitudes towards migration, with a focus on how ethnic and skill hierarchies are constructed, but also how place-based knowledge is relevant in shaping attitudes. It then brings the discussion to the current Brexit context as a period when attitudes towards migrants have been extensively researched. This last section discusses recent research on the extent to which concerns over immigration can explain the Brexit vote, on how immigration was used as a tool in political communication and on EU migrants’ lived experiences post-referendum. This literature review chapter identifies a need for more local-level studies on attitudes towards migration in the Brexit context. It argues that a separation between cultural and economic factors when analysing the impacts of immigration on public attitudes may overlook intersections between skill and ethnic hierarchies in constructing attitudes towards EU migrants.

Chapter 3 argues the choice of a qualitative fieldwork-based study with British, Romanian and Polish participants in Newham and Tendring. Participants’ local-level attitudes towards migrants are contextualised within national-level narratives. An analysis of 120 EU referendum ephemera is used to study who spoke about migration and how in the referendum campaign. Having justified case selection in the introduction, the methodology chapter proceeds to detail the fieldwork in Newham and Tendring and semi-structured interviews as the main method. It considers the practicalities emerging before, during and after the interviews and reflects on ethics and selective positionality. The final section exemplifies the interview data analysis in NVivo12, focussing on coding and the
thematic analysis employed in the empirical chapters. This chapter is complemented by detailed Appendices containing materials such as the interview topic guide, data tables and examples of fieldnotes.

**Chapter 4** contextualises the interview-based analysis. It shows the national-level picture of EU migration during the 2016 EU referendum campaign. The analysis of 120 ephemera illustrates how EU migrants did not have a voice in a debate about them and how a positive case for freedom of movement was almost absent, even in Remain materials. Three categories of movements of people are constructed in the ephemera. ‘The brightest and the best’ are the highly skilled EU migrants who are rarely, but positively mentioned in the materials. They are seen as ‘contributors’ positively impacting the UK. ‘Us’ represents British people who use freedom of movement and who are portrayed in a positive way. ‘The rest’ includes all other migrants who do not fit within the desirable migrant categories. Among EU migrants, those are the East Europeans who, when mentioned, are depicted as lower skilled, and consequently, lower contributing migrants to the UK. The second part of the chapter analyses how British, Romanian and Polish residents in Newham and Tendring responded to a selection of ephemera and the campaign more broadly. The main themes emerging from the interviews are a perceived shortage of quality information (which links to the mistrust in politics felt by the majority of participants), the difficulty to relate to the limited positive arguments about freedom of movement at the local level and a lack of a local-level constructive debate on immigration, which enabled campaigners’ messages to usually be disseminated in an unchallenged way.

**Chapter 5** explores the first two themes from the interview analysis – contribution and community. Migrants need to be perceived as contributors to be welcomed in local communities. With examples from the recorded interviews, this chapter develops on the meaning of ‘contribution’ as a concept, drawing on participants’ interpretations. Its first part details on the expectation that migrants should ‘integrate’ economically. ‘East European’ becomes a euphemism for ‘low skilled’ (and therefore less desirable migration). The second part of the chapter analyses the socio-psychological arguments on migrant integration and clarifies how,
conversely, ethnic and nationality-based migrant hierarchies usually have a class component. This chapter’s main contribution is in revealing the intersections between skill and nationality-based hierarchies of EU migrants, based on in-depth qualitative participant narratives.

Chapter 6 addresses the other two themes emerging from the interview analysis: control and certainty as aspirations for my participants. The less certainty someone feels over their everyday life, the more control they tend to want, and this control often translates to control of migration. The first part of the chapter presents the national-level contexts of ‘losing control’. Participants find themselves in an increasingly unsettling environment, in particular observing negative impacts of austerity policies on their communities. The majority feel detached from and unrepresented in local and national politics. Contrary to some people’s expectations in 2016, Brexit exacerbates some uncertainties. The second part of the chapter asks whether the vote to leave the EU represents ‘taking back control’ for participants, looking at their expectations on immigration policy and comparing those to how they describe their ideal scenarios on migration. Participants’ policy suggestions can be grouped in two themes: controlling the overall number of migrants and controlling their access to welfare. This chapter argues there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to post-Brexit migration policy that is underpinned by public support, given that participants understand widely used migration related terms, such as ‘highly’ and ‘low skilled’ in different ways. The main contribution of this chapter is in giving voice\(^7\) to both migrants and non-migrants in discussing migration policy at a local level.

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\(^7\) ‘Giving voice’ through research, particularly to migrants and other minority groups, has been criticised in the literature. The practice of ‘giving voice’ overlooks participants’ agency, assuming that the ‘voice’ is for the researcher to ‘give’ (Montero-Sieburth, 2020: 211). This could ultimately reinforce power relations between researchers and participants (e.g. Ashby, 2011). I do not assume that the British or migrant participants in this research did not have a ‘voice’. However, I do argue, particularly in the second part of Chapter 4 and Chapter 6, that my participants often feel their voices are not heard or represented, especially at the political level in the UK. Despite immigration being a salient issue in the EU referendum campaign, the EU migrants directly affected did not have a ‘voice’ through voting, while others who could vote still felt they could not discuss about migration in an open and meaningful way (see Sections 4.1.3 and 4.2.3). The aim of the thesis is to explore attitudes towards migration in their diversity and in reference to participants’ own narratives. In addition, the active methodology I adopt (detailed in Chapter 3) contributes in finding my own voice as a researcher (cf. Montero-Sieburth, 2020: 212), through the reflexive practice and selective positionality (see Section 3.3.5 in particular) I employ in my interactions throughout the fieldwork.
Chapter 7 analyses how participants justify their views on migration, presented in the previous two chapters. It first elaborates on the role of mediated contact, in the form of political, media and community narratives, in negatively framing immigration. The second part examines how direct contact with migrants at the local level can challenge and change participants’ views. It argues that change is usually progressive, although there are ‘key moments of change’ identified in many participants’ narratives. It then shows how mediated contact can prevail over direct contact in some circumstances, while in others, direct experiences with migrants are more powerful. This often depends on whether the direct contact confirms or contradicts views shaped by mediated forms of contact. Overall, participants back up their views primarily in reference to one or a few local-level anecdotes of their personal experiences, which are then used to generalise about various impacts of different groups of migrants. This chapter’s main contribution is in demonstrating how mediated and direct forms of contact intersect at the local level.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis, grouping the main conclusions on the construction of attitudes towards EU migrants into three themes: ‘the five C’s’ in participants’ narratives, the relationship between the national and local level, and the intersection between economic and socio-psychological explanations. The second part outlines the contributions of this research. These are grouped into several categories: theoretical and conceptual (on ‘attitudes’, ‘migration’ and contact and constrict theories), empirical (on the qualitative study of attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK), policy (on UK immigration policymaking) and political messaging on immigration. The final section discusses the limitations of this thesis and the potential for future research on the topic of this study.
Chapter 2. Attitudes towards EU migrants in the context of Brexit: theoretical framework and empirical literature review

Research on migration is multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary. This chapter situates my research study within a rapidly developing literature on Brexit and migration, outlining its original contribution to Political Sociology and Migration Studies, through qualitatively analysing how local-level contact shapes migrant and non-migrant attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK.

The first part introduces the key concepts underpinning this thesis - ‘attitudes’, ‘(im)migration/(im)migrants’ and the ‘local level’. It explains how they relate to the literature on defining ethnic and national groups as well as the concepts of nationalism, populism and Euroscepticism, which are central to the Brexit literature. Then, it presents the theoretical framework for the empirical chapters, reviewing contact, conflict and constrict theories. It situates those within economic and socio-psychological perspectives employed in research on attitudes towards migrants. This is followed by a discussion on integration and social remittances showing how attitudes are impacted by the process of (return) migration and a section on mediated attitudes illustrating various ways in which outsiders can manipulate individuals’ views. Finally, this first part considers the construction of ‘hierarchies of migrants’ within individual attitudes.

The second part of this chapter critically engages with empirical studies on attitudes towards migrants in contemporary Europe. It presents mixed findings on the extent to which contact needs to be ‘meaningful’ to affect attitudes. It reviews studies on attitudes among migrant groups and then explains how socio-demographic characteristics, such as education and skill level, shape attitudes, and how place-based knowledge matters when constructing these views.

The third and final part narrows the scope further to the UK context, reviewing the post-2016 ‘Brexitology’. This field of research has been preoccupied with analysing migration as a public concern shaping the EU referendum result and
as a topic in political communication. It also explored the lived experiences of EU migrants post-Brexit. While I updated this chapter regularly throughout my PhD research, relevant studies are likely to be published between the submission and examination of this thesis, given the rapidly expanding Brexit literature.

2.1. Theorising attitudes towards migrants

2.1.1. Defining the key terms of the research

This thesis focusses on local-level attitudes towards migrants. There is a wide range of publications proposing various definitions of ‘attitudes’, ‘(im)migrant’ (and ‘(im)migration’) and multiple perspectives on the role of a ‘local level’ in understanding socio-political phenomena. The literature on migration overlaps with studies on ethnicity and nationality. In the socio-political situation in which this study takes place, migration is usually discussed in connection with nationalism, populism and Euroscepticism. Notably, scholars, policymakers and the public often understand these terms in different ways. Therefore, before presenting the theoretical framework and reviewing empirical literature on attitudes towards migrants, it is essential to introduce the main terminology.

2.1.1.1. Attitudes

Research on attitudes is rooted in social psychology, becoming popular in the 1920s. Attitudes have been conventionally defined as psychological constructs. Initial definitions describe an attitude as ‘a readiness of the psyche to act or react in a certain direction’, arguing that ‘having an attitude is synonymous with an a priori direction towards a definite thing, whether this be present in consciousness or not’ (Jung, 1923: 526). Contemporary scholars define attitudes as ‘evaluations of people, places, things, and ideas’ (Albarracin and Johnson, 2018). Attitudes are positive or negative (and sometimes neutral) feelings that an individual has about a person, issue or object. They are dependent on experiences and part of socialisation processes. Attitudes are often discussed in reference to norms and values, which, in turn, form various value systems (Evans, 2006: 5-7). As suggested in Section 2.3.1 in the literature on the EU referendum vote, researchers consistently study the links between attitudes and behaviour,
including voting behaviour. Attitudes and behaviour are not always consistent, and scholars pointed out how acts of hypocrisy (Albarracin and Johnson, 2018: 433) can change individuals' behaviour (e.g. voting for a political party) in order to reflect their attitudes on a certain topic (e.g. immigration).

Initially, researchers were interested in categorising and measuring attitudes quantitatively. Later on, they sought to explain changes in attitudes, and by the 1980s, attitudes were studied from the viewpoint of social cognition (McGuire, 1986). There have been many definitions of attitudes throughout time, from Jung's (1923) interpretations to discourse approaches half a century later (Edwards and Potter, 2005; Potter, 1996; Potter and Edwards, 1999; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Earlier studies see attitudes as ‘dimensions of judgement’ on ‘objects of thought’ (e.g. McGuire, 1985), which researchers strove to measure.

Since the 1980s, the contributions of Potter and Wetherell, among other socio-psychologists, created a ‘discursive turn’ (Harré, 2005) in researching attitudes. Scholars recognised that the complexity of attitudes could not be captured through limited questionnaires. Variability was introduced as a concept in attitudes research (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 47-49). This implies that researchers cannot expect people’s attitudes to be consistent and thus their accounts should not be treated as factual reality, but rather as constructed discourses. Even people who would choose the same point on a Likert scale could display a variety of attitudes towards the same object, fulfilling different aims with their use of discourse and employing different stereotypes depending on the situation.

In discursive approaches, the attitudinal object itself becomes constructed when people express their views. Attitudes are not separate from the ‘object of thought’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 53-54). Qualitative approaches can adopt a more intersectional lens, especially when looking at individuals holding contradictory opinions on this topic (Berg, 2015). As mentioned in Section 2.1.5, attitudes often change when impacted by outside influences. It is not only direct individual experiences that can change attitudes, but also wider social factors (Albarracin
and Johnson, 2018: 11). These changes can be captured in more detail through a constructivist approach.

2.1.1.2. (Im)migration and (im)migrants

Migrants (and migration) are one ‘object of thought’ in attitudes research. As Chapter 6 will discuss, attitudes can be directed towards individual migrants, but often they are expressed towards migration as a phenomenon. Scholarly definitions of migration differ from how migration is interpreted in media, political and public narratives. Academic definitions sometimes do not correspond with legal instruments categorising migrants’ status in the receiving societies, which are only concerned with obligations and rights, rather than wider implications of migration (European Migration Network, 2011: 12).

Both inside and outside academia, ‘migration’ usually refers to international migration and most migration scholarship is concerned with international migration. This study also initially focussed on attitudes towards international migration from the EU to the UK. During the fieldwork, internal migration, including between the two fieldwork locations, became more relevant to the research (see Sections 1.4 and 5.2.2.2). In an increasingly globalised and mobile world, the differentiation between internal and international migration is often difficult to establish and some migration pathways include elements of both internal and international migration (King and Skeldon, 2010).

Migrants are usually negatively framed in non-academic debates. Discussions on this topic across countries tend to focus on the scale of migration (Castles, 2017), thus dehumanising the movements of people (the ‘numbers game’, referred to in Section 2.1.5). The impacts of migration are largely debated in terms of scale. In this context, ‘immigration’ has implications for settlement and can be regarded as having a greater impact on the receiving society than migrants who are seen as temporary residents. In contrast, research uses the term ‘migrants’ neutrally to describe people who move from one location to another for a reason other than travel or visiting.
Migrants are usually categorised according to the duration of their stay in the receiving society. Temporary or short-term migration tends to have three months as a threshold, while long-term migration (which is often also referred to as ‘immigration’, rather than ‘migration’) assumes a period of one year or longer (United Nations, 2016: 3). Migration statistics include various categories of migrants, but often migrants’ lived experiences do not easily fit one of the categories. To address some of the gaps in migration categorisations, concepts such as ‘circular migration’ and ‘return migration’ have been increasingly replaced by ‘mobility’.

Temporary and circular migration have been particularly common in the EU, creating some tensions between policy and research (Geddes, 2015). Intra-EU mobility is often distinguished from third-country migration in official statistics, since EU member state governments consider it a separate phenomenon. Some migrants are included in the European ‘community of value’ (Anderson, 2013), while others are not. Following the Treaty of Amsterdam, immigrants, asylum seekers and visa applicants were all lumped into the same ‘migrant’ category, whereas the European mobile ‘free movers’ became the new collective ‘us’ identity, aiming to replace the ‘us’ previously defined by individual nation states (Geisen et al., 2008: 82).

The European ‘us’ excludes a non-European ‘other’. The EU created soft internal borders, while having some of the strongest external borders, limiting the number of ‘other’, non-EU migrants. Freedom of movement has received extensive criticism regarding its impact on non-EU migration, with the Schengen zone being described by some as ‘fortress Europe’ (Geddes, 2000; Lahav, 2004). While those inside ‘Europe without frontiers’ are, in theory, equal but mobile ‘EU citizens’, rather than ‘im-migrants in Europe’ (Favell, 2013: 56), this is not how their migration is always perceived. From a policy and public opinion perspective, even with freedom of movement, people from other EU member states making their lives in the UK are still largely seen as migrants. Moreover, the EU’s borders are not only territorial, but also ‘organisational’, such as enabling or restricting the access migrants have to the labour market and the welfare state (Boswell and
Geddes, 2011: 14), including some migrants from inside the EU’s external physical borders.

All categorisations of migrants have limitations, due to possible contradictions between one’s legal status and subjective personal identifications, but also because each definition can leave certain migrants out. These statistical categories impact on how migration is perceived by the public. The meanings of ‘(im)migration’ and ‘(im)migrant’ imply various connotations, which shape how individuals evaluate this issue (see Blinder, 2013). Moreover, different categories describing people who move from one location to another are often used inappropriately, such as conflating ‘asylum seekers’ with ‘refugees’ and various categories of ‘migrants’ in the media (Berry et al., 2015). Often ‘migrants’ becomes a general term referring to the undesirable ‘others’ in society. Those more desirable mobile individuals, such as international students, are not always seen as part of the ‘migrant’ category, which is sometimes reserved in public narratives for those moving primarily for economic reasons.

The ‘migrant’ label is not only constructed through external public, political, media and legal accounts, but also by migrants themselves. For some individuals, national or ethnic identities may be the only anchors ‘in a foreign environment that identifies them as a stranger’ (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002: 132), and thus even become more salient through the process of migration. Literature underlines how migrants can develop ‘migrant identities’ (e.g. Ganguly, 1992; Morales, 2019; Mukherjee, 2010) which shape their behaviour and their own attitudes towards migration.

These migrant identities are transnational. There is consensus in research that migrants’ lives are situated in reference to both their countries of origin and their countries of migration. As individuals become more mobile, they establish more relationships with two or several societies at the same time, challenging traditional definitions of the nation state (Castles and Miller, 2009: 5). Transnationalism was thus conceptualised to describe the processes by which migrants are connected to both their countries of origin and of migration, encompassing the multiple relations they develop through migratory experiences.
(Schiller et al., 1992). The concept of transnational identities has been particularly researched in Europe. The EU’s freedom of movement and single market integration (Risse, 2010: 91) have been instrumental in transnational exchanges, which construct transnational identities. Transnationalism in intra-EU migration was an expected development, given that EU-level policies on freedom of movement did not intend to encourage settlement (Brettell and Hollifield, 2015: 20).

2.1.1.3. Ethnic and national groups

Migrant identities are often used in conjunction or interchangeably with ethnic or national identities. Like for ‘migration’, there are various definitions, interpretations and categorisations of nationality and ethnicity. An objectivist stance regards these as collective real identities, to which people adhere or ‘join’ or are given (e.g. by birth). Primordial or essentialist approaches claim that ethnicity is defined through kinship and bloodlines and therefore ethnic groups are naturally occurring (Ishiyama, 2011: 106). From a constructivist ontological viewpoint, these categories are imagined or subjective. Thus ethnicity is not based on traceable kinship and bloodlines, but instead entrenched in a subjective belief of common descent (Weber, 1978).

It is challenging to speak of identities such as nationality and ethnicity as collective, objective realities, if individuals have different understandings of belonging to a national or ethnic group. Boundary-drawing between oneself and others can become the chief purpose of using such labels (Barth, 1969). Cognitive approaches suggest that ethnicity and nationality are, in both their institutionalised and informal manifestations, ways ‘of recognising, identifying, and classifying other people, of construing sameness and difference’ (Brubaker,

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8 Citizenship is a related concept to nationality and ethnicity. It is relevant for parts of this fieldwork-based research, although it does not constitute a focus of the study. For instance, in Chapter 5, the discussion around how my participants understand the term ‘integration’ or in Chapter 6, when some migrant participants speak about securing their status through naturalisation (which is also pointed out in the literature reviewed in the last section of this chapter), are part of a wider discussion on the shifting meaning of citizenship for my participants post-Brexit. In this context, migrants’ legal status is also relevant to the question on whether they can be included in a ‘community of value’ (Anderson, 2013) or within a definition of (social) citizenship (Dwyer, 2004; Taylor-Gooby, 2009) post-Brexit.
In-depth micro-level analyses are necessary to assess how ‘deeply rooted notions of nation and national identity are in social interaction’ (Thompson, 2001: 31). Social scientists agree that nationality and ethnicity ‘are reproduced from day to day in and through such perceptions, interpretations, representations, classifications, categorisations, and identifications’ (Brubaker, 2009: 34).

In this thesis, the working definitions of national and ethnic groups are adapted from cognitive and constructivist approaches. For instance, Romanians as a national group are not only people who have a Romanian passport, but also those who identify as Romanian or who are classified as Romanian by others. This study is mostly interested in how perceptions of ethnicity and nationality create distinctions between in-groups and out-groups based on stereotypes about ‘us’ and ‘them’. These simplified representations inform attitudes towards migration, as well as how ‘ethnicity is constituted through social contact’ (Eriksen, 2010: 23). My Romanian, Polish and British participants self-identify with ethnic or national group labels (Chapter 3, Section 3.3.5.2 offers some insight in this sense).

Certain perceived characteristics associated with national or ethnic groups form the basis of stereotypes. Nationality and ethnicity tend to overlap as concepts in public narratives. In the UK, ethnicity is usually used as a term when speaking about minorities, including descendants of migrants – or ‘second’ or ‘third generation’ (usually non-white) migrants. Ethnicity can thus become a euphemism for skin colour and used instead of the concept of race. This contrasts to approaches in socio-anthropological literature where ethnicities refer to groups who share a collective identity based on their descent.

Historically, policymakers in the UK have been developing immigration rules in reference to groups of people who were not perceived as white, illustrating how ethnic difference has often been seen in terms of race. For instance, the arrival of the Windrush generation of British and Commonwealth citizens in the late 1940s prompted the creation of successive immigration laws, particularly in the 1970s or 1980s to restrict entry and settlement for different categories of British citizens (and later, British subjects). Scholars argued how these legal developments racialised Commonwealth immigration in the UK (Carter et al.,
With more recent and predominantly white migration from Europe, various categories of white migrants are also constructed, with East Europeans being situated lower in the hierarchy than West European counterparts (e.g. Fox et al., 2012; Halej, 2014; Moore, 2013).

2.1.1.4. Nationalism, populism and Euroscepticism

Attitudes towards migration have been increasingly discussed in the context of nationalist, populist and Eurosceptic ideologies in Europe. Increasingly so after the 2016 referendum, attitudes in the UK have been explained with reference to these interlinked concepts. Nationalism is an ideology and can belong across the left-right political spectrum, depending on the symbols and meanings it appropriates to appeal to kinship and shared traditions (Eriksen, 2010: 130). In functionalist approaches, ethnic or national groups are often seen as the ‘national unit’ (Gellner, 1997). Other scholars define nations as ‘imagined’ political communities (Anderson, 1991). Contemporary social science research concurs that nations are social constructs and that individuals’ identifications with and feelings about the nation sometimes take the form of nationalism, supporting the nation often at the expense of the ‘other’.

Like nationalism, populism manifests across the traditional left-right political spectrum. While scholars debate the detailed definitions, they tend to agree that populism involves ‘a critique of the establishment and an adulation of the common people’ (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 5). As a ‘thin-centered ideology’ (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017: 6), populism can manifest in various forms and use different symbols and mix with other ideologies (e.g. religious) to ‘thicken’ its ideological basis (Kotwas and Kubik, 2019). In the referendum campaign, opposition to immigration was often framed through populist narratives. Public opinion surveys conducted immediately before the referendum, showing large majorities supporting lower immigration (e.g. Migration Watch, 2015), were used to justify the argument that leaving the EU would address ordinary British people’s concerns. A revolt against ‘expertise’ is central to the Brexit campaign which mobilised opposition to ruling ‘elites’ (Clarke and Newman, 2017). Brexit is not an isolated phenomenon, but linked to a revival
of populist discourse in the United States and also in other European countries (Holbolt, 2016).

Euroscepticism represents only one type of populist discourse used in the UK Brexit context (Vasilopoulou, 2016), but it is essential when situating this research. Although opposition to the EU (and previously the EEC) existed before the 1990s, the UK Independence Party (UKIP), launched in 1993, arguably popularised these anti-EU feelings and eventually brought them into mainstream public debates, particularly after topping the polls in the 2014 UK European elections. The media are often held responsible for promoting Euroscepticism and determining people’s attitudes towards the EU. Since the late nineties, analyses of press coverage on the EU in the UK concluded that tabloids advanced a ‘Whig-imperialist nostalgia for an “Europe-free” Britain’ (Anderson and Weymouth, 1999: 79). A page on the European Parliament’s website, titled ‘Euromyths’, collects these anti-EU media portrayals (see European Parliament, 2017).

2.1.1.5. The local level

Attitudes towards migrants and migration do not exist in a vacuum, as they are heavily influenced by the ‘where’, the context within which they are shaped. They vary from location to location. There have been numerous local studies which explore why attitudes differ, analysing the history of migration in different places. This literature examines how location impacts integration policies, socio-economic characteristics in an area and the likelihood of local-level contact between migrant and non-migrant groups. The local level has implications for identity and belonging, which is important when researching migration – consider the implications of the common question ‘Are you local?’, something migrants can hear when a stranger asks for directions, but also when someone tries to include or exclude them from certain categories. The empirical chapters will show how strongly felt local identities impact individuals’ attitudes towards migrants and how national-level narratives of migration translate (or fail to relate) at the local level (for instance, in Section 4.2.2).
The local level is present in research on attitudes towards migration. ‘Micropublics’ (Amin, 2002) such as workplaces and schools enable interaction between different groups of people. Studies also assess neighbourhood-level attitudes on diversity (Catney, 2013; Forrest and Kearns, 2001). Anthropological literature focusses on ‘local communities’, but often on ‘remote others’ (Eriksen, 2010), rather than considering multiple groups living in a specific location. There also exists a vast literature on the ‘neighbourhood effects’ of migration and diversity (to enumerate just a few: Hedberg and Tammaru, 2012; Lupton, 2003; Sturgis et al., 2013). An extended review of local experiences with recent migration to the UK by Robinson and Walshaw (2011) shows the diversity of local encounters with migrants and how different dimensions of place shape individual experiences with migration. Nevertheless, they argue more research is needed on how place informs but is also impacted by migration.

It is not only migrants who can shape local-level attitudes, but also the internal movements of the native population. For example, theories of ‘whiteshift’ (Kaufmann, 2018) propose that those who have more negative views towards migrants tend to move to areas with lower migration, perhaps explaining the uneven attitudes towards migrants in different areas. The asymmetric local impacts of migration can lead to the development of targeted local-level migration policies. To illustrate, Alexander (2007: 38-43), analysing immigration policy implementation in four cities, identifies different local-level policy typologies (non-policy, guestworker, assimilationist and pluralist policies), which are defined according to local authorities’ attitudes towards and expectations from groups of migrants in that particular city.

Crucially, these policies develop over time – as cities change with migration and become more accustomed to the new residents, the policies also adapt to the new social landscape. In this sense, the pace of migration is relevant when accounting for local-level responses. ‘Habituation to change’ over time is expected to reduce hostility towards migrants (Kaufmann, 2014). A rapid increase in migration to an area, thus a fast-paced change, especially when coupled with a perception of instability, could lead to increased conflict between old and new residents, prompting for different policy responses. Nonetheless, there is little
conclusive research on local-level spaces such as schools and their relationships with community cohesion (Keating and Benton, 2013).

As explained in this section, attitudes (what) towards migrants (who) are constructed at the local level (where). Yet the main question that migration literature has been preoccupied with is ‘how’ - how are these attitudes constructed? The following sections in this first part of the chapter address this question by reviewing theoretical debates on attitude formation.

2.1.2. Conflict, contact and constrict theories in attitudes towards migrants

Scholars advance two main lines of argument when explaining hostility towards the migrant ‘other’ - economic and socio-psychological. Researchers using economic approaches study how resource allocation impacts group relations. To illustrate, Sherif (1956) is known for the Robbers Cave experiments, testing how competition over scarce resources influences group behaviour. The longer experiment participants competed over resources, the more violent they became towards each other. These experiments are the foundation of realistic conflict theory (see Jackson, 1993), which claims that conflict between different groups occurs primarily because of competition over limited resources, which lowers solidarity between the in-group and the out-group, hardening attitudes towards the ‘other’.

In parallel, social psychologists introduced alternative theories to conflict-type explanations, which were grouped as ‘contact theories’. These were based on social experiments assessing how prejudice can be reduced to improve social cohesion between different racial and ethnic groups. As in the case of conflict theories, their scope often extended beyond race and ethnicity as markers of otherness. Contact theories aim to explain the development of intergroup relations, rather than reactions to resource allocation. Intergroup contact theory implies that, under appropriate conditions, contact effectively reduces prejudice between groups. Experiments (Allport, 1954) showed how contact leads to communication and develops the ability to understand different perspectives to one’s own. Appreciating different viewpoints, although not necessarily agreeing
with them, decreases prejudice. This chimes with philosophical theories according to which exposing oneself to difference is not sufficient to correct unfounded views. Experience needs to be reflected on and discussed with others to achieve more informed conclusions (Mill, 2001[1859]: 19-21).

Simply placing two groups together in a space does not suffice to change attitudes. Opportunities to express negative feelings towards others can exacerbate existing negative attitudes. Thus, to be effective, contact needs to satisfy the following criteria (Allport, 1954): an ‘equal status’ between those in contact; sharing common goals and recognising those can be achieved together; a commitment to intergroup cooperation (as opposed to competition); shared support of authority, law and customs; and that the interaction has to be personal in nature. (Highly formalised situations are less likely to reduce prejudice than more informal conversations.) Prejudice, or negative attitudes towards the ‘other’, results from generalisation and oversimplification, namely seeing people as ‘stereotypes’. These stereotypes tend to materialise from incomplete or mistaken information about the group in question. Negative stereotypes encourage in-groups to distance from out-groups (Gorodzeisky, 2013). Meaningful encounters collect more comprehensive information about out-groups and therefore facilitate dismantling stereotypes, consequently changing attitudes. In theory, extended contact is more likely to reduce prejudice than episodic interactions. One example is how research finds hostility lower in tribal societies with multigroup membership achieved through various types of exogamous marriages or ‘criss-crossing’ (Tajfel, 1982: 29).

Although providing insight into group relations and proposing solutions for improved social cohesion, contact theories are subject to extensive criticism. Scholars exposed early contact theories for being simplistic and overly optimistic. Inverse contact theory noted that contact has fruitful results only if the minority and majority groups choose to have that contact in the first place. Prejudiced people are more likely to avoid contact with the ‘other’ altogether and therefore, ‘instead of optimal contact reducing prejudice, the opposite causal sequence could be operating’ (Pettigrew, 1998: 68). Even when contact occurs, people remember previous experiences, influencing their reactions and responses to
interaction. Having positive experiences with out-groups early in life, before being socialised to see particular groups in a negative way, can be more impactful in reducing prejudice (Pettigrew, 1998: 79).

Both conflict and contact theories have been accused of looking at the relationship between in-groups and out-groups as one-way only. Constrict theory calls for research to consider that diversity could constrict both in-group and out-group solidarity. In contact theories, interacting with others erodes the differences among groups and increases out-group solidarity, forming bridging ties outside one’s group. In conflict theories, competing over scarce resources translates to emphasising the differences between groups, and consequently developing in-group solidarity, thus facilitating bonding ties inside one’s group. In contrast with the two, constrict theories suggest in-group and out-group attitudes can vary independently (Putnam, 2007: 144). That is to say, people living in diverse settings could ‘pull in like a turtle’ (Putnam, 2007: 149), simultaneously showing lower solidarity with their own in-group and out-groups. Although conflict, contact and constrict theories are competing in the theoretical literature, they are often tested simultaneously in empirical research (e.g. Savelkoul et al., 2015).

2.1.3. Economic (interest) vs. socio-psychological (identity) explanations of attitudes towards migrants

The interplay among conflict, contact and constrict theories is reflected in migration research. The two ‘camps’ in studying attitudes towards migrants are interest-based and identity-based theories, corresponding to the ideas advanced by conflict and contact/constrict theories, respectively (or ‘realistic’ and ‘symbolic’ threat hypotheses). Some researchers start with the assumption that opposition towards migrants is mainly driven by economic factors, particularly people’s economic self-interest. According to this perspective, those who compete directly with migrants in the job market are expected to express more hostile attitudes towards migrants. This hypothesis stems from conflict theory, the idea that when competing over scarce resources (or a limited number of jobs, in this example), people tend to form stronger in-group favouritism and distance themselves from the out-group, seeing the out-group as a threat to their prosperity.
Studies of migration also use identity-based theories, which sometimes contradict, but often complement, economic-based approaches. This school of thought believes that hostility towards migrants is driven by ‘deep-seated affective and cognitive predispositions’ (Hampshire, 2013: 23), notably the desire to maintain a certain cultural and ethnic identity in one’s society. People manifest hostility towards migrants due to their opposition to perceived cultural changes brought by migration. Although certain explanations are found to be more salient than others in different social contexts, scholars tend to conclude that identity takes precedence over economics when explaining negative views towards migration. For example, symbolic predispositions, such as preferences for ‘cultural unity’, are usually found to be more significant than economic factors (e.g. Sides and Citrin, 2007: 477). Studies find that economic competition contributes less to explaining cross-national differences in attitudes towards migration compared to the ‘fear of conflict over values and culture’ (Schneider, 2007). Where economic arguments are present, the consensus seems to be that concerns about the economy as a whole, at the macro-level, rather than one’s personal situation, have a stronger impact on attitudes (Hampshire, 2013: 23). Welfare concerns are more significant in shaping negative attitudes towards migration than those related to labour market participation (Dustmann and Preston, 2007).

While economic approaches consider migrants’ skills and status in the receiving society’s labour market, socio-psychological perspectives focus on migrants’ ethnicity, race, cultural habits and other socio-demographic characteristics which can impact on how a society’s ‘culture’ and ‘identity’ are shaped. In this latter approach, migrants’ perceived level of social integration links to perceptions of a cultural threat coming from the out-group. Consequently, acculturation theories are often used in combination with intergroup contact theory (Van Acker and Vanbeselaere, 2011).

Although often separated in theory, culture and economics cannot be isolated in practice. Scholars recommend considering both when empirically examining attitudes towards migrants. They note the need to analyse attitudes towards migration in regions with little history of immigration and with underperforming
labour markets, to be able to capture the overlap between cultural and economic factors (Stenning and Dawley, 2009). Such comparison would assess whether conflict type explanations would trump contact theories in areas with challenging economic conditions and low likelihood of contact with out-groups, compared to an equally deprived area, but where contact with migrants is more likely. Would hostility towards migrants be similar in both cases and therefore justified by self-interest theories, or would it be more likely to occur in the area with little or no contact with the out-group? Research theorised that competition over limited resources does not unavoidably result in hostility towards newer groups living in a certain area. However, existing negative attitudes are likely to intensify when there is insufficient or no contact with the ‘other’ (Robinson and Walshaw, 2011: 5).

2.1.4. Integration and social remittances

A comprehensive review of migrant integration studies would constitute a whole literature review chapter. Nevertheless, it needs to be acknowledged that the concept of ‘integration’ informs socio-psychological approaches in research on attitudes towards migrants. There are various definitions of integration and researchers usually speak about domains or areas of integration. To illustrate this, consider the categorisation by Ager and Strang (2008). The ‘foundation’ of integration consists of individuals’ rights and access to citizenship. There are ‘facilitators’ of integration, namely language, cultural knowledge and feelings of safety and stability. A third domain, ‘social connection’, includes the social bridges, bonds and links that refugees and other migrants can use within the integration process. Finally, a domain of ‘means and markers’ looks at how employment, housing, education and health impact integration outcomes (Ager and Strang, 2008: 170). The ‘social’ dimension of migrant integration also entails a legal component, which can impact attitudes towards certain groups of migrants. Socio-legal integration (Kubal, 2012), or migrants’ (perceived) relationship with the law in the country of migration, is often taken for granted in integration theories, which overlook migrants’ agency and their attitudes towards the legal framework of their migration.
Scholars have not only written about how out-groups ‘integrate’, but also how migration impacts social cohesion and integration at the local level. For instance, Saggar et al.’s (2012) MAC report did not find a significant impact of migration in this respect. It recommended that the asymmetric impacts of deprivation, rather than migration, need to be accounted for in policymaking. Nevertheless, the perceived impact of migration by local-level residents may not reflect research findings (e.g. Meltzer et al., 2018), as parts of the empirical chapters in this thesis will also show.

Migrants use different strategies to ‘integrate’ in local communities. One of the most widely used recent categorisations of migrant acculturation was proposed by Berry, who identifies four types of strategy: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation. Assimilation is when individuals ‘do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interactions with other cultures’, while integration occurs when ‘there is an interest in both maintaining one’s original culture, while in daily interaction with other groups.’ Both assimilation and integration involve contact with out-groups. Contrastingly, the latter two strategies, separation and marginalisation, do not necessarily imply such contact. Separation is when one’s culture is preserved, yet interaction with others is avoided, whereas marginalisation also involves little interest in contact with others, but it is coupled with low possibility or eagerness to maintain one’s culture (Berry, 2011: 2.6).

Linking these strategies to contact theories, one can hypothesise that the more migrants lean towards integration or assimilation as an acculturation strategy (or are perceived to do so), the more positive the attitudes towards them would be in that society. As both integration and assimilation include migrants initiating contact with others, and assuming at least part of that contact is positive, one can extrapolate that higher migrant integration will ameliorate the tensions between in-groups and out-groups. However, integration is a two-way street (Klarenbeek, 2019) – or a three-way process, if we consider transnational links (as mentioned in Section 2.1.4) and the continued role of migrants’ country of origin after migration (Garcés-Mascareñas and Penninx, 2016). Non-migrant groups also
have to be willing to interact with migrant groups, facilitating their integration in the receiving society.

Integration is broadly viewed as a positive strategy, but it can also become ‘pathological integration’, a concept used by Fox and Mogilnicka (2019) to illustrate how migrants can adapt some racist attitudes encountered in the receiving society. Most studies examine how migrants integrate in multiethnic societies from the perspective of sending countries. This literature on remittances originated in economics, exploring the flow of material resources across borders (Rahman and Fee, 2014) and its determinants (Carling, 2018). But attitudes also travel when people move. ‘Social remittances’, a term coined by Levitt (1998), refers to non-economic transfers from receiving to sending countries, including attitudes on gender norms, sexuality or ethnic minorities. Scholars analysing social remittances show how migrants can acquire certain attitudes in the receiving country. They discuss in which situations individuals could transmit these attitudes to their networks in the country of origin. Racism is seen as one such transnational outcome (Nowicka, 2018). Thus both economic aspects and the ‘circulation of culture’ (Lacroix et al., 2016) need to be considered when discussing remittances.

Social remittances studies in the UK have been mainly focussing on how Polish migration challenges attitudes in the country of origin (Dzięgielewski, 2016; Gawlewicz, 2015c; White and Grabowska, 2019; White et al., 2018) and how migrants become agents of attitude change (Grabowska et al., 2017). Nevertheless, migrants can also resist change both in the country of migration and that of origin (Garapich, 2016). Besides, other scholars noted how attitudes can be remitted in both directions. Individuals’ views are shaped by experiences prior to migration but are also impacted by the shifting context in the sending country upon return (Kubal, 2015: 16-17).

2.1.5. Mediated attitudes

Many studies consider ‘contact’ primarily as direct, face-to-face encounters between in-groups and out-groups, underestimating the extent to which attitudes
are situated in a mediated environment. Intergroup contact in contemporary society is increasingly influenced by external narratives. The most common mediated contact occurs when in-groups interact with out-groups through the media, such as when watching television programmes, reading newspaper articles and using social media platforms. Individuals can also have mediated contact through other individuals who interact with the out-group. The attitudes shaped by this contact are not first-hand, based on localised, grounded experiences, but rather de-localised and mediated through a third party with a particular framing of migration. Overall, indirect contact is considered to be most impactful for individuals who have limited or no possibility of direct contact with out-groups (Brown and Paterson, 2016: 20).

Scholars identify three main forms of mediated contact. First, the extended contact hypothesis (Wright et al., 1997) argues that direct contact with another in-group member who has close contact with an out-group member can reduce prejudice towards out-groups. Reduced negative attitudes towards out-groups are found when the in-group members are exposed to extended contact. Second, mediated contact can be ‘vicarious’, usually defined as the circumstances where the in-group observes contact between the in-group and out-group through media. Third, it can be ‘parasocial’, where in-groups only observe out-groups through these media (e.g. Schemer and Meltzer, 2019). All three types of mediated contact can significantly affect individual attitudes e.g. negative vicarious contact with migrants would make one’s attitudes more negative. Vicarious and parasocial contact are closely linked with another form of indirect contact - imagined. The imagined intergroup contact theory (Crisp and Turner, 2009) goes beyond extended contact hypotheses, asking whether mentally stimulating a positive encounter with the outgroup can shape more positive attitudes towards the outgroup outside the imagined space. Moreover, mediated contact can lead to spontaneous imagined contact (Kim and Harwood, 2019), which further shapes attitudes towards out-groups.

As this thesis examines attitudes in the Brexit context, the mediated narratives about EU migrants are particularly relevant. This is why the first empirical chapter will analyse the national-level debate during the EU referendum campaign
through the study of ephemera (see Section 3.2). Mediated depictions of migrants significantly affect people’s attitudes towards migration and, consequently, their support for more liberal or restrictive immigration policies. Activating ‘threat-based emotions’ through media reporting on immigration ‘may additionally limit willingness to engage in real-world, intergroup communication’ (Seate and Mastro, 2016: 209). In other words, an initial vicarious negative form of contact can restrict the likelihood of direct intergroup contact, thus preventing attitude change through positive face-to-face contact with the out-group.

The media construct narratives beyond episodic reporting on migration, which set the direction of public debates. Simplified, sensationalistic messages on a narrow range of migrant ‘types’ tend to be prioritised, failing to show the complexity of migration and migrants’ experiences. The migration debate is skewed towards speaking of refugees, asylum seekers, ‘illegal’ migrants and migrant (lower skilled) workers (Threadgold, 2009: 1). In addition, the media use selective framing, further narrowing the construction of narratives about migration. Reports on migration are mainly framed in terms of numbers and security concerns (Threadgold, 2009: 1) and attitudes towards migration reflect ‘at least in part systematic misperceptions of its scale and impact’ (Portes, 2019). The ‘numbers game’ effect is particularly relevant considering the public’s tendency to overestimate the size of ethnic, racial and other types of minority groups. This finding is consistent across countries (Alba et al., 2005; Citrin and Sides, 2008; Gallagher, 2014), including for the UK population (Duffy and Frere-Smith, 2014).

Migration is further framed through the media’s tactical use of sources. The people talking about, interpreting, condemning or endorsing immigration are mainly accredited or authoritative legitimate public sources, such as experts, politicians or political commentators (for an analysis on media sources, see Schudson, 2011). Most discussions on migration become a mere variation of opinion or disagreement among ‘elites’, rather than meaningfully accommodating for the breadth of public opinion, going beyond the occasional news report ‘vox pop’ (Thorbjørnsrud and Figenschou, 2014: 3). The ‘primary definers of reality’ (Hall et al., 2013) usually share most socio-demographic characteristics as senior white elites (Manning, 2001: 11). Sources rarely include migrants themselves,
unless they fulfil the ‘victim’ or ‘villain’ roles in media storytelling (Crawley et al., 2016). Including migrants in debates about them can bring more balance and crucially provide an alternative framing to certain issues (Migrant Voice, 2014).

The framing and sources, alongside reporting on a limited number of issues on migration, form a media bias towards a ‘very negative view of what immigration is and might be’ (Threadgold, 2009: 22). These media stories impact public and political discourses (Kosho, 2016) and therefore public views on the benefits and risks of migration, including of EU migration (Boomgaard and Vliegenthart, 2009; Meltzer et al., 2017: 1). Therefore, a study of attitudes should consider both direct and mediated contact when seeking to explain attitude formation and change.

2.1.6. Hierarchies of migrants

Direct and mediated forms of contact construct migrant types or categories. Categories are used ‘to accomplish particular goals, such as blamings and justifications’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 124). The greater the perceived differences between groups, the more hostility can increase (Tajfel and Wilkes, 1963). Hierarchies of ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ people are constructed. Migrants are not only categorised by their legal status, but also through (non-) membership in the ‘community of value’ (Anderson, 2013: 4). To illustrate, according to Anderson (2013: 6), there are good, failed and non-citizens, alongside ‘tolerated citizens’, the latter category being opened to desirable, ‘hardworking’ migrants.

Numerous characteristics, including the (perceived) belonging to a certain ethnic, national or racial group, are used to differentiate between ‘us’ and ‘them’, distinguishing between those migrants who are welcomed and those who are not. This ‘hierarchy of others’ is built around power structures in society, creating inequality and stratification in inter-group relationships (Barth, 1969: 27). In political narratives, references to nationality and ethnicity usually downplay similarities and underline differences. Some ethnic groups or nationalities are portrayed as distinct from each other. This is relevant when exploring contact
theories in practice, given that ‘cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence’ (Barth, 1969: 10).

Migrants arrive with layered identities (van Houtum and van Naerssen, 2002) but are usually categorised by policymakers through their nation state membership. These categories used in policy intersect with public attitudes towards migration, which are influenced by migrant origin or other characteristics. Studies in Western countries show a preference for white (European) migration over migration from other regions (Ford, 2011; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014), due to perceived ethnic and cultural ‘proximity’ with the majority group in the receiving societies. These perceptions of cultural proximity cannot be decoupled from economics. Research noted the potential advantages migrants’ whiteness has in the UK job market (Samaluk, 2014).

Contrary to the European project aspirations, not all European or EU migrants are tolerated citizens in the ‘community of value’. It has been especially economic migrants from Central and Eastern European countries who are racialised in the labour market (Felbo-Kolding et al., 2018). Large scale surveys in the UK show how migrants from Western Europe are preferred to Eastern counterparts. Romania stands out in public attitudes surveys, as opposition to Romanian migrants is similar to migrants from Nigeria and Pakistan coming to the UK (Blinder and Richards, 2020). It was especially migrants from Eastern Europe who have been depicted as ‘suitable enemies’ (to borrow Cole’s (2009) phrase) or ‘folk devils’ (Cohen, 2002 [1972]) in the Brexit context, building on historical negative depictions of this migrant group in the UK. Researchers noted how continental Europeans (Medrano, 2003: 220), but also specific East European national groups, such as Romanians, have been constructed as different from the British through popular culture, such characters in novels (Drace-Francis, 2013: 237).
2.2. Empirical studies of attitudes towards migrants in contemporary Europe

2.2.1. Meaningful contact

Despite its limitations (outlined in Section 2.1.2), interpersonal contact theory has been widely adopted as a framework to identify reasons for positive and negative attitudes towards migrants. There has been a preoccupation with classifying various categories of interpersonal relationships when operationalising ‘contact’. The classic sociological study by Bogardus (1947) proposed the ‘social distance scale’, a device to measure attitudes based on quick participant responses to questions, aiming to remove social desirability bias. This scale was used to categorise relationships from the furthest to the closest, corresponding to different levels of ‘social’ distance - from no social distance illustrated by a close relative or marriage-type relationship to wanting to exclude someone from the country. Nevertheless, the complexity of social relationships cannot neatly be fitted into this seven-point scale by Bogardus. Hence, more discursive approaches in attitude research (see Section 2.1.1.1) are critical of this approach which aims to, in Bogardus’ (1947: 311) own words, make ‘objective some of the dynamic aspects of personality in measuring degrees of likes and dislikes’.

Regardless of whether researchers try to quantify intergroup relations or study them through a discursive framework, there is agreement that there is a distinction between more and less ‘meaningful’ contact that can drive attitude change. Consequently, studies ask questions about what are the characteristics of a contact which is sufficiently ‘meaningful’ to shape attitudes and whether contact needs to be ‘meaningful’ at all to facilitate attitude change in certain contexts.

According to traditional contact theories (Allport, 1954), meaningful contact is more likely to reduce prejudice than fleeting contact. More recent research finds mixed results on how ‘meaningful’ contact has to be to facilitate attitude change. Many studies illustrate how instrumental relations, for example among professionals at work, are less likely to decrease hostility towards migrants compared to closer, more meaningful relations, such as having a partner who is
not a co-ethnic, or spending time with close friends from the out-group (Fonseca and McGarringle, 2012: 8; Gillmartin and Migge, 2013: 297; Kennedy, 2009: 480). To exemplify, Galent et al. (2009) show these different stages of contact, demonstrating how stereotypes about Poles were challenged when Belgians employed Polish domestic workers. This meaningful contact resulted in positive generalisations (such as migrants being ‘hardworking’), which, in turn, became stereotypes about Polish people. The Belgian employers did not associate Polish people with the criminal stereotype, despite the negative media coverage emphasising their nationality when reporting on crimes committed by migrants. This suggests ‘meaningful’ interpersonal direct contact challenges attitudes shaped by mediated contact. Direct contact and more informal conversations with the migrant group allowed Belgians to form a more individualised picture and reflect on the oversimplified mediated portrayals.

‘Micropublics’ (Amin, 2002), such as workplaces, can facilitate encounters shaping attitudes, including attitudes towards diversity (Grabowska, 2018: 75; Rzepnikowska, 2019). Some scholars show that contact does not have to be ‘meaningful’ to create some limited changes in one’s ability to ‘tolerate’ or even engage with the ‘other’. Although superficial encounters with out-groups can reproduce negative stereotypes, such ‘sustained’ encounters in specific circumstances (for instance, migrants and non-migrants working on projects in community centres), can drive change (Matejskova and Leitner, 2011). Other studies show the role of ‘fleeting encounters’ in attitude formation, such as the contact with migrants in semi-public spaces (e.g. libraries and community centres), which can make migrants feel more welcome in the community, improving collective life and intergroup relations (Peterson, 2017). The environment in which contact takes place motivates subconscious decisions of whether to proceed or not with certain interactions with otherness (Lefebvre, 1991).

2.2.2. Attitudes among migrants

Research on attitudes towards migration usually analyses non-migrants’ views towards migrants. More recently, there has been an increasing emphasis on
giving migrants a voice in this discussion. While studies on non-migrants’ attitudes tend to be quantitative, research on migrant experiences and views is mostly qualitative. In the UK, there seems to be a divide between quantitative investigations with British survey participants and qualitative accounts of EU migrant interviewees. Academic experts and other migration commentators commonly argue that the most suitable way to relieve tensions between native and migrant populations is by listening to both sides. Yet in the context of Brexit there is no study, to my knowledge, which systematically looks at attitudes towards migration from both British and EU migrant viewpoints, comparing them through a consistent methodological approach.

Nevertheless, before the referendum, a number of scholars explored the relations between EU migrants and the UK-born population, including examining neighbourhood effects using contact theories. Even then, very few studies are based on both migrant and non-migrant voices. Exceptions include Duru et al.’s (2017) mixed methods research on Romanian, Turkish and British attitudes towards diversity and tolerance in the UK, Halej’s (2014) PhD research with East European and British participants and Cook et al. (2011)’s study of Leeds. There is a parallel literature on racial prejudice that often simultaneously considers both ethnic majority and minority attitudes on race (e.g. Storm et al., 2017).

EU migrants’ attitudes towards the ‘other’ mirror Anderson’s theories on the construction of the ‘community of value’. Like non-migrants, migrants distance themselves from perceived ‘failed citizens’ (Anderson, 2013: 6), using various approaches. McGhee et al. (2019) identify three strategies among UK Poles: ‘discursive complicity’, where the migrants distance themselves from co-ethnic ‘failed citizens’ by emphasising their own individual merit; ‘intergroup hostility’, where Polish migrants, as EU migrants, scapegoat non-EU migrants; and ‘defensive assertiveness’, where British, non-migrant people, are stereotyped.

Intergroup hostility can involve xenophobic or racist attitudes towards other migrant groups. In this sense, Fox and Mogilnicka (2019) illustrate the ‘pathological integration’ of Hungarians, Romanians and Poles who pick up racist attitudes from local British people. The longer migrants live in the UK, the more
similar their views become to those of the non-migrant population. More recent migrants show higher support for further immigration (Braakmann et al., 2017). Attitudes are also brought from the country of origin. As an example, EU interviewees, particularly before migration, tend to imagine the British as only white (Manolova, 2018; Rzepnikowska, 2016). Second (or third) generation migrants, and certain ethnic minorities, are not always considered British.

There are many studies documenting the strategies that migrants use to distinguish themselves from the ‘other’. Examples include Parutis (2011b) who shows how Polish and Lithuanian workers justify their position of power through skin colour and legal status and Datta (2009) who illustrates how Polish construction site workers consider themselves superior to English colleagues due to their work ethic, among other markers of difference. Migrants negotiate their ethnicity (Ryan, 2010) and status in a hierarchy of migrants in the UK by reference to their perceptions of the ‘other’.

Studies overwhelmingly select Polish migrants as a case study, partly because Poles are the largest EU migrant group in the UK (Blake, 2019). With a few exceptions (e.g. Cook et al., 2011; Moroșanu et al., 2019a; Parutis, 2011b), there is surprisingly little comparative research of EU migrant groups, and even less focussed on their attitudes towards migration. In contrast, there are many in-depth studies looking at Polish views towards the ‘other’, such as Siara (2009), Temple (2011), Gawlewicz (2014b; 2015a; 2015b) and Rzepnikowska (2019; 2016).

Over a decade ago, studies discussed how Polish participants in London considered their conationals to be intolerant towards ‘others’, particularly Asian and Black people (Garapich, 2006: 21). Yet respondents dissociated themselves from such attitudes, which ‘other Poles’ were assumed to have. Reviewing Polish migration studies in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, White (2016: 14) notes that a substantive number of scholars found a ‘discursive hostility towards co-ethnics’ in Polish migrants’ narratives. This is often linked to the assertion about Poles exploiting other Poles in the UK, which prompts some to avoid conationals (Garapich, 2006).
Alongside the extensive Polish migration literature, there are some studies on Romanians’ interactions with the ‘other’. My own previous research explored Romanians’ mixed views towards the British, conationals and other migrant groups (Bulat, 2016; Bulat, 2017b). There are studies on Romanians’ cosmopolitan relationships in the UK (Moroșanu, 2013), particularly the bridging and bonding ties they develop after migration (Moroșanu, 2015), showing the preponderance of ‘weak ties’ (see Ryan, 2016) with locals. Another example is Vicol’s (2019: 225) ethnographic PhD study which shows how Romanians distance themselves from the conationals who were perceived to be of a ‘lower class status simply through accent or attire.’

Another layer of literature on EU migrants’ attitudes towards the ‘other’ examines views towards ethnic minorities, who are sometimes EU citizens and conationals. A substantial number of studies, mostly conducted in Romania, evidence Romanians’ predominantly negative views towards Roma.9 Discrimination against Roma is a widely studied phenomenon in Eastern Europe. From negative media representations (Crețu, 2014), to nation branding (Kaneva and Popescu, 2014), the ‘țigan other’ (Woodcock, 2007: 439) is situated at the bottom of the hierarchy. It is important to consider Romanians’ attitudes towards Romanian Roma in the context of intra-EU mobility (Macarie, 2014; Vlase and Voicu, 2014), given that negative attitudes towards the ‘Roma other’ can also ‘migrate’ to the UK (Briggs and Dobre, 2014: 60). Studies show how Romanians often believe they are not discriminated against, positioning themselves higher in a hierarchy of migrants than Romanian Roma counterparts (Fox et al., 2015: 743).

For all three themes identified (attitudes towards ethnic and racial ‘others’, own conationals or conational minorities and ‘locals’ of various ethnic backgrounds), negative views tend to be explained as a form of resistance, shaped by a hostile environment of entrenched anti-migrant attitudes in the UK. For example, Briggs and Dobre (2014: 61-62) justify the negative attitudes of their Romanian participants as ‘a form of resistance’ which ‘doesn’t go beyond their own cultural exchanges with each other.’ More research is necessary to assess whether

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9 The following sentences until the end of the paragraph are adapted and re-written from my MPhil dissertation, which focussed on Romanians’ attitudes towards the ‘other’ (Bulat, 2016: 10-11).
migrants’ negative attitudes towards others actually go beyond mere cultural exchanges with other conationalists, affecting decisions to work or live in certain places. For instance, a couple of interviewees in White’s (2011: 149) research on Polish families in the UK commented about ‘particular locations being preferable to others because they were less racially mixed’, although all interviewees were positive about their personal direct contact with diversity. If migrants’ attitudes cannot be seen in isolation from existing attitudes in the receiving society, then research should focus more on how migrant and non-migrant views intersect and influence each other.

Exploring these intersections between ingroup and outgroup attitudes is encouraged in the conviviality literature. Recent approaches go further, proposing conviviality not only as a concept, but as a methodology. A ‘genuine conversation and exchange with our subjects of research as well as with practitioners and activists’ (Berg and Nowicka, 2019: 5) is encouraged in migration studies. The conceptualisations of conviviality have been refined in recent literature. Initially, conviviality was primarily used as a term to describe rather positive encounters between ingroups and outgroups. The approach has been criticised for creating utopian representations of multiethnic spaces, such as Newham, one of the fieldsites in this thesis. Nevertheless, more recent studies develop on the conceptualisation of conviviality, showing its multifaceted manifestations. Studies of conviviality also have a strong focus on the role of place, exploring interactions in different community spaces.

This research adds to the understanding of local-level contact in previously underresearched spaces. The workplace is essential to the study of migrants’ everyday experiences and interactions with non-migrants and other migrant groups. For instance, Rzepnikowska (2017) illustrates how meaningful interactions in the workplace result in ethnic differences becoming less relevant in everyday encounters. However, while the workplace can foster friendships, it can equally lead to ‘forced conviviality’ (Rzepnikowska, 2017: 64), where superficial, seemingly friendly encounters can mask underlying prejudices. Neal et al.’s (2019: 74) research on interactions within social leisure organisations argues to bring ‘community and conviviality together as a frame’, showing how
everyday conviviality practices take the form of ‘connective interdependencies’, reciprocal social relations, rather than mere ‘fleeting encounters’.

These convivial practices at the micro level are affected by macro-level factors. The nature of migrant and non-migrant interactions at work can be influenced by how migrant groups are portrayed in political and media narratives (Rzepnikowska, 2017). Migrants’ socio-legal status and level of integration (Kubal, 2012) also impact their convivial practices. For instance, the research of Duru and Trenz (2017) with EU and non-EU migrants in Denmark shows how transitioning between ‘diversity’ and ‘conviviality’ is an incomplete process when the rights of different groups of migrants are unequal. Similarly, Flynn (2019: 182) reflects on how the ‘hostile environment’ migration policies in the UK bring suspicion towards migrants in everyday life, which can hinder convivial practices.

2.2.3. Education and skills as factors influencing attitudes towards EU migrants

In addition to macro-level narratives, whether researching non-migrants’ or migrants’ attitudes, it is essential to consider how their personal characteristics may shape these views. With an increasingly diverse society, intersectionality, a theoretical framework emerging from feminist thought (see Collins and Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1991; Nash, 2008), discusses how different individual identities interact when shaping attitudes towards migrants. The original approach started by addressing the ‘intersecting patterns of racism and sexism’ (Crenshaw, 1991: 1243), exploring the links between gender, race and class in the context of oppression experienced by women. The current migration literature investigates intersections within a range of characteristics, including, but not limited to, respondents’ education, age, political behaviour, gender, location and level of interethnic contact. Much of the discussion focusses on education and skills, matching the preoccupation with economic interest explanations.

What is perhaps overlooked is assessing how these individual characteristics apply to both the attitude holder and the subject of the attitude. For example, a British person’s level of education may impact their attitudes towards Romanian migrants, but these attitudes may be different depending on whether they are
directed towards highly educated, as compared to lower educated, Romanians. On location, the demographic characteristics where the attitude holder lives matter, especially considering the likelihood of inter-group contact, but the areas in which migrants previously lived also influence the kind of attitudes they bring over to the new location.

A quantitative, survey-based literature established relationships between attitudes towards migrants and participants’ socio-demographic characteristics. Men are more likely to express anti-immigration views than women (e.g. Coenders and Scheepers, 2003) and older people are more likely to view migrants negatively than younger counterparts (e.g. Gorodzeisky and Semyonov, 2009; O’Rouke and Sinnott, 2006; Reeskens and van Oorschot, 2012). Education, closely linked to age and gender as variables, has several implications regarding attitudes towards migrants: it exposes people to the society’s values, develops critical thinking and allows contact with migrants, particularly in countries with large numbers of international students, such as the UK. Early studies show attitudes changing with experience and learning (Doob, 1947). Moreover, higher education leads to improved job market prospects for individuals (Jenssen and Engesbak, 1994), which reduces the perceived threat of migrant competition. Most studies agree that the more highly educated the respondent, the more likely they will show positive attitudes towards migrants (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007). In most West European countries, education level is the main explanatory variable for prejudice (Hagendoorn and Nekuee, 1999).

There is also a correlation between education and European identity, with about five times more graduates in the UK considering themselves European, compared to non-graduates (Ormston, 2016: 6). Those who identify more as European have more favourable views towards migration (Curtis, 2014). Those strongly relating to a national identity and having lower levels of human capital tend to be most opposed to intra-EU migration (Vasilopoulou and Talving, 2019). Nonetheless, critical approaches question whether a higher level of education is a ‘solution’ to counter negative attitudes towards migrants. There is evidence against the hypothesis that the knowledge and cognitive competences gained
through education will break down stereotypes about migrants (Jenssen and Engesbak, 1994). Studies also show there is no conclusive effect of education on Eurosceptic attitudes (Kunst et al., 2019). The literature underestimates the anti-immigrant attitudes of the highly educated, overlooking the impact of specific national contexts in which they are formed (Eick, 2019). In fact, some highly educated people could be more subject to social desirability biases (Janus, 2010) and less likely to express their negative views towards migrants in surveys or other types of research.

Education shapes non-migrants' attitudes, but it is also relevant when speaking about what type of migration is under question. Higher education often relates to a higher social status (Pardos-Prado and Xena, 2019) and becomes synonymous with ‘highly skilled’ in everyday conversation. In line with economic interest theoretical explanations, there is a pattern of preferences towards highly skilled over lower skilled migrants (Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007; Helbling and Kriesi, 2014). In the UK, EU migrants are overall more highly educated than the local population (Rienzo, 2018) and over half the British public want to increase ‘highly skilled’ migration (Kaur-Ballagan, 2017). More than half of the foreign-born workers in the UK have tertiary education (Eurostat, 2019). However, EU migrants from newer member states tend to be less formally qualified than nationals of older member states, though still more highly educated than the British-born (Eurostat, 2012, discussed in Teney, 2016: 10).

Most importantly, migrants’ level of education does not always match their jobs in the UK. Over half of highly educated migrants born in new EU member states (thus East Europeans) worked in low and medium low skilled jobs in 2018, contrasting with only 23% of UK-born workers (Fernández-Reino and Rienzo, 2019: 2). This fact reflects the well-researched phenomenon of migrant downskilling (Boboc et al., 2012; Eade et al., 2006; Glennie and Pennington, 2013; Nowicka, 2012; Saunders, 2012), mostly affecting Central and East European workers (Johnston et al., 2014). This downskilling experienced by East European migrant workers in the UK could be a factor in forming differentiated attitudes towards Western, compared to East European migrants. Public attitudes are consistently more in favour of ‘highly’ over ‘low skilled migrants’; in this
context, East Europeans may be seen in a more negative light due to the ‘low skilled’ connotations of the sectors in which they disproportionately work, in contrast to their Western EU counterparts.

Researchers have criticised the highly vs. low skilled binary used in surveys measuring attitudes towards migrants, underlying migrants’ mobility and skill transfers in the labour market (Hagan et al., 2014; Hagan et al., 2016; Hagan et al., 2011; Nowicka, 2014). Definitions of skill have shifted over time (OECD, 2012; Payne, 2000), blurring previously rigid categories. Concepts such as ‘middling transnationals’ (Conradson and Latham, 2005) were proposed to nuance binary understandings of either ‘highly skilled professionals’ or ‘poverty-driven labour migrants’. There have been calls for a research agenda emphasising the ‘human face’ of migration (Favell et al., 2007), transcending limited and limiting economic-based categorisations (for a review, see King et al., 2016: 10).

Qualitative research has shown the entanglements behind the ‘highly’ and ‘low’ skilled migrant categories. To illustrate, Polish and Lithuanian participants (Parutis, 2011a) became ‘middling transnationals’ when they could not neatly be placed within a simplistic skill framework because of the highly mobile character of their work (cf. Krings et al., 2013). Romanian migrants challenged highly-low skilled categorisations themselves by focussing on their work ethic and transferrable skills such as ‘creativity’ (Moroşanu et al., 2019b). Such empirical studies show it is problematic to operationalise ‘highly’ and ‘low skilled’ migration given the wide range of definitions and thresholds (Migration Advisory Committee, 2014). One such definition applying to non-EU Tier 2 visas in 2018 was having an income of ‘at least £30,000 per year or the “appropriate rate” for the job you’re offered - whichever is higher’ (UK Government, 2018). This threshold was slightly lowered in the post-Brexit immigration policy proposals, but it was extended to EU migrants after the end of freedom of movement (HM Government, 2020a). Such policies and the quality of research informing
immigration policy more broadly attracts criticism from scholars (Wallace, 2018), professional bodies and politicians alike (CBI, 2019; Gabbatiss, 2019).¹⁰

2.2.4. Geographical origin and location as factors affecting attitudes towards EU migrants

On the socio-psychological level, empirical research emphasises differentiated attitudes according to migrants’ origin. Research in Western Europe usually finds preferences towards white and culturally proximate migrant groups (Ford, 2011). This ‘racial logic’ situates Central and East European migrants ‘within a shared, or at least compatible, racial genealogy’ in the UK (Back, 2007: 36). Nevertheless, there are also studies disproving the hypothesis linking culturally distinctive migrants with more negative attitudes (e.g., in the US, Hopkins, 2015).

An ‘ethnic hierarchy’, structured by perceptions towards different regions of origin, is expressed when measuring attitudes in general, but also more specific attitudes, such as welfare chauvinism - discrimination against migrants claiming benefits -, and welfare ethnocentrism - discrimination against native-born ethnic minority claimants (Ford, 2015). Subnational identities, such as those related to race and religion, also inform preferences for EU over non-EU migration (Blinder and Markaki, 2019). Theories of racial and cultural prejudice explain negative attitudes towards ‘ethnically different’ migrants (Dustmann and Preston, 2007), while economic factors are used more in justifying negative attitudes towards those perceived as ‘culturally similar’. There is little detailed empirical research on preferences for sub-categories of EU migrants, partly because large survey data tend not to differentiate within the European group - they usually only separate ‘Eastern’ and ‘Western’ Europeans. Further categorisation by ethnicity

¹⁰ This thesis was submitted shortly before the COVID-19 lockdown started in the UK in March 2020. Since then, there has been a narrative shift in the public domain - many previously labelled ‘low skilled’ migrants are currently praised as ‘key workers’. There has been increased awareness regarding how the UK economy relies on migrants in low-wage sectors (Fernández-Reino et al., 2020). This prompted debate on whether the pandemic would be the start of a longer-term positive shift in attitudes towards ‘low skilled’ migrants, or rather a temporary narrative change responding to an emergency. While public portrayals of migrants have arguably been more positive, UK migration policy has not necessarily been liberalised. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere (Bulat et al., 2020), COVID-19 has been detrimental to EU migrants’ rights, particularly in the case of those without a status or with pre-settled status (limited leave to remain) who tried to access welfare support. Moreover, the further details document on the UK’s post-Brexit immigration system (HM Government, 2020b) has been criticised for omitting several ‘low skilled’ occupations, such as care workers (e.g. Heffer, 2020), from the categories qualifying for a post-Brexit visa.
or nationality is rarely made, thus researchers overlook the potential effects that migrants’ country of origin, and the associated symbolic meanings and stereotypes, can have on attitudes towards migrants. There are some exceptions in recent detailed survey items, showing clear preferences for certain migrant groups by nationality. A 2017 sample from Kantar illustrates the hierarchy of migrants in British public opinion, from Australians as the most desirable migrants, to Poles in the middle and Romanians, Nigerians and Pakistani migrants at the bottom (Blinder and Richards, 2020), reflecting the findings from the Citizenship Surveys highlighted in the introduction of this thesis (Map 1, Section 1.2).

Researching public and media reactions to East-to-West EU migration, it is clear that ‘EU migrants’ are not seen as a homogenous category. Westerners have an image of mobile EU citizens exercising EU treaty rights and are generally perceived to work in highly skilled jobs, which is indeed what the data show overall (Fernández-Reino and Rienzo, 2019; Rienzo, 2018). Consequently, according to economic theories, they are more likely to attract positive attitudes in receiving societies. As Ford (2011: 1022) puts it, the ‘lack of policy-maker and public interest in West European migrants suggests that they are widely regarded as acceptable’, compared to non-EU or East European EU migrants. The British participants in Duru et al.’s (2017: 685) study express negative attitudes towards two main ‘others’ – East Europeans and non-white Muslims. In contrast, there has been significantly more policy interest in East European migrants, especially when transitional restrictions end for different migrant groups in the UK. Citizens of East European EU countries had limited rights to access work and welfare during transitional periods, lasting for up to seven years (see Kubal, 2012: 74-76). Thus, these migrants found themselves having a different status in the hierarchy of migrants compared to the EU citizens from older EU member states.

In addition, media and political narratives featuring East European migration have been more visible than any discussion of West Europeans. Campaigns against benefit tourism by UK political parties such as UKIP were ‘specifically designed to encourage voters to associate welfare abuse with a particular immigrant ethnic group’ (Ford, 2015: 17), such as East Europeans, when discussing EU migration.
Perhaps as a consequence, less attention has been given to West Europeans in UK scholarship as well, with several notable exceptions, such as Favell’s (2008a) ethnographic research of West Europeans and Ryan and Mulholland’s (2013) qualitative study of French professionals in the UK.

Research has usually responded to public opinion concerns and media and political events, comparing East European migrant stereotypes with empirical evidence. Differentiated portrayals and attitudes towards sub-groups of EU migrants add complexity to theories of preference for ‘whiteness’ and cultural proximity. Despite having a ‘common European heritage’ (McDowell, 2009: 25), some EU migrants possess a different ‘shade of whiteness’ than others (Moore, 2013). The ‘other whites’ in demographic questionnaires can become ‘white others’ in public opinion and media narratives (Halej, 2014). The media are influential in creating those hierarchies (Blinder and Allen, 2016; Helbling, 2013). For instance, through conflating ‘Romanian’ and ‘Roma’ (Cheregi, 2015; Fox et al., 2015: 735; Vicol and Allen, 2014: 15), British media ‘darken[ed] Romanian migrants’ (Fox et al., 2012: 692).

Although ethnic and national categories are overlooked in survey-based attitude research on EU migrants, there is literature on various stereotypes of EU migrant sub-groups. The Belgian employers in Galent et al.’s (2009: 138) study contrast the Polish workers (with whom they have direct contact) with Romanian migrants, expressing more negative attitudes towards the latter, despite similar stereotypes in the media - ‘contrary to decriminalised Poles, Romanians are associated with banditry and roughness’. In the UK, Favell (2013: 57) notices how Poles and Romanians have ‘always been differentiated and discriminated ethnically from other Europeans’, even before the 2008 economic crisis. Stereotypes associated with specific nationalities have consequences for migrants’ lives, such as reducing their access to employment and affecting their wellbeing. Ethnicity, nationality and cultural difference impact how labour markets are structured in multi-ethnic societies (Friberg, 2012: 1914). Moroşanu (2018: 162) concludes there is ‘ample evidence of the highly ethnicised (or nationalised) way in which workplace interactions are perceived.’
Migrants’ geographical origin is linked to various assumptions and stereotypes, impacting attitudes and contact between out-groups and in-groups. These attitudes are shaped within national and local contexts in the receiving country. A multi-disciplinary, mixed methods approach to assess the role of location has been encouraged (Lupton, 2003). Most research on contemporary EU migration to the UK concentrates on how diversity shapes attitudes in certain areas. The characteristics of a particular place influence everyday interactions and, as Bell and Domecka (2018) demonstrate, the local area is in turn impacted by migrants’ and non-migrants’ actions. The sense of localness is shaped by both immigration into an area and those leaving (Rogaly and Taylor, 2009). ‘Spatial sensitivities’ need to be considered when analysing such attitudes (Valentine and Harris, 2016).

At a national level, countries with higher intra-EU migration tend to have more positive attitudes to such migration, for instance when measuring welfare chauvinism (Cappelen and Peters, 2018). Studies find higher solidarity towards migrants’ welfare rights in more ethnically diverse places. Interestingly, migrants tend to arrive from less diverse countries and show lower solidarity than non-migrants (van Oorschot, 2008). Welfare chauvinistic views are significantly more popular in lower-immigration East European countries, with almost half of those surveyed in Poland expressing such attitudes (Eick, 2019). Qualitative studies nuance these quantitative results, also illustrating migrants’ preference for a conditional welfare system based on the concept of deservingness (Osipovič, 2010; Osipovič, 2015).

Complementing this national-level dimension are studies on the local level, especially those considering neighbourhood diversity. Literature on neighbourhood effects (Hedberg and Tammaru, 2012) is concerned largely with migrant segregation and its consequences for job market participation and other aspects of migrants’ lives. Attitudes are influenced by how ‘visible’ migration is perceived to be in an area. Even in absence of direct interactions, seeing ethnically marked spaces (Valentine, 2013) can constitute a form of vicarious contact impacting views on migration. The assumption is that positive attitudes are more likely to occur in urban, multiethnic spaces than rural, rather monoethnic
locations. Comparative research with urban and non-urban responses to otherness evidence that heterogeneity in urban locations ‘produce superficial, secondary social relations’ (Carter and Carter, 2014: 167) which improve tolerance of diversity, contrasting to rural areas lacking this type of social contact.

Some researchers argue that it is economic deprivation, and not migration, that explains people’s views of their local areas (Saggar et al., 2012). Exclusionary attitudes are linked to economic downturn and are more likely to come from those living not only in less diverse countries, but in less wealthy ones as well (Gorodzeisky, 2011). Scholars recommend that research considers interpersonal interaction while ‘addressing fundamental issues of deprivation, disadvantage, and discrimination’ (Hickman et al., 2008: ix). There is an interplay between conflict and contact in localised experiences, and some research concludes that racial tensions are often driven by struggles for resources such as in employment and housing (Hudson et al., 2007). Conflict between ethnic groups is least likely to occur when there is a ‘separation of communities by way of economic niches’ or ‘differential demands on public resources’ (Vertovec, 2007: 5). Especially in times of economic hardship, ‘proximity does not equate with meaningful contact’ (Valentine, 2008: 334).

The impact of austerity on attitudes towards a variety of topics, including migration, has been central in explaining Brexit. Recent studies show the local-level impact of austerity as a predictor of Brexit support (Becker et al., 2017; Fetzer, 2018a; Fetzer, 2018b). There was a higher pro-Leave vote in areas which were more negatively impacted by economic globalisation (Colantone and Stanig, 2018) and suffered economic decline (Jennings et al., 2017). Some scholars described the referendum outcome as ‘two Englands’ (Jennings and Stoker, 2016)’ – of growth and decline, corresponding to majority Remain and Leave voting areas. Other researchers criticise the spatial imaginary of the ‘left behind’ (Sykes, 2018), showing how the picture is more complex than often presented (Gordon, 2018), underlining how multiethnic, urban spaces can also be ‘left behind’ in various ways (Furlong, 2018; Furlong, 2019). The next and last part of this chapter explores the Brexit phenomenon and its implications for the study of attitudes towards migrants in the UK.
2.3. The emerging ‘Brexitology’ and its connections with attitudes research

Literature on Brexit, or ‘Brexitology’, is a rapidly expanding field. Researchers explain the 2016 referendum outcome and predict post-Brexit scenarios. Before reviewing the main themes on immigration, it is significant to note that this body of literature is substantively different from the theoretical and empirical studies reviewed so far. Because Brexit is a time-sensitive, pressing political issue, writing on this topic includes diverse contributors, such as journalists, politicians, campaigners and academics. The fast-paced political environment leaves more space for partisan analyses; thus, conclusions should be treated even more critically.

Research on Brexit is dominated by explanations of who voted for the UK’s EU exit and why. The Brexit discussion goes beyond individual voting behaviour, outlining divides among parts of the UK and their implications. But there are also differences within Leave or Remain heartlands, illustrated by how varying levels of deprivation correlate with Leave support at a more local, ward level (Becker et al., 2018: 32-33). This insight is important for this thesis given it analyses attitudes in a multiethnic local authority and a monoethnic one, both including some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK (as described in Chapter 1, Section 1.4). Immigration is a core topic studied within the Brexit literature, both at macro and micro-levels. I found three main clusters when reviewing this literature: examining immigration as a concern in public opinion, discussing the extent to which immigration was used in political communication during the campaign itself, and researching the lived experiences of migrants in an uncertain Brexit context.

2.3.1. Immigration as public concern in the UK

In 2018, the Government commissioned a MAC report assessing the impact of EEA migration. The analysis revealed no or very little negative impact on every area considered and overall a significant positive fiscal contribution (Migration Advisory Committee, 2018). This complements other studies concluding there is
no or very little impact of migration on the life satisfaction of UK-born residents (Giulietti and Yan, 2018), rejecting the welfare magnet hypothesis (Giulietti, 2014) and finding little evidence of migration driving down wages (Lemos and Portes, 2013). Moreover, a higher number of EU migrants living in an area does not significantly impact UK-born residents’ access to the labour market and their level of pay (Wadsworth et al., 2019). Two years prior to the 2018 MAC report, immigration was the top issue for voters in the EU referendum (Ipsos MORI, 2016), showing unresolved tensions in migration policy (Dennison and Geddes, 2018). The salience of immigration in political narratives during the referendum campaign was perhaps unavoidable. Some argued that the campaign was not even focussed on the EU, but acted primarily as a vehicle to scapegoat migrants (Barker, 2016) for homegrown problems.

Research concurs that three issues dominated the campaign: immigration, the economy, and the conduct of the campaign itself (see Deacon et al., 2016). Although there is consensus that immigration was salient, many scholars point out the need to unpack the term. Research suggests that areas with higher levels of migration from countries joining the EU post-2004 tend to have a higher share of Leave voters, in contrast to when controlling for Western EU migrant group size growth (Becker et al., 2018: 31). There also is a positive relationship between immigration and the Leave vote only when considering migrants from newer member states as a variable (Colantone and Stanig, 2018). These correlations call for a more comprehensive exploration of how voters understand different types of intra-EU migration, which is provided in the empirical chapters of this thesis. Some research argues that the driving forces behind Leave support were poor economic conditions, coupled with the rapid pace of change in immigration levels, rather than static migrant numbers (Goodwin and Heath, 2016; Kaufmann, 2017). This links to earlier research on how hostility towards migrants occurs more frequently when communities are exposed to sudden movements of migrants (Hopkins, 2010).

Brexit research identifies for whom immigration was an important motivation when voting Leave in 2016. The ‘typical’ Leave voter profile is found within the section of the population with more negative views towards migration, as
explained in Section 2.2.3. Those who are older, white, less well-educated and living in less privileged economic conditions were more likely to vote Leave and express concerns about immigration (Holbolt, 2016). There are other relevant factors too, such as political affiliation – when comparing voters with otherwise similar characteristics, Conservatives are more likely to vote Leave than Labour counterparts (Alabrese et al., 2019).

The immigration component of the Brexit vote operates at the attitudinal level, connecting with people’s value systems. Brexit researchers found that identification with values such as authoritarianism, nationalism, conservativism and system justification can predict pro-Brexit, anti-immigration and anti-EU views (de Zavala et al., 2017; Swales, 2017; Zmigrod et al., 2018). To illustrate, consider the five ‘tribes’ of voters identified by an IPSOS Mori (2017) study, which intersects identities, values, attitudes and behaviour. The ‘young, urban and unengaged’ are diverse, live in cities and have low political interest, while those ‘bothered by Brexit’ tend to be male, more highly educated and middle class. There are also female majority groups such as those with ‘traditional misgivings’, who are older, concerned about the NHS and immigration, different from the ‘public service worriers’, who are middle class, highly educated and younger, but also care about the NHS, although immigration is not necessarily among their concerns. The fifth category are the ‘hyper concerned’, the most politically engaged part of the middle classes, who are ‘worried about everything’.

Several initiatives explored British voters’ expectations of Brexit, including their views on future migration, for instance the UK in a Changing Europe research on ‘left behind’ areas (Bevington et al., 2019) or Brexit citizens’ assemblies (Renwick et al., 2017). The findings from these citizens’ assemblies and also those emerging from the ‘national conversation’ on immigration (Rutter and Carter, 2018) suggest there may be a ‘hidden consensus’ on UK immigration policy (Buchanan et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the latter YouGov & UCL Constitution Unit study (Buchanan et al., 2019) has some important limitations. The survey questions assume that the so-called ‘three-month’ rule has never been enforced

11 The ‘three-month’ rule is a term used to reference EU Directive 2004/38/EC (European Parliament, 2004), according to which all EU citizens have the freedom to reside in another EU country for an initial
in the UK, when, in fact, there are cases of EU citizens being removed for failing to prove that they exercise EU treaty rights. For example, over 5,000 EU migrants were removed from the UK in the year ending June 2017 (Home Office, 2017), while this decreased to 3,530 in 2019 (Home Office, 2019b). In 2017, the decision of the Home Office to remove EU migrant rough sleepers from the UK on the basis they abuse freedom of movement rights has been ruled unlawful (e.g. Taylor, 2017). This is an illustration of the limitations of survey research more broadly, especially the difficulty to assess respondents’ knowledge of policies on which they express their views.

2.3.2. Immigration in political communication during the EU referendum campaign

Another main theme in Brexit research concerns how immigration was discussed during the campaign. It was not only Leave.EU, with their outspoken politicians such as Nigel Farage, who played the ‘migration card’. The official Vote Leave campaign focussed on immigration in later weeks, even though their launch materials avoided this issue (Clarke et al., 2017: 35). Shortly after this shift in Vote Leave’s communication strategy, the Remain campaign’s lead dropped in public opinion polls (Glencross, 2016: 36). Instead of putting forward a case against the Leave stance on immigration, the official Remain campaign, Britain Stronger In Europe, chose a ‘defensive campaign script’, as described by their executive director in Clarke et al.’s book (2017: 32). Remain strategists were informed by research showing it was futile to argue on immigration with Leave, so they decided to focus on economics, stressing how Brexit could damage the UK’s economic standing. Despite their emphasis on evidence, Remain was perceived as more dishonest, negative, and unclear than Leave (Clarke et al., 2017: 42). Furthermore, drawing on previous UK referendums, there was an assumption that voters prefer less risky options (Clarke et al., 2017: 32), thus the 2016 result surprised many politicians and academics.

period of three months, without other conditions except holding a valid identity document. After this three-month period, they will have to meet the conditions of exercising their EU treaty rights, by being a worker, self-employed or having sufficient resources and the appropriate health insurance if self-sufficient.
Researchers agree that the referendum campaign had a narrow agenda (Deacon et al., 2016), especially on immigration. Leave succeeded in the immigration debate because of Remain’s limited or lacking counterarguments, but also because it could relate to a larger group of ordinary voters. The Leave messaging combined two contradictory visions, appealing to different types of voters: a pro-immigration ‘global Britain’ and a nostalgic view of a colonial past (Virdee and McGeever, 2018). Leave’s ‘take back control’ slogan usually translated to taking back control of borders, more than other aspects (Portes, 2019: 24). The campaign bolstered misconceptions about freedom of movement, inaccurately representing migrants’ reasons to leave their countries of birth, their various contributions, and the state of UK migration policy at the time (Thielemann and Schade, 2016: 139).

The campaign highlighted particular categories of migrants, mirroring the hierarchies outlined in Sections 2.1.6, 2.2.3 and 2.2.4. The focus was on East Europeans and migration from Turkey (Portes, 2019: 56), the latter considered as future EU migration, despite the complexities of Turkish accession prospects (Arvanitopoulos, 2009). The Leave campaign thus built on existing negative narratives about certain groups of migrants. For example, research on UK media portrayals of Romanians and Bulgarians shows that pro-immigration, cosmopolitan narratives are almost absent and replaced by communitarian perspectives, often containing welfare chauvinistic attitudes (Allen, 2016; Balch and Balabanova, 2016). Some campaign arguments pitted EU migrants against those from the Commonwealth (de Cruz, 2018), to appeal to British ethnic minorities or non-EU migrants who had the right to vote (Portes, 2019: 24). A few years since the referendum, researchers note how a shift in media portrayals of migrants, such as the emphasis on the cost of ending freedom of movement post-referendum (Morrison, 2019), could be a variable explaining the softening of attitudes towards migration (Duffy et al., 2017; Kaur-Ballagan, 2019).

There are many studies on media use during the EU referendum campaign. The media mainly reported on Leave’s immigration arguments, consequently reinforcing those messages (van Horne, 2018: 77). Jackson et al. (2016) present a collection of academic commentaries, including analysing campaign e-
newsletters and radio programmes. Most studies explore television and newspapers, exposing the poor quality of the EU referendum debates. Immigration and the economy were the top two issues in television news, far exceeding coverage of other topics (Cushion and Lewis, 2017: 212).

While people perceive asymmetric local-level impacts of migration in their lives (Osuna et al., 2019), the Remain campaign focussed on national-level arguments and even failed in articulating why EU membership was beneficial for the UK as a whole (Calhoun, 2017: 65). For instance, repetitive mentions of the Prime Minister’s renegotiation with the EU, depicting the ‘benefit cap’ for EU migrants as an achievement, had little power in the campaign, because the issue of ‘benefit tourism’ was largely irrelevant for the public compared to other issues (see also Jackson et al., 2016; Portes, 2016: 14).

The limited choice of arguments on immigration is connected to insufficient source diversity. An alternative to a right-wing case for EU membership was almost absent, because almost three quarters of political party sources in television reporting were Conservatives (Cushion and Lewis, 2017: 213). The overall shortage of pro-EU voices in the news media (Copeland and Copsey, 2017) facilitated the influence of Leave campaigners in setting the discussion agenda (Usherwood and Wright, 2017: 284), consequently strengthening their position.

Despite the large number of analyses on the EU referendum campaign, no study systematically examines in detail media coverage of immigration as a core topic. Political ephemera, central to campaign communication, are overlooked in the literature. There are millions of leaflets, newsletters and other ephemera distributed in any given political campaign and most voters encounter these materials, used to offer a snapshot of the campaign arguments. The only references to ephemera found when reviewing the Brexit literature are critiques of the one official UK Government pro-Remain leaflet sent to all voting households. This political material becomes a case study of poor campaign arguments that avoid an open assessment on the economic consequences of leaving the EU (see Welfens, 2016). Scholars concluded that ‘the only way the
Government was actually prepared to mention immigration was in relation to border control’ and the only ‘positives’ underlined were the existence of the European Arrest Warrant and that the UK is not in Schengen (Glencross, 2016: 35). There is a need for more research on the detail of the 2016 referendum campaign arguments on immigration, hence the first empirical chapter in this thesis, Chapter 4, starts with an analysis of campaign ephemera.

2.3.3. EU migrants’ lived experiences in an uncertain Brexit context

Although the topic of immigration was used as a campaign tool to mainly promote pro-Brexit arguments, EU migrants already in the UK (and British citizens living in other EU member states) were promised nothing would change for them, whatever the referendum outcome (Gove et al., 2016). At the moment of writing, EU migrants have to apply for a new immigration status through the EU Settlement Scheme if they wish to remain lawfully in the UK after Brexit. Moreover, official statistics reported ‘a genuine increase in hate crime, particularly around the time of the EU referendum in June 2016’ (O’Neill, 2017: 4), with mainly East Europeans becoming victims of crimes reported in the media (e.g. Bulman, 2016; Gordon, 2019). Thus, EU migrants are one of the groups most impacted by the 2016 referendum result. A relatively small part of the Brexit literature gives voice to EU migrants’ lived experiences. The plight of British people in other EU states has been even less researched, in particular regarding British ethnic minorities’ experiences (with the notable exception of Benson and Lewis, 2019).

EU migrants are usually discussed in the context of European citizenship and residency rights (Mindus, 2017), and also future immigration policy (Thomas, 2019). Research on EU migrants in the Brexit circumstances is a mixture of academic and non-academic writing. I find three interconnected main areas of inquiry: a legally focussed literature on EU citizens’ rights; socio-political perspectives on future EU migration (with a focus on migrants’ plans to stay or leave the UK); and the personal experiences of EU migrants in an uncertain environment.
On citizens’ rights, the research body consists of technical reports covering various possible Brexit scenarios at the time. This discussion is influenced by the wider hostile environment policies in the UK. As mentioned previously in the thesis, while conducting this doctoral study, the UK witnessed one of the biggest immigration scandals, Windrush, when the Home Office deported a number of people who arrived in the UK as British subjects or citizens. A range of academics and journalists debate the impact of the hostile environment policies on future immigration, covering the development of the Windrush situation (Gentleman, 2019) and how these policies permeate migrants’ essential rights, such as to work and rent (Goodfellow, 2019). EU migrants’ narratives started to include references to hostile environment policies (Burrell and Schweyher, 2019). Some EU citizens in the UK even received erroneous deportation letters shortly after the EU referendum (Busby, 2017). After Brexit, EU migrants become once again workers with limited rights, rather than mobile citizens (D’Angelo and Kofman, 2018).

The EU-UK Brexit negotiations included the rights of EU migrants in the UK and British migrants in other EU states, forming Part 3 of the Withdrawal Agreement Bill (2019). In the UK, the EU Settlement Scheme was fully open in March 2019 and nearly two million applications were made by September that year (Home Office, 2019a). However, various migrant organisations and researchers have been concerned about those most at risk of marginalisation who may not be able to apply by the deadline, therefore risking to become unlawfully resident after Brexit (The Migration Observatory, 2018). The process of Brexit can thus lead to ‘illegalising’ (Manolova, 2016) some EU migrants.

Organisations like the3million, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) and others proposed recommendations to ensure that the more vulnerable EU migrants were not left behind this scheme (Desira, 2017; Gardner and Rahman, 2019). Researchers criticised the burden of proof being placed on the individual rather than the state (Sumption, 2017) and noted other barriers to applying, such as language and digital literacy (Rutter and Ballinger, 2019). At the same time, studies with British participants showed broad support for EU
migrants’ continued residency rights, in particular among the young generation (e.g. Mejias and Banaji, 2017).

Additionally, other researchers focus on EU migrants applying for British citizenship. The number of naturalisation applications has spiked since 2016 (Blinder, 2018). In 2018, applications for citizenship by EU citizens increased by a fifth compared to the previous year, with EU nationals accounting for almost a third of naturalisation applications, compared to 12% in 2016 (Home Office, 2019c). However, the number of applications remained generally stable in the following year. Polish, Italian and Romanian citizens are the top EU nationalities who choose to become British (Home Office, 2020). Migrants from older EU member states and those in more privileged socio-economic backgrounds are less convinced to naturalise (Sigona and Godin, 2019b), whereas those from post-Enlargement EU countries, especially more recent EU migrants to the UK, have a more pragmatic view in applying for naturalisation (Anderson, 2017), a trend noted before the referendum result as well (Moreh et al., 2016). Alongside the legal rights of EU migrants already in the UK, the migration sector has been preoccupied with post-Brexit EU migration policies (Katwala et al., 2017; Owen et al., 2019; Rolfe et al., 2018).

The legal context of post-Brexit rights underpins migrants’ plans. Decisions to stay or leave the UK are influenced by migrants’ awareness of their rights and their views on whether those rights will be preserved in the future (McGhee et al., 2017). Although net EU migration to the UK is still positive, there has been a significant decrease in the number of newcomers every quarter since the referendum (Office for National Statistics, 2018c). In November 2019, EU net migration for that quarter was at its lowest level since 2003, before EU Enlargement (Blake, 2019). This decreasing trend in EU immigration to the UK has been seen in early 2020 as well (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

Several studies analysed the impact of this ‘Brexodus’ on health and social care provision (Dolton et al., 2018), noticing the abrupt decline in EU nurses applying to work in the NHS (McKee, 2018). Impacts in other sectors have also been considered, particularly on labour markets with flexible work patterns (Green and
Hogarth, 2017; Rolfe, 2017) and lower skilled/paid sectors (Rolfe, 2016), such as hospitality, food processing and construction (Rolfe et al., 2016). These industries employ a disproportionately high number of EU migrant workers (Fernández-Reino and Rienzo, 2019), who are appreciated for their work ethic in particular (Hopkins, 2017).

Reductions in EU migration motivated by Brexit are predicted to have significant negative impacts on the UK’s economy, but marginal positive effects on wages in the lower skilled sectors are also expected (Portes and Forte, 2017). Nonetheless, some researchers consider it is still too early to argue there is a ‘Brexodus’. They argue that many EU migrants see the UK as their home (Kilkey and Ryan, 2018) and show how family situations influence the prospects of return migration or settlement (Kay and Trevena, 2018). Brexit has implications for the literature on return migration (Galasinska, 2018; Vathi and King, 2018), but also on settlement and integration. Research with Polish adolescents shows how they mostly want to remain in the UK (Young, 2019), while a study with Czech migrants illustrates how the majority aspire to a predictable future with their families (Janurová, 2018). Moving ‘back’ to one’s country of origin is increasingly difficult, the longer and the earlier on in life the migrant lived in the UK – recent research describes Romanian children returning with their families as ‘strangers at home’ (Telegdi-Csetri and Ducu, 2019).

In addition to non-academic books providing direct testimonies from EU migrants in their own voices (Remigi et al., 2017), there is a growing scholarly literature, predominantly qualitative, listening to EU migrants’ views. This research highlights the sense of ‘in-betweenness’ felt by many EU migrants, particularly younger people from the ‘1.5 generation’ (Tyrrell et al., 2018) and the mixed UK-EU families interviewed for the ‘Eurochildren’ research project (e.g. Sigona and Godin, 2019a). A few researchers who conducted interviews with EU migrants before the referendum followed up with their participants to assess whether and how their experiences have changed since 2016. Some Polish migrant women participants felt like ‘second class citizens’ after the Brexit referendum (Duda-Mikulin, 2019).
Research on EU migrants’ lived experiences compared racism and xenophobia before and after the 2016 vote (Rzepnikowska, 2018) and xeno-racism in the digital sphere, with some EU migrant researchers sharing their personal experiences (Pawluczuk, 2019). Research also documented how East Europeans face racism in UK schools (Tereshchenko et al., 2019). Survey-based post-Brexit studies compile a larger picture of EU migrants’ plans and concerns. For instance, Marks et al.’s (2019) survey with Polish respondents differentiate between concerns that are shared with the British population, such as about their financial situation post-Brexit, and Brexit worries specific to migrants, such as the cost of naturalisation.

Like the broader literature on EU migration to the UK, most studies on EU migrants in the Brexit context involve Polish or, in some cases, other Central and East European participants. One notable exception is Lulle et al.’s (2018) study based on interviews with Irish, Romanian and Italian migrants before and after Brexit, underlining the uncertainties they feel and their complex plans. Bueltmann’s (2020) survey-based report on EU migrants’ experiences applying to the EU Settlement Scheme includes participants from most EU countries (predominantly West Europeans), showing negative impacts on wellbeing and feelings of trust and integration. In sum, the ‘Brexitology’ reviewed for this last part of the chapter is also focussed either on British or migrant perspectives, with little conversation between the two, even if those two angles cannot easily be separated.

2.4. Conclusion and research gap(s)

The purpose of this literature review chapter is to situate the original contribution of this thesis within Political Sociology and Migration Studies. The first part defined and discussed the key terms (attitudes, (im)migrants/(im)migration and the local level, ethnic and national categorisations, integration and social remittances, but also the context of nationalism, populism and Euroscepticism and the construction of hierarchies of otherness) before outlining the economic and socio-psychological perspectives used in explaining attitudes towards the ‘other’. It then detailed how direct and mediated contact shape attitudes towards
out-groups. This theoretical discussion of attitudes is framed within the wider literature on migrant integration and social remittances. It also introduced the concept of migrant hierarchies, before detailing ethnic and skill-based hierarchies in the second part of the chapter.

This first part identified a need for a more in-depth localised contact theory approach, in particular analysing how national-level attitudes and narratives relate to the local-level, thus Chapter 4 will focus on this question in particular through the national-level EU referendum ephemera analysis and local-level responses to the campaign. It observed that direct and mediated contact are interlinked but often discussed separately in the literature. One of the main contributions of Chapter 7 is exploring how direct and mediated forms of contact interact in shaping attitudes towards EU migrants.

The second part of this chapter reviewed empirical literature on attitudes towards migrants. It summarised some contradictory findings on the extent to which contact needs to be ‘meaningful’ in order to change attitudes towards migrants. It critically engaged with the question of whose attitudes are we considering, looking at both migrant and non-migrant views. Then, it explained how education and skill level, both of migrants and non-migrants, impact those attitudes. Finally, it demonstrated how migrants’ geographical origin, but also the local context in which attitudes are shaped, impacts attitude formation.

To understand what constitutes meaningful contact that can change views towards migration, the attitudes of migrants and non-migrants towards migration should be considered together, as influencing each other, rather than as separate topics as most existing studies do. Separating economic and cultural arguments may overlook the intersection of migrants’ skill level and origin in constructing hierarchies of migrants reflecting public attitudes. Chapter 5 elaborates on intersections between skill and origin when participants express their views about EU migrants.

The third and last part of the chapter reviewed the rapidly expanding literature on Brexit, engaging with three main categories of research: studies on immigration
as a public concern informing voters’ behaviour, analyses on immigration as a tool in the campaign’s political communication, and research on the lived experiences of EU migrants post-referendum, particularly on their plans of return or settlement, and how these decisions impact the UK more broadly.

While studies explored a range of media used during the 2016 referendum, I find little detailed analysis of the arguments on immigration. Aside from some comments on the UK Government’s leaflet, there is no analysis on campaign ephemera when discussing political communication. While quantitative studies show a softening of attitudes towards migrants post-2016, qualitative research gives voice to the uncertainty and hostility many EU migrant participants experience. Research on Brexit also tends to divide between studies with British participants and those concentrating on migrant experiences. Again, I underline that a comparative element would add to the empirical insight in this fast-paced Brexitology.

In a review of Polish migration literature, which dominates the literature on EU migrants to the UK, White (2016: 14) observes ‘there is surprisingly little on attitudes towards post-2004 migrants […] despite the political significance of the anti-Polish sentiment in the UK.’ The views of ordinary British citizens towards East Europeans have been less well known (White, 2011). Research on British attitudes is dominated by large scale surveys, which, for various reasons noted in this chapter (and later in Section 3.1), are limited in capturing the nuances behind attitudes towards migrants.

Qualitative approaches would complement this literature and be able to adopt a more intersectional lens. There have been very few studies including both British and migrant voices. The most recent and closest to my research focus is Duru et al.’s (2017) mixed methods analysis of British, Romanian and Turkish migrants’ attitudes towards tolerance and diversity, using survey data and interviews collected in 2012-13. To my knowledge, no similar study has been conducted after the 2016 referendum, and overall no qualitative study looked at how local-level contact shapes the attitudes of both migrant and non-migrant participants towards EU migration.
This thesis fills in a research gap on several levels – theoretically, empirically and from a policy perspective. It employs a framework of localised contact theory to compare how attitudes are shaped in two demographically contrasting English local authorities (Tendring and London Borough of Newham), with both migrant and non-migrant participants residing in those areas (British, Romanian and Polish), as well as local politicians and activists. This research expands previous studies based on contact theory in three main ways. First, it provides a qualitative analysis of how local-level identities inform interaction between in-groups (British residents) and out-groups (EU migrants). In this sense, it follows one of the recommendations of Robinson and Walshaw (2011: 7) for ‘greater clarity about the variable geography of experiences and outcomes associated with migration’. Second, unlike most survey-based studies where the researcher selects the types of contact analysed, this qualitative research is data-led and therefore able to explore the links between different mediated and direct forms of contact with migrants at the local level. Third, it compares the role of contact shaping attitudes from both migrant and non-migrant perspectives, which is rarely covered in the field’s scholarship. A qualitative, in-depth approach would be better placed to answer the question of how and when contact becomes ‘meaningful’ and how economic and cultural-type explanations intersect in participants’ narratives.

Empirically, this thesis first contributes to the Brexit literature through a detailed, qualitative analysis of which migrants were spoken about and by whom during the 2016 referendum campaign, based on political ephemera, which are almost ignored in the literature (Chapter 4). It then looks at how this national-level campaign was perceived by both migrants and non-migrants at the local level. It adds to the study of EU migrants’ lived experiences by analysing the views of the two largest EU migrant groups in two contrasting local authorities (Chapters 5-7). It places those views in conversation with British residents’ attitudes, rather than as a separate debate. It challenges the ‘left behind’ stereotypes by comparing two relatively deprived areas, one of the most multiethnic, inside London, and one of the most monoethnic, in the East of England. Using in-depth fieldwork to analyse the role of everyday local-level experiences in shaping views towards migrants brings a qualitative socio-political perspective into an area dominated by quantitative political science and polling.
Finally, considering mistrust in ‘expert’ opinion in the climate of Brexit (Clarke and Newman, 2017), this study also represents a call for a more public political sociology and participatory policymaking considering both migrants and non-migrants’ voices in immigration debates (especially through Chapter 6, Section 6.3, on participants’ expectations of UK migration policy). The UK’s future migration system post-Brexit impacts all UK residents and it is paramount that knowledge in this area is disseminated beyond academic audiences. The goal of public (political) sociology should therefore be to develop conversations in situations where aims are not necessarily shared by both sides (Burawoy, 2005: 9), such as in the Brexit context. This study contributes to this purpose by listening to both migrant and non-migrant voices in making sense of attitudes towards migration, bringing the national discussion back to the local level, and using an active and in-depth qualitative methodology - which is the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter 3. Methodology: an in-depth qualitative, interview-based study

This chapter justifies the study’s constructivist epistemological approach and qualitative methodology. Then, it explains what methods were chosen for this research and why. Chapter 4 situates my participants’ attitudes towards migrants in the Brexit context through analysing three EU referendum campaign ephemera collections. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are based on original fieldwork in two English local authorities – Newham and Tendring.

The empirical chapters mainly draw on 63 semi-structured recorded active interviews with British, Romanian and Polish residents and 15 unrecorded interviews with local politicians and political activists. The one year of fieldwork also includes insight from other informants, extensive fieldnotes, photographs, and hundreds of informal conversations about migration, both in online and offline spaces. I discuss various fieldwork practicalities, particularly focussing on participant recruitment and the interview process. A subsequent ethics section covers the procedures involved in this research and reflects on some ethical implications of the fieldwork. Next, I build on the concept of selective positionality, illustrating how I found myself at different points on the insider-outsider spectrum when interacting with my interviewees. To illustrate, I detail on how my positionality shifted during a particular interview setting.

The final part of this chapter presents the qualitative techniques I used for data analysis. I demonstrate how I coded the interview transcripts, organised participant case descriptions and generated the main themes using NVivo12. I argue that reflexivity can overcome some of the limitations of this study. I conclude by underlining how this study differs from dominant quantitative approaches in the research of attitudes towards migrants and contributes to methodological debates within Migration Studies. Appendix A shows some interview materials, Appendix B offers details on the samples (ephemera and interviewees) and Appendix C includes the NVivo codebooks and an example of fieldnotes, a case description and an interview transcript.
3.1. The limitations of measuring attitudes towards EU migrants

As introduced in Chapter 1 (Section 1.1), this study has one main research question: how does local-level contact shape attitudes towards EU migrants? To answer this, several other related questions have to be considered first. Who spoke about EU migration and how during the 2016 EU referendum campaign? How do migrant and non-migrant participants perceive EU migration? How do their views compare? Moreover, the question on local-level direct contact cannot be separated from the influence of mediated contact. As concluded in Chapter 2 (Section 2.4), the original contribution of this study on attitudes towards migration is in exploring the nuances behind attitudes towards EU migrants and considering how economic and cultural perspectives intersect.

I adopt a constructivist approach with a qualitative study design. The epistemology is, therefore, interpretivist. My study is informed by the assumption that attitudes towards migration are contingent on social encounters. People’s knowledge about migration is empirical, built through subjective experience rather than logic. Social constructivism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) implies that attitudes are formed through interaction and interpretation. Attitudes towards migrants are expected to be shaped by a range of factors, including contact with migrants and reflecting on those experiences. Moreover, drawing on the conflict theories explained in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1.2), perceptions about resource competition may also affect attitudes. People’s subjective knowledge of migration is influenced by participants’ characteristics, such as education, skill level and geographical origin, detailed in Sections 2.2.3 and 2.2.4.

Attitudes are further impacted by the research setting itself. For example, the timing of the interview, or my own personal characteristics as researcher, can become relevant when making sense of what participants choose to express on the topic of immigration. This study is primarily interested in how people understand migration and experience it at the local level. It does not regard attitudes as objective categories that can be measured with precision. Thus, this research does not aim to quantify attitudes, given that ‘nuances are lost with
categorisation’ (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 124), but instead to analyse detailed attitudes towards EU migrants at the local level through a qualitative methodology. This in-depth study examines how participants express their views, rather than imposing the researcher’s own categorisations within a deductive model of analysis. Thus, rather than starting with a pre-established scale or categorisation, such as Bogardus’ (1947) social distance scale (elaborated on in Section 2.2.1) or Allport’s (1954) conditions for meaningful contact (see Section 2.1.2), this study considers all types of contact as emerging from participants’ narratives and understandings.

As a concept, attitudes have been researched across disciplines. Scholars have not only debated how to define attitudes (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1), but also how to measure them. In the UK, large-scale surveys like British Social Attitudes and opinion polls from YouGov, Ipsos MORI and other research companies are most frequently used when discussing the changing nature of attitudes towards migrants. Summated rating scales are the most widely used tool in attitude measurement, but can contain categories that are ‘both limited in number and undefined in terms of explicit comparison standards’ (Foddy, 1993: 180). Measurement often becomes problematic when respondents have to place their complex attitudes within limited categorisations.

Question wording is crucial in the study of attitudes towards migration. Having set survey questions constrains the extent to which attitudes towards different migrant groups can be understood in detail. The terms used to categorise migrants also limit the type of responses that participants can offer. By way of illustration, it is unlikely all respondents define ‘Polish migrants’, or ‘East Europeans’ in the same way. Research has already concluded that the meanings participants attribute to the term ‘immigration’ affect how people evaluate the impacts of immigration (Blinder, 2013). The differences in knowledge and perception of migration can be explored in more detail through a qualitative study. Survey questions tend to assume participants’ knowledge on certain aspects of immigration. This is problematic, especially considering research showing how the number of migrants, alongside the group size of other minorities, tend to be significantly overestimated by the public (Chapter 2, Section 2.1.5). It is difficult
for surveys to provide sufficient space for a fair amount of detail, such as assessing prior knowledge about immigration, to contextualise the attitudes expressed.

Additionally, an extensive body of research notes the difficulties to minimise social desirability biases when measuring attitudes (Fowler, 1993: 89; Sapsford, 2007: 103; Sue and Ritter, 2007: 39). It is challenging to capture honest accounts from participants through quantitative surveys, especially on sensitive topics (Janus, 2010), such as race, ethnicity and immigration. In this sense, positive self-presentation is a common strategy used by participants, who often employ techniques such as disclaimers (‘I’m not racist, but…’) to communicate their awareness that certain views they may have are not socially acceptable (Van Dijk, 1992: 89). Having negative attitudes towards immigration has become more socially undesirable over time (de Vaus, 2002: 107).

Surveys including attitudes towards immigration rarely have the intention or the space to differentiate attitudes by detailed migrant categories. There is a clear picture of a preference towards highly skilled over lower skilled migration (e.g. Helbling and Kriesi, 2014), yet we have very little understanding on what participants mean by those terms. Moreover, being asked direct survey questions about specific nationalities, such as in some waves of the Citizenship Survey (DCLG, 2001-2011), can lead to artificially creating opinions (de Vaus, 2002: 97; Sue and Ritter, 2007: 40). In other words, participants may not have a particular country or region of origin in mind when ticking the option of reducing the number of migrants, but the question can prompt them to think in those terms. Alternative methods such as vignettes (Ford, 2015) can be more useful than large-scale surveys in exploring how migrants’ (perceived) origin shapes attitudes towards them. However, vignettes are also limited, particularly because they cannot include a tailored follow-up process, as compared to semi-structured interviews. Qualitative methods, such as asking individuals to tell a story or freely describe their experiences (Sapsford, 2007: 106) through narratives and open-ended questions, can provide a more comprehensive picture on the constructions of hierarchies of migrants (see Section 2.1.6).
Overall, survey-based research on attitudes towards migration suffers from three interrelated deficiencies: first, generally not distinguishing by country of origin or nationality; second, not always repeating specific measures (Curtice and Ormston, 2015: 22); and third, not testing variation between responses of different British ethnicities, given that survey samples tend to become too small if considering only British minorities (Dustmann and Preston, 2007: 11). In the UK, surveys also overlook migrants’ own attitudes. Despite researchers articulating the limitations of using survey data in studying attitudes towards migration, there have been comparatively small efforts to balance quantitative studies on attitudes towards migration with qualitative research.

A more qualitative approach to researching migration has been encouraged in (Political) Sociology and Migration Studies, particularly in the last couple of decades. Scholars identified the gap in studies exploring how nationality and ethnicity shape debates on migration. They pointed at the need for more research on current day attitudes on newer migrations to the UK (see Chapter 2, Section 2.4) and more in-depth analyses of attitudes towards migrants, beyond the limiting survey-style answers. ‘A new generation of East European researchers’ was invited to ‘make the case once again for grounded ethnographic and interviews-based research as an essential part of the repertoire of international migration studies’ (Favell, 2008b: 705). The reliance on survey data to understand complex concepts and attitudes was criticised for ‘flattening’ behaviour to ‘public opinion research formulae’ and perpetuating methodological nationalism (Favell, 2017: 194).

Chapter 2 defined the key terms in this study, including attitudes (Section 2.1.1.1). Attitudes are usually operationalised as positive or negative (and sometimes neutral) stances an individual holds about a person, issue or object (Evans, 2006: 5). In social psychology, in which the theories used in this research emerged, attitudes are seen in relation to social norms, dependent on experiences and part of socialisation processes (Evans, 2006: 6). It is customary in research that ‘attitudes’ are operationalised on a Likert-type scale. My qualitative approach does not attempt to quantify or simplify attitudes, but rather to listen to them in their complex manifestations and inductively try to find patterns
and explanations. As such, attitudes could range from broad statements like ‘I do not agree with uncontrolled EU migration’ to specific views towards different nationalities or encounters with migrants, often collected through follow-up questions. Although this study focuses on EU migration, it also considers how these attitudes compare to views towards non-EU migrants. Before collecting data on local-level attitudes, it was essential to understand the national-level picture.

3.2. Contextualising the fieldwork: who spoke about EU migrants and how during the 2016 EU referendum campaign

As mentioned in the introduction and detailed in the literature review (Section 2.3.2), immigration was a central issue during the EU referendum campaign. Attitudes towards migrants and migration in the UK are historically rooted. Discussing attitudes towards EU migrants, who benefited from the EU’s freedom of movement, intensified before the EU referendum campaign. Previously, there had been passionate media and political debates especially when new member states joined the EU in 2004 and 2007 and immediately before and after Romanians and Bulgarians were granted full rights to work in the UK in 2014. With the EU referendum campaign, other groups of EU migrants, who were previously the ‘Eurostars’ (Favell, 2008a), desirable free movers and EU citizens, who were not usually seen in a negative light, also became subject of debate within the Leave arguments for ending freedom of movement. People who previously considered themselves free movers, not migrants, perhaps like some French and German citizens living in London, were suddenly labelled as unwanted migrants by some media and politicians.

To contextualise the interviews conducted between December 2017 and December 2018, it was important to understand the EU referendum context. I was interested in what types of EU migrants were mentioned in the campaign and what kind of messages about migration were used. Arguments about migration are disseminated through a range of media channels and in everyday conversations, so it is a task beyond the scope of a PhD thesis to account for all these sources of information. Ephemera stood out when thinking about which
media are more likely to capture the main arguments of the debate. As explained in the literature review (Section 2.3.2), there is no in-depth qualitative study on the arguments about migration during the 2016 campaign. I use the term ‘ephemera’ to group the millions of leaflets, newsletters and booklets distributed during the six-week EU referendum campaign. As the etymology suggests (from the Greek *ephēmeros*, meaning ‘lasting only a day’), ephemera are collectable items initially intended to be short-lived, in terms of usefulness and popularity. However, they tend to compress top political lines into one, or a few, reader-friendly pages, thus they are a good indication of how the debate looked in the EU referendum campaign.

### 3.2.1. Three EU referendum ephemera collections

I analyse three collections of EU referendum ephemera to situate the localised attitudes from Newham and Tendring into the national debate on EU migration. This archival research started while I was on a three-month PhD placement at the British Library in the summer of 2017 and continued later in university libraries at Cambridge and Oxford. Although the collections contained over 500 items altogether, I focussed on those ephemera which included mentions of and arguments about immigration or freedom of movement.

The total number of ephemera that contained such text was 67 in the British Library-LSE collection, and an additional 18 and 35 items from the collections at Cambridge University Library, and Oxford Bodleian respectively (N = 120). These are all individual items (the items found in the first collection were not re-analysed if found in the latter collections). The ephemera were published by a range of organisations, from the official *Vote Leave* and *Britain Stronger In*, to leaflets produced by individuals and smaller campaign groups. Tables 3, 4 and 5 in Appendix B1 list all the item titles by collection, their publisher, type and position on the referendum question, illustrating the diverse range of perspectives included in the sample.

Exploring this form of political communication has limitations. Ephemera tend to exist and are used for a short time and it is therefore impossible to have access
to every single leaflet, booklet, poster and other materials distributed during the campaign. These collections are not representative as they rely on people donating the items to the libraries or on library curators collecting items themselves, usually from the area where the library is located. Nevertheless, the collections did not only include items from London, Cambridge and Oxford, and notably even contained leaflets written in Welsh.

The sample has a balance of Leave and Remain material. There are two items that I categorised as ‘neutral’ as they do not take a side, a newsletter from The Telegraph and a booklet from the Electoral Commission. Most items tend to be two or four-page leaflets, but there are a few lengthier newsletters and small booklets. To contextualise the arguments, I also searched for content about immigration in the latest archived version (before the referendum day) of the campaigners’ online presence, mainly their websites and Twitter profiles, via the EU referendum web archive hosted at the British Library. The findings presented in this thesis focus on the ephemera content only.

3.2.2. Ephemera analysis

Overall, 120 ephemera items were analysed to answer the following question: How were EU migrants portrayed during the EU referendum campaign? The analysis concentrated on identifying what types of movements of people were depicted in the EU referendum campaign ephemera and how those people were framed in the debate. After extracting all the text about immigration from the collections, I coded the text using NVivo11 by ‘type of people’ and ‘type of frame’. The first layer of analysis examined the ‘who’, namely the type of people spoken about in the material. For instance, it looked at whether the argument is about EU or non-EU migration, or narrowed down to specific nationalities, ethnic, region or skill-based categories within larger groups. The second step of the analysis was on the ‘how’ question, namely the ways in which migrants were portrayed.

While I started this research with a frame analysis approach, the ephemera text revealed stronger overarching narratives. A frame analysis differs from a thematic analysis, which identifies categories related to the research focus (Bryman, 2012:}
Framing strategies consist of selecting and omitting, highlighting, and elaborating some issues and not others, to fit the agenda of those who are framing the narratives. Framing implies choosing aspects and increasing their salience, ‘in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment for the item described’ (Entman, 1993: 52). Framing involves defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgements and suggesting solutions for these problems.

In the EU referendum campaign, campaigners opt to focus on arguments and examples of immigration which uphold their positions to Remain or Leave, which are associated with certain key messages on immigration. To take a case in point, those who campaign to reduce the number of migrants would be more likely to present how high immigration puts pressure on public services. Conversely, the opposing side would be expected to underline the contributions migrants make to public services, for instance through taxation or workforce participation. Neither case presents a comprehensive picture of the impact of migration on public services. In both examples, a framed narrative of migration is constructed to promote proposed policies (the solutions).

I started the analysis by adapting most of the frame categories described by Habermas (1993) and used by Helbling (2013) in his study of how immigration has been framed by political parties in Western Europe. First, an identity frame encompasses both multicultural and nationalistic arguments on immigration. Second, a utilitarian frame comprises two categories which are relevant to the ephemera sample: economic prosperity (underlining migrants’ financial contributions and the need for migrant workers) and labour and social security (assertions about how migration affects public services such as education, healthcare, transport, but also wages). Third, a security frame contains issues such as border control, crime and terrorism. Fourth, a moral-universal frame relates to migrants’ human rights.

Beside those frames, an additional frame, ‘scale of migration’ was added, to incorporate arguments which focus on the number of migrants, when the text is not openly linked to economic, identity, security, or moral-universal aspects. After
coding all the ephemera text using the ‘type of people’ and ‘type of frame’ categories described, I evaluated whether different types of migrants tend to be depicted in particular ways, and which migrant group characteristics influence the debate. I also considered the sources which were used for the arguments on immigration, and whether any migrant voices were involved. Nevertheless, the analysis uncovered three main narratives about how people were spoken about in the materials - the brightest and the best, us, and the rest. A discussion on the findings of these three core categories, and how they compare across the ephemera, forms the first part of Chapter 4.

3.3. Fieldwork in Newham and Tendring

Following an interpretivist epistemology, this study's methodology is reflexive and adaptable, employing elements from sociological interviews, elite interviews, field photographs and observations, in addition to the analysis performed on the EU referendum collections described in Section 3.2.2. The next paragraphs describe my approach to primary data collection, the main method of interviews, as well as present some of the other types of data collected, before discussing research practicalities, ethics, positionality and analysis.

3.3.1. A qualitative approach

My approach to fieldwork derives from listening and comparing. In a culture that ‘speaks rather than listens’ (Back, 2007: 7), it is not uncommon that research speaks about Leavers, Remainers, or migrants, instead of speaking to those in question. Sociological qualitative research can fill in this gap by making ‘explicit the assumed terms of the debate, point to the hypocrisy and double standards of the present system and pay attention to that which is ignored’ (Back, 2007: 48). This research listens to voices that are largely sidelined in debates on migration, including, but not only, migrants themselves.

Drawing on the concept of ‘inductive ethnography’ (Miller, 2017: 30), I adopt a bottom-up, data-led approach in making sense of attitudes towards EU migration. I juxtapose findings from the two local authorities (Newham and Tendring), three nationality groups (Romanian, Polish and British) and official and ordinary voices
(local politicians and residents). I use elements from a ‘case oriented comparative method’ (Ragin, 1987) within a qualitative design. Most importantly, this approach allows for data triangulation and more reflection. Working comparatively guards ‘against the potential parochialism of ethnography’ (Miller, 2017: 28), widening the study beyond the specificities of one place or one population categorisation.

3.3.2. Data collection

3.3.2.1. Interviews

Most of the analysis in the empirical chapters is based on data collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Overall, I conducted 63 recorded interviews with British, Romanian and Polish residents in Newham and Tendring, based on the same topic guide. In addition, 15 local politicians and political activists were interviewed for this research and several key informants were consulted. Appendix B2 includes all participant tables with details.

Table 2: Interviews by fieldsite, summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Tendring</th>
<th>Newham</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish and Romanian</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians and activists</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.2.1.1. The choice of semi-structured ‘active’ interviews

When researchers discuss interviews as a qualitative method, the main debate revolves around the potential biases introduced in the research, through question wording or the interviewer’s actions during the process. Active interviewing rejects the assumption that an interviewer can remain unbiased. Although the interviewer may have a clear topic guide asking all participants the same questions, ‘dispassionate questioning’ fails as a strategy. Through a dialogical, less formalised situation between the interviewer and the interviewee, active interviews encourage narrative production. The active interviewer ‘intentionally, concertedly provokes responses by indicating - even suggesting - narrative positions, resources, orientations, and precedents for the respondent to engage in addressing the research questions under consideration’ (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011: 38-39).
Active interviewing as a method matches my focus on listening and comparing. A more participatory interviewer stance facilitates discussing often controversial and uncomfortable topics, such as migration. As an active interviewer, I can suggest narrative positions (for instance, saying ‘Some people express concerns about migrants’ impact on public services. How do you respond to that?’) and to use stimulus material to provoke answers. This creates an environment which feels more like an everyday conversation about migration rather than a rigid interview, structured within an uncomfortable power dynamic where I ask all questions and expect all answers from participants. This approach also enables comparisons, such as asking one interviewee to comment on what else I have found in that fieldsite or the other – for example, following-up with ‘some people in Clacton told me […] Does this reflect your experience in Newham?’

3.3.2.1.2. Developing the interview topic guide

An active interview can still benefit from a clear topic guide and contain items that are directly relevant to the research questions. Before entering the field to interview participants, I developed a topic guide organised in the following components: attitudes towards Brexit, knowledge of EU migration, attitudes towards EU migration, contact with migrants, local matters, and other topics that participants wanted to speak about. Depending on interviewees’ narratives, the order in which I asked the questions differs in the interviews, but each interview covered the questions marked in bold from the topic guide included in Appendix A6. I also used a short demographic questionnaire to collect information on participants’ age, gender and other characteristics (Appendix A7). The topic guide was first tested through some informal and unrecorded interviews with British, Romanian and Polish friends and family in the UK. I revised its questions according to the feedback I received in these pilot interviews.

The interviews also used stimulus material. This helped the conversations to become more fluid and resemble the everyday, less formalised discussions about immigration I have with other people outside a research setting. The stimulus material was used at different stages of the interview process. Before starting recording, participants were asked to write on a card, in their own words, what is
the first thing that came to their mind when thinking about the EU referendum campaign. This was not only an ‘ice breaker’, but also prompted free commentary on the topic. Usually in the first half of the interview, when speaking about the EU referendum campaign, participants were presented with three leaflets (Images 18, 19 and 20 in Chapter 4) – one Leave, one Remain and the official UK Government leaflet. This was useful for participants to reflect on the campaign when interviewed two years after the vote. Interviewees’ reactions to the ephemera add to the ephemera analysis detailed in Chapter 4. They represent a bridge between talking about how EU migrants are portrayed at the national level and participants’ everyday local-level experiences with EU migrants.

These leaflets were compiled in a folder I titled ‘The book of Brexit’ (Image 2) which I carried with me during the fieldwork. This folder also contained other ephemera from the referendum campaign, which some, but not all, participants were keen to read and comment on. When discussing media narratives about migration, the vast majority of respondents were also shown a selection of six printed newspaper headlines about EU migrants (Appendix A8). Five appeared in broadsheet or tabloid newspapers in the UK and one was invented and had a figure on EU migrants claiming tax credits. The sources were removed, and participants commented whether they thought the headline was published, whether it was accurate and what was their opinion on its content.
3.3.2.2. **Other fieldwork data**

The empirical chapters are primarily based on the data from the recorded semi-structured interviews and the extensive notes taken during the unrecorded interviews with local politicians and political activists. I also collected other data which informs the findings of this thesis. I used unrecorded interviews with key informants. Table 10 (in Appendix B2) is a selection of such informants noting the reasons why their experience was valuable for this thesis. One example is a writer and historian I interviewed in Clacton who informed me about history of Clacton-on-Sea and surrounding towns and villages. I documented my fieldwork in Newham and Tendring through hundreds of photographs of different places and fieldnotes. I took pictures of ethnically marked spaces and other places that participants refer to in the interviews when describing local-level experiences with migrants (such as Images 3 and 4). Furthermore, I discussed preliminary research findings with the public beyond academia, through a variety of public engagement activities. While I do not analyse any of these materials in a systematic way, unlike with the interview data, it is important to acknowledge that all these shaped my analysis and approach to this thesis to some extent.
The fieldnotes from Newham and Tendring consist of descriptive accounts while walking alone or with participants in various places. Before or after the recorded interviews (or both), I wrote notes based on what participants said and my own reflections. I included my thoughts on selective positionality during the research process. I often compiled a longer account after an entire day spent in the field. Appendix Error! Reference source not found.0 contains an example of unedited fieldnotes I wrote on the train back home after spending a day in Jaywick. It is typical of other fieldnotes I have - it summarises some of the most impactful aspects from what participants said that day, describes the non-recorded conversations, the places I visited and captures my reactions as a researcher encountering different situations.

Ethnographic literature found walking in the field to be a useful method in understanding the specificities of a certain area. Studies note how small details provoke reactions when walking, leading to conversations about comparisons between the ‘here’ and ‘there’ for migrants (O’Neill and Hubbard, 2010: 52). The ‘getting around’ feature of walks allows a more thorough understanding of the places studied (Lee and Ingold, 2006). Many of my fieldnotes are informed by walking in Newham and Tendring. They note reflections at various moments in the research. Reading all notes together after completing fieldwork constructed a picture of how my knowledge and thought process progressed over the year of fieldwork. By way of illustration, I note during my first visit to Tendring:

I’m wandering around the streets and taking pictures of deserted stores, littered gardens, and old-looking shops. It feels like a walk in the past. I text my partner: ‘I begin to understand why those people want out of the EU. They don’t seem to get any of the benefits we did.’ (Fieldwork diary, 2 May 2017)

A few months and interviews later, I familiarised myself with several villages and towns in Tendring and each had rather different descriptions. It became evident from the fieldnotes that the reasons to Leave the EU were much more complex.

I walked hundreds of hours on my own in the two fieldsites. I often walked together with some participants, especially after the interview if going in the same direction. Before starting the interviews in December 2017, I spent several days
in Newham and Tendring in spring and summer 2017 exploring these spaces. When interviewing participants, I would have no more than three (usually one or two) interviews in a day and would spend the remainder of the time visiting places, documenting anything related to migration. I did some longer distance walks between two definite points, such as Clacton-on-Sea to nearby village Thorpe-le-Soken (2 hours) or Clacton-on-Sea to Jaywick (about 45 minutes). Walking facilitated reflection before, after or between interviews and it enabled me to observe the stark contrasts between neighbourhoods or towns and villages in the same local authority, something that participants often underline during the interviews.
Image 3: UK flags near the seaside, Clacton-on-Sea

Image 4: Permanently shut up Polish and East European food shop, Clacton-on-Sea
Alongside writing fieldnotes and collecting photographs, public engagement activities developed my approach to researching attitudes towards migration. I communicated initial research findings to various non-academic publics. One early example is the Bloomsbury Festival in 2017 (Images 5 and 6), where I set up a stall with EU referendum ephemera (a selection of the ones I analyse in Chapter 4) and political ephemera about migration published after 2016 (which are not analysed for this thesis). Passers-by were free to write their thoughts down anonymously or engage in conversations about Brexit and migration directly with me. Public engagement has challenged some of my expectations in this research. The Impact Statement at the start of this thesis offers more detail on my public engagement record.

Image 5: EU referendum ephemera exhibition, Bloomsbury Festival, October 2017
3.3.3. Fieldwork practicalities

Apart from choosing the methods and designing appropriate tools, such as the topic guide, there are several practicalities that emerge in the fieldwork. I group these in three categories - before, during and after the interview.

3.3.3.1. Before the interview: accessing the field, sampling and recruiting participants

When I started the PhD research, I was unfamiliar with both fieldsites. I had never been to Tendring before. While I visited Romanian friends in east London a few times, I was not particularly knowledgeable of Newham. As with many fieldwork-based projects, I overestimated the number of interviews I could do. Unexpected financial and family commitments made it more difficult to conduct this in-depth research than I initially thought. For instance, I first envisaged living a few months in both locations, but ended up not having the budget and possibilities to rent accommodation in those places while still maintaining my home address in Cambridge, where I lived throughout the PhD and had various other
responsibilities. Nevertheless, I approached this fieldwork with flexibility and still, overall, spent enough time interviewing to feel there was a ‘saturation point’ in the narratives I was listening to, enabling me to answer the main research question of this study.

Often researchers do not discuss the everyday difficulties during fieldwork, but I think it is crucial to recognise that the interview transcripts are a result of many compromises, adjustments and creative approaches to progress during fieldwork. I would normally have no more than two interviews in one day and travel to the fieldwork site and back within the same day. Most fieldwork days started with a waking up at five or six in the morning and arriving home close to midnight. For instance, travelling door to door from my home in Cambridge to some of the participants in Tendring would take longer than four hours one way. I would then spend at least eight hours in Tendring on average, before going on another four-hour journey changing several means of transport. Unlike going to Newham (which takes around two hours), the public transport system is not as well connected in parts of East Anglia.

Participant recruitment did not go as smoothly as I expected either. It was particularly difficult to recruit migrant participants in the two locations. This is evident from the smaller number of migrants, as opposed to British interviewees in the sample. This contrasted with my previous experiences as a qualitative researcher interviewing Romanian migrants for my MPhil dissertation and working for research projects, where I easily and quickly recruited participants mainly through Romanian social media groups. Focussing on two specific places, Newham and Tendring, involved thinking more widely about various recruitment methods. Initially, I wanted to compare two constituencies – Clacton and West Ham. After experiencing difficulties recruiting participants, I expanded my comparison to the two local authorities including those constituencies – the London Borough of Newham and Tendring.

I use a conveniently accessible purposive sample. I thought about who is best to speak to and how to achieve not only diversity in terms of demographics within the chosen three groups (Romanian, Polish and British), but also diversity of
opinion on migration and Brexit. Purposive (or purposeful) sampling is commonly used in qualitative research, including research on migration. It involves a selection of interviewees without random sampling (Elliot et al., 2016), finding in-depth participant cases while often having limited resources (Patton, 2002).

My sample is balanced in terms of gender and diverse regarding age and education levels. The youngest British participants are in their early twenties, while the oldest are in their eighties. The age range of migrant interviewees is 23 to 52, with most in their late 20s and early 30s. I spoke to interviewees with no formal qualifications, with vocational diplomas, with a degree and some with postgraduate education, including one participant with a PhD. Some were employed, some unemployed or self-employed, a few were retired, and others were still studying (often alongside work). Participants expressed a variety of political preferences. The sample has voters for all main political parties in England at the time of the fieldwork (Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats, Greens and UKIP) and those with no political preferences or floating voters. I included participants who voted or supported Leave (including Polish and Romanian migrants), voted or supported Remain, a couple who changed their mind since 2016 and a few who were neutral on the referendum question, uninvolved or uninterested. I tried to interview participants living in different parts of both fieldsites. In Tendring, participants lived in Clacton-on-Sea, Little Clacton, Jaywick, Thorpe-le-Soken, Great Bentley, Frinton-on-Sea, Walton-on-the-Naze and Harwich. In Newham, I interviewed an almost equal number of participants in the East Ham and West Ham constituencies.

I used a range of recruitment strategies. My first step was to create a general participant recruitment advertisement (Appendix A1), inviting participation from British, Romanian and Polish residents in Clacton and West Ham. I placed adverts in various spaces such as a library in Stratford (without any responses, although I later joined a local poetry group, which enabled me to have some informal conversations with residents) and public toilets in shopping centres in Clacton (with two responses, both interviewed). When I decided to expand the fieldsites to Newham and Tendring, I changed the recruitment strategies. Discussions with Londoners made me realise that many residents may not be
aware which constituency or borough they live in and suggested I should be more specific. I designed posters mentioning the main underground stops in my area of interest (‘Do you live near Stratford, Plaistow, East Ham […]’). There was different feedback in Tendring, where the majority could enumerate several nearby towns. All participant advertisements were displayed in English, Romanian and Polish. I included a Polish recruitment advertisement used in Newham as an illustration in Appendix A3.

In addition to traditional paper poster advertising, I used social media and websites. I created a ‘study page’ on www.callforparticipants.com and linked it to some of my Twitter posts, where I am active speaking about immigration, including disseminating academic research. I interviewed some respondents who replied through the website or directly to my tweets. I found a few migrant participants through sharing the call for participants on some closed Facebook groups I joined for Romanians in Clacton-on-Sea (‘Romani in Clacton On Sea’) and Polish people in London (‘Polacy w Londynie’). I had limited success recruiting through these groups and I approached some Polish and Romanian people living in Newham and Tendring on LinkedIn or directly on Facebook, with some responses. I also advertised the study via Gumtree and craigslist, which other researchers found useful for recruiting stigmatised or marginalised groups (e.g. Worthen, 2014). Interestingly, all four UKIP voters in the sample were recruited through the Gumtree advertisement.

Reaching one participant often involved conversations with several people. For example, a couple of Polish interviewees were recruited through snowballing from another Polish participant, whom I met through a recommendation from a British person, with whom I had an informal conversation with in Jaywick, after being introduced by a community organiser. Another couple of Polish participants were recruited through a recommendation from one of the local political activist interviewees. Some interviews were facilitated by gatekeepers. In Jaywick, a local community leader I interviewed put me in touch with several other participants, three of whom I interviewed on the record and many others informally.
I had access to the field through different organisations and political groups, who invited me to observe in the area or offered to put me in touch with others. Some of these invitations materialised, others did not, despite my follow-ups. For instance, I was invited on two occasions to write an article about the research with the aim to attract more participants – one in a local Newham magazine and one in a local Newham newspaper. The former was deemed inappropriate after I sent it to the editor (despite discussing the content beforehand) and the latter was due to be published but I never heard back from the journalist after the initial confirmation. In Clacton, I was in contact with a business employing Polish workers who were keen for me to visit, but we never seemed to find an appropriate time.

It was challenging to find any participants through established community groups or organisations. I spent hours speaking to various people who were confident that their friends, neighbours or colleagues who fitted my interviewee categories would be willing to speak to me, but without success. I wrote emails to countless local organisations, such as churches or Romanian and Polish groups, usually getting no reply or being directed to someone else who did not reply either or who said they had no capacity to assist research students. I put adverts in Polish and Romanian in East European shop windows, again, without any responses. I even approached people I heard speaking in Polish and Romanian directly on the streets, again, without success, although some were happy to informally have a chat about their views, which was useful to contextualise my recorded interviews.

For the local politician sample, I sent invitation letters by email to the MPs in Clacton, Harwich & North Essex (Tendring) and East Ham and West Ham (Newham). The Clacton and East Ham MPs responded and were interviewed. I had one phone interview with the Clacton MP, followed by an in-person discussion later that year, speaking about some of my initial findings. I interviewed the East Ham MP once in person. The West Ham MP did not reply to my invitation, while the Harwich and North Essex MP initially agreed to answer some questions in writing, but then did not respond to the questions. In addition to the two MPs, I spoke to local councillors in both fieldsites. I also successfully contacted a few people known locally to have campaigned for either Leave or
Remain in 2016 (including campaign strategists) and interviewed them to understand the use of ephemera and message targeting at the local level.

3.3.3.2. The interview: the choice (not) to record, language and unexpected circumstances

Once participants are recruited, there are several practicalities to be considered during the interview. One of the first choices is about what to audio record or whether to record at all. As many scholars conclude, recording interviews often means that ‘the most interesting material emerges when the recorder is switched off’ (Powney and Watts, 1987: 319). Participants are more willing to disclose details that are more personal, or controversial, after the recording ends (Weiner-Levy and Abu-Radia-Queder, 2012: 1160). Throughout the fieldwork, I was aware that speaking about immigration is a sensitive topic for many. It can be difficult particularly for those with negative views if they know that their opinions can be considered racist or xenophobic by others. It can also be challenging for migrants to speak about experiences of hate crime, hate speech or other difficult situations they encountered during their stay in the UK.

In a few cases, I noticed how participants tried to package their views in a more ‘politically correct’ way, but I also recorded participants who openly and unapologetically expressed negative views on immigration. I captured many instances of participants who referred to the presence of a recorder. To give one illustration, instead of calling Leave voters ‘stupid’, as she does after the recording, one participant chooses to describe Remain supporters in opposition as follows: ‘I know it sounds a bit horrible, but you’re recording me, but people with more knowledge and more brains, is what I mean.’

The recorded interviews with residents were usually around one hour long, with a few closer to two hours. I used a Sony IC recorder. The interviews with politicians were normally around half an hour and detailed notes were taken. I wanted politicians to speak about their own views and experiences rather than promoting their political party lines on immigration. Thus, I decided not to record to enable them to speak from a more personal, rather than party political perspective, which was the case in most interviews. It is difficult to quantify the
amount of time participants spoke with me about immigration. Some left minutes after we concluded the interviews, while others stayed to speak more informally even for longer than one hour afterwards. Some local councillors also discussed at length after I finished with my questions.

I interviewed residents in many public locations, such as local libraries, pubs and cafes, shopping centres and park benches. I spoke to politicians in council buildings, at their businesses, in their homes or at Westminster. Many participants in Tendring invited me to their homes, while only one in Newham did so. Interestingly, a few interviewees who welcomed me in their homes in Tendring thought they could not be honest about their (usually negative) views on immigration in a public space. These different interview locations add another practicality: the quality of the recordings vary, from a noisy background in a pub on an evening, to complete silence in a countryside house. Influenced by location, the interviews tended to be longer in Tendring than in Newham. Many Londoners were interviewed while they had a break from work or before they had to go somewhere else, while most Tendring interviewees had much more free time to spare for the research. This is a reflection on work-life balance in a large city compared to small towns and villages, but also the fact that more participants in Tendring were retired, self-employed or unemployed compared to those in Newham.

Another practical consideration is the language used during the interviews. My first language is Romanian, and I speak English fluently. All apart from one Romanian participant spoke in Romanian, which I found much more difficult than speaking with the British participants in English (I discuss this more in Section 3.3.5.2 on positionality). While I attended Polish language classes in 2016-2017 at my university department, I found it difficult to commit enough time to achieve a good level before starting fieldwork in my second year, therefore I conducted all interviews with Polish participants in English. I emphasised at the beginning that if someone wishes to express something in their native language, they are free to do so. One participant spoke in both English and Polish during the interview. I could include Romanians who had limited knowledge of English, while
my Polish participants, with this one exception who used both languages, had good English language skills.

In addition to recording and language, there are several practicalities that emerged while conducting the interviews. The interviews did not always go as planned, without interruptions or unexpected circumstances. For instance, although arranging individual interviews, I ended up with three British participants in a group interview, a British-Polish couple in a pair interview and two Romanian friends in a pair interview. While I envisaged to do only one-to-one interviews, I could not refuse the others who were present and willing to be recorded. This type of setting can impact how honestly participants express their views on migration, even though they proved to be some of the lengthiest and richest narratives in my sample. Managing a pair or small group interview was challenging, because I needed to be flexible with my line of questioning when participants started debating with each other. It was also harder to get interviewees to react to the stimulus material. For example, the three British interviewees were sat quite far apart from each other in a living room, and it was difficult to walk around and show each material, so I read the text aloud, but not everyone reacted to each of the leaflets and news headlines.

Some one-to-one interviews also had interruptions. On two occasions when interviewing migrant women, one Polish and one Romanian, their husbands, who were present in the house but did not wish to participate initially, started intervening in the conversation. They were happy to make ‘side remarks’, but not be interviewed one-to-one. Again, this provided useful context to the material from the 63 participants who did the full interview. A different type of interruption was when one of my participants, who was interviewed in a public space near a pathway, stopped passers-by and asked them questions about Brexit.

Finally, another practicality is the use of incentives. Previous findings in survey research have demonstrated how using incentives can reduce non-response and improve the quality of answers, although it is not a catch-all solution to make people interested to participate in research (Singer and Ye, 2013: 135). Based on my previous experience working on other research projects, it was much
easier to recruit when using vouchers, small gifts or a cash payment. For this research, participants were not paid for their time, due to budget constraints. However, when meeting participants in a public place, I offered to buy them food and drinks. Some accepted the offer, while others insisted that they should buy me a coffee. When visiting participants’ homes for interviews, they offered me drinks, food and snacks on some occasions. I found that sharing food and drinks often made the interview atmosphere more relaxed. I paid an Oyster card top-up for a participant who was in temporary accommodation and struggled financially, as he asked me if I could do this before starting the interview.

3.3.3.3. After the interview: data management, transcription and translation

I conducted the first interview in December 2017 and the last in early December 2018. I stored all fieldwork data on my personal laptop in password-protected folders and a password-protected external drive for back-up. I chose to organise and work on the data using NVivo12, as I have used the software before in migration research and was trained in using it. Interview analysis using NVivo will be detailed in the last sub-section of this chapter. Apart from data analysis features, NVivo is also a tool to store all data corresponding to a research project in the same file. Image 7 shows the interface and how different aspects of the fieldwork were organised in folders.
I spent the first four months of 2019 transcribing almost full-time the interview data. I had approximately 80 hours on the recorder. I chose to transcribe myself not only because I had no more research budget after all the trips to Newham and Tendring, but also because I felt this process would enable reflection on the material I collected. Moreover, I was aware that some interview material, containing racist or xenophobic remarks, could be upsetting for someone not familiar with the context of the research. Only two interviews were transcribed by someone else – two UCL undergraduate students whom I mentored through a programme called UCL Connect.Ed who were fully briefed on the research beforehand. I re-listened to these recordings, checked and edited the transcripts afterwards.

In early 2019, NVivo trialled an automatic transcription feature, but unfortunately this did not produce any fruitful results on the recordings I tested, so I decided to abandon this strategy. I transcribed directly and manually using NVivo12’s transcription feature, which then allows to export the transcripts in other formats (see Image 8). Judging by the word documents exported, significantly over 1,000 pages of size 12 transcript were produced. The interviews in Romanian were transcribed directly in English, but the phrases and words which were not directly
translatable into English were left in original Romanian in brackets. For the interview which was half in Polish, a native Polish speaker and fellow PhD student (Marta Kotwas) kindly sat down with me while going through the recording and translating sentence by sentence.

Image 8: Transcribing in NVivo

As I look at themes and narratives rather than aspects of language or speech, I adopted the following approach to transcription. The first 10 minutes of all recordings were transcribed in full. This means writing down everything that can be heard on the recording, including ‘mhm’ and ‘erm’. Afterwards, only the relevant material is transcribed. When participants go off topic (e.g. starting to criticise the then Prime Minister, for example), I summarise what they say in a bracket, rather than transcribing this word for word. Again, this is a practical decision, given that I did not have sufficient time to do those transcriptions word for word. All transcripts were in English and looked like the example transcript included in Appendix C5.
3.3.4. Ethics

This research project was approved on the 15th of November 2017 by the UCL Ethics Committee, with the ethical approval number 12123/001 and then offered an extension on the 19th of October 2018 until the 31st of January 2019. The participant documentation was updated according to the new data protection regulations (GDPR) which came into force on the 25th of May 2018. Ethics in research is not only about the forms and risk assessments filled in for ethical approval. Ethical issues arise throughout the research process and it is important to reflect on how this research approached its ethical implications.

3.3.4.1. Participant informed consent

At the core of the ethics process is the concept of informed consent. Consent can be written or verbal. Almost all 63 local resident participants signed a consent form, with a few exceptions where verbal consent was preferred. Politician, political activist and other key informant interviewees agreed that notes can be taken based on our conversations. All participants read the project information sheet which described the research and what their participation involved. Like the participant recruitment advertisements, the consent forms and information sheets were available in all three languages – Romanian, Polish and English. The English version of the informed consent form is in Appendix A4 and the corresponding information sheet in Appendix A5.

The information sheet was written according to UCL ethical guidelines and the official template. Most importantly, it states that participants can refuse to answer the questions with which they are not comfortable, and even withdraw from the research process without negative consequences. In a similar way, the consent form asks participants to tick the boxes corresponding to the statements with which they agree. For example, a participant can consent that notes would be taken during the interview, but not consent to the interview being audio-recorded. Although it is ideal for the research that all interviews are audio-recorded, so that the transcripts can be coded and compared with more consistency, the participant has the ultimate say in what data they share and how. It is crucial that
the documentation mentions this flexibility. All 63 participants from the recorded interviews explicitly consented to being audio-recorded.

As explained in the section on fieldwork practicalities, in some circumstances, other voices were captured in the background or when participants’ family members or members of the public intervened. In some cases, I stopped the recording for the interventions, but in other situations I was told it was not necessary and I mark these, anonymously and without any description of the person intervening, in the transcripts.

The information sheet and consent forms noted that what is said in the interviews will be kept anonymous. As the qualitative data analysis tells a story of attitudes towards migrants from a variety of perspectives, I chose to allocate pseudonyms to my participants, as opposed to using numbers or other methods which depersonalise the research, particularly when extensive interview extracts are used. In the residents’ sample, some participants chose their own pseudonym and I chose a pseudonym for the rest. A few mentioned they did not mind me using their real name, but I decided not to, apart from one who wished to be acknowledged - Dan from Jaywick is already well known as he appeared in local and national media expressing his views, including on a TV programme about Jaywick (Channel 5, 2015).

I approached carefully how much detail I give about my participants throughout the data analysis. I do not add participants’ characteristics unless those are important to understand the analysis. For example, in Chapter 4, I think it is important for the reader to know whether participants supported Leave or Remain (or neither) when commenting about the EU referendum campaign specifically. But their attitudes towards immigration are not necessarily determined by their politics – there are both negative and positive views about EU migration on both sides of the referendum debate. Therefore, in Chapters 5-7 I only use participants’ pseudonyms and additional detail when it is relevant to contextualise a certain quote (such as mentioning whether a participant moved from the East End to Tendring if they compare London and Clacton).
The participant tables in Appendix B2 are also kept to a minimum of data, mentioning only the widely used variables of age, gender, self-identification of race, ethnicity and/or nationality and education level, alongside a binary fieldsite category (Newham or Tendring). Other detail I have from the fieldwork, such as the region where participants were born, their religious and political views and other characteristics that may impact how the interview data is understood are not necessary to be included in the participants’ tables.

3.3.4.2. Discussing sensitive topics

Upon reflection, it was not surprising I had difficulty recruiting participants. After all, I was interviewing two years after a referendum which divided the UK and many people were not interested or deliberately avoided speaking about Brexit and immigration in their everyday lives, let alone volunteering their time for an interview. When approaching people in the field directly, especially in Tendring, some of the responses were along the lines of ‘just get Brexit done’, a phrase that later became the slogan of the Conservative Party in the 2019 election which they won with a majority. While some were ‘fed up’ with politics, others, especially migrants, excused themselves saying they do not follow politics, and despite my efforts to persuade them that no prior knowledge is needed, I did not succeed having more than short chats.

Brexit, migration, and political views are not the most straightforward topics to discuss in an interview and they can often be emotionally charged. I addressed these potential sensitivities by open questions, adaptability in the interview topic guide and style, selective positionality, and making clear before starting the interview that I respect all types of views on Brexit and migration and the core purpose of my project is to provide a comprehensive picture from all perspectives. Participants were made aware that the interview can be paused or stopped at any time, without giving a reason. Interviewees are also the ones who chose the location of the interview, as opposed to me timetabling several interviews in a location of my choice. This enables me to know more about their local areas, by visiting more neighbourhoods and local businesses, libraries, cafes, and other spaces, but also offers more comfort to participants, as they know better where
they feel comfortable expressing the views they have, particularly if more controversial.

There were interviewees who were comfortable speaking about these topics and with me as a researcher. They spoke almost unprompted for the whole interview, providing rich and detailed examples when expressing their views on migration. On the other end of the spectrum, there were interviewees who were uncomfortable being interviewed. I had to adopt different strategies to ask the topic guide questions. I will illustrate with one example. One participant responded enthusiastically to a recruitment advert and invited me to her home. When I arrived, she asked me to show my ID before entering, as she was suspicious of my intentions. After she felt comfortable that I am who I claim to be, we started the interview, and although she consented in written to the recording, this had to be stopped and restarted three times. This was one of the most difficult interviews in over a hundred interviews I had conducted for various projects by that point. The participant was not only mistrusting, but she became visibly affected remembering some aspects from her past, and I felt unprepared to react to such situations I had never encountered, aside from stopping the recording, comforting her verbally, and letting her know that the interview can be stopped completely (she chose to continue the interview). It was not only the interview topics, but also the discussion possibly evoking painful memories that could become sensitive during the interviews. Throughout the process, I found that sharing some of my own experiences and knowledge put many participants more at ease and then more likely to express detailed views on immigration, even when disagreeing with my own.

It is not sufficient to only reflect on how participants may be affected by the research process. Lone fieldwork exposes the interviewer to unexpected circumstances. I tried to mitigate against those risks by letting my partner know the days I went on fieldwork, before I started each interview, where I was, and how long I expected the interview to last. I tried to plan interviews in daytime, but it was challenging for a few participants who were working long hours, so I had a few later in the evening. Throughout the fieldwork, I was conscious that I was a woman in my early twenties at the time, walking alone for miles in areas I have
never walked through before. I received a few unpleasant comments on the streets from strangers (I refer to one such incident in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2.2, in the context of how it matched with one of my participants’ own experiences) and many ‘where are you from?’ type questions when chatting to people informally (followed by conversations which were always very insightful).

3.3.5. Positionality in the fieldwork

3.3.5.1. Positionality in migration studies

My thesis makes no claim to be objective. As noted earlier in the chapter, participants have their own positionalities. The research on social desirability bias shows how participants have control on what they disclose about their views, particularly on sensitive topics such as immigration. There is another side to positionality in the research, namely how the researchers themselves situate their own backgrounds and experiences in reference to the fieldwork. Both ‘interviewees and interviewers work to construct themselves as certain types of people in relation to the topic of the interview’ (Rapley, 2001: 303). Researchers need to reflect on their positionality and think about how this may impact their inquiries, throughout the development of this research, conducting the fieldwork and later analysis and writing-up stages.

Almost all qualitative work on migration references the ‘insider-outsider’ debate on researcher positionality. To exemplify on my research topic, an ‘insider’ argument would suggest that EU migrants are best suited to research corresponding EU migrant communities, for example Romanians researching other Romanians. First, being an insider usually grants easier access to the field (Bucerius, 2013: 691; Chavez, 2008: 480; Ganga and Scott, 2006: 6), facilitates recruitment and often enables participants to be more comfortable speaking about their experiences (Berger, 2013: 4; Carling et al., 2014). Second, speaking the ‘insider language’ (Unluer, 2012: 5) and familiarity with certain cultural aspects are perceived as insider advantages (Berger, 2013: 9; Carling et al., 2014; Gawlewicz, 2014a). In contrast, an outsider perspective would argue that the researcher should not be familiar with EU migrant communities. Simmel’s (1971 [1908]) ‘stranger’ is believed to offer more objective accounts than
researchers who have an affinity with the participant group or familiarity with the field (Zinn, 1979: 210). With an outsider researcher, participants are less likely to take for granted a ‘common ground’ (Botterill, 2015; Carling et al., 2014; Ryan, 2015) and therefore are more likely to provide informative accounts, which challenge their ‘tacit knowledge’ (Altheide and Johnson, 1994: 492). While some emphasise the potential to become a ‘trusted outsider’ with ‘inside knowledge’ (Buceri, 2013: 690; Shinozaki, 2012: 1822), others state power structures between non-migrants and migrants are unlikely to vanish during research processes (Martín Pérez, 2006).

This debate seems to have reached a consensus in migration research: both researchers and participants have multiple markers of identities (Amelina and Faist, 2012: 1713), which interact in various ways. These have been described as ‘multiple intersectionalities’ (Botterill, 2015), ‘multiple positionalities’ (Ryan, 2015), ‘positional spaces’ (Mullings, 1999: 340) and ‘hybrid positions’ (Carling et al., 2014). All these concepts are based on the same conclusion that identities are fluid and shifting during research encounters. The researcher’s sociological understanding transcends insider and outsider roles (Merton, 1972: 41; Roer-Strier and Sands, 2014: 15). The researcher moves along the insider-outsider spectrum depending on how their characteristics intersect with those of their participants – and there is a myriad of possible combinations.

3.3.5.2. **My own selective positionality in the field**

During the fieldwork, I wrote extensive notes on how I perceived my own positionality. One of the questions I asked most participants is whether they considered me an ‘EU migrant’. I had various responses to this, from participants being decisive that I was, to others who would separate me as a ‘desirable’ migrant from other, less desirable counterparts, to some who did not think I was an EU migrant at all. Chapter 5 (Section 5.2.2) looks at how verbal and non-verbal cues shape participants subjective definitions of who is an EU migrant.

I started the fieldwork in 2017 as a 23-year-old Romanian PhD researcher at a prestigious UK university. I was a researcher, but also a migrant and a migrants’ rights activist. I left Romania in 2012 at 18 years old and kept little contact with
the country and rarely speak Romanian. Some of my migrant participants expressed surprise when they heard that I have not visited my ‘hometown’ since 2013 and had last been to Romania in 2016 for an academic conference. I sometimes mentioned I have a British partner with different political views than mine. Again, this prompted questions from some participants, while others were more surprised that we have no plans for marriage after all these years together. Although I lived in towns and cities, I also spent time in the countryside, and some villages in Tendring reminded me of deprived villages in Romania. I have been through financial difficulties and related to many participants who found themselves in less privileged economic circumstances. These are just some of the various contexts and identities at play in the fieldwork. Upon reflection, I did not see these identities as contradictory, but rather being activated at different times.

I have multiple positionalities that fulfil certain roles in particular interview settings. This is conceptualised as ‘selective positionality’ in methodology literature. Selective positionality means presenting certain identities that can be ‘actively manipulated to facilitate talk about relevant subject matters’ (Holstein and Gubrium, 2011: 41). This is not to say that I am deceiving participants about my identities or opinions. It is about choosing some aspects to be more prominent than others in the self-presentation of the researcher. For instance, through the recruitment advertisement, participants know I am a UCL researcher and they can try to guess my nationality based on my name.

During the interviews, I deliberately disclose certain information about myself so the conversation with the participant becomes more relaxed, which is precisely what this research tries to capture – everyday attitudes, experiences and conversations about migration. For example, when speaking to a Leaver, I am aware of the assumption about academics being overwhelmingly Remain supporters and I understand why certain participants may not feel comfortable expressing their honest views. I have an ‘insider’ advantage in this sense, as I did not have a vote in the referendum, and I have a politically mixed group of friends, including Leave supporters. Mentioning this helped in the field, as some participants felt more convinced that I was indeed open to listen to their views.
regardless of my own politics. When I published an LSE Brexit blog about my fieldwork in Jaywick (Bulat, 2018b), I received emails from Leave voters and Leave supporting academics who appreciated the way I presented the complexity of the Leave vote, instead of dismissing residents’ concerns.

Similarly, some Leave participants thanked me for listening to ‘both sides of the story’. Interestingly, while some Remain supporting participants pitied me for ‘having to listen’ to Leave voters, no Leave voter in my sample had similar comments about Remainers. One Remain participant even suggested I should break up with my partner given we did not completely agree on the Brexit outcome. This made me think that perhaps having a politically mixed group of friends makes me feel comfortable listening to views I do not agree with and less likely to label people one way or another according to my own personal preferences. Among Remain participants, there was an underlying assumption that I must be a passionate Remain myself, as some sent me Remain materials and People’s Vote event links after the interviews, for instance. Very early in the fieldwork I realised that ‘Leaver’ and ‘Remainer’ were not labels only based on how people voted or which side they supported in 2016 – these labels became identities and they were strongly felt by many participants.

The fieldwork was a particularly ideal setting to reflect on positionality as I researched three groups by nationality – British, Romanian and Polish. The shared migrant status is assumed and expected to provoke empathy feelings with other migrants (Maggio and Westcott, 2014). An ‘insider’ assumption would be that researching the Romanian group would be easiest in terms of access and the interview process itself. This was not necessarily the case. As I left Romania before my university studies and speak very rarely in Romanian in my daily life, I found it was more difficult to quickly formulate follow-up questions during the interview, compared to when interviewing in English. I found the power relations in some interviews with Polish migrants interesting, particularly when a few participants spoke about how Romanians are usually placed lower in a hierarchy of desirable migrants than Poles. Some British participants self-identified as internal migrants in the UK (see also Section 5.2.2.2) or spoke about their experiences living abroad.
It is not only the researcher who engages in selective positionality, but also the participants, who establish rapport with the interviewer in various ways, such as by suggesting a shared ‘migrant’ status. This self-identification as an internal migrant came across rather strongly in the interviews with local politicians. Like some of the residents in Tendring, the Clacton MP is also a ‘migrant from London’, while one of the Newham councillors compares himself with the recent East European arrivals in the area, claiming he was also an ‘economic migrant’ to London when he moved to the capital from a small town. Others related more to international migration experiences. Some local councillors interviewed in Newham spoke at length about their Commonwealth heritage, while one councillor in Tendring described her mixed-race children.

After finding out I am Romanian, some participants spoke about their experiences visiting Romania. For instance, I had a particularly interesting conversation with Cllr Platt from Tendring, whose wife is from Romania and who had a vast knowledge of Romania given he has worked in humanitarian aid in the 1990s and maintains close links with the country. At times, I often felt that some British interviewees who enjoyed visiting Romania had much more knowledge on certain aspects of the country than I did.

The fieldsite also shaped my positionality. I started this research with no experience of the two areas, but I soon transitioned from a complete outsider to a comfortable outsider. I felt ‘at home’ in both areas in different ways – not only because of hearing Romanian on the streets (almost every few minutes in certain areas in Newham), but also because the areas looked like some places I grew up in Romania or my friends did, especially in some of the most deprived countryside parts like Jaywick. Many of my friends from more privileged socio-economic backgrounds expressed concern about my safety in those areas, but I did not personally regard this as an issue. One colleague even suggested that they would never even visit a place like Jaywick while others did not envisage the possibility of having long conversations with Leave supporters.

I found myself reflecting mostly on socio-economic backgrounds and how sometimes these transcended Leave/Remain divides. For instance, I had a
detailed conversation with one participant (who was overall negative about immigration) about food prices and shopping at the discount supermarket Aldi (where we both did at the time), which made me feel more of an ‘insider’ in the participants’ everyday life than when interviewing some pro-immigration participants in highly paid jobs. I reflected on how interview structures can reproduce classed understandings of social situations. In more deprived areas, the interviews were much more fluid, often interrupted by participants’ friends and families. I was particularly aware of my own socialisation when a couple of my participants struggled to understand the demographics questionnaire, asking me what they should put next to ‘nationality’. I offered some examples of nationalities. One participant then said, ‘OK, English, if it’s about football.’

It is an impossible task to write about all the different identities and contexts involved in my selective positionality. While the previous paragraphs noted some of the most salient observations, the following case study illustrates how my positionality shifted during one interview. A key moment in the fieldwork was when I interviewed John, a middle-aged Leave-voting UKIP supporter in Tendring with east London roots. He was the opposite of me in respect of demographic characteristics and political preferences, and I felt uneasy when walking to the pub where we established our meeting. I did not think he was particularly friendly in the first minutes of our conversation, while he was buying a parking ticket, and gave the impression he did not even understand what I was saying, so I nervously repeated my sentences trying out my best British accent. My interviewer ‘instinct’ was telling me this interview will be short and not yield in-depth data and attitudes.

After we sat down in a quiet part of the pub, I began one of the longest interviews I had done – just under two hours on the recording, all topic guide questions answered in depth without the need of often awkward prompting on sensitive topics, and a fascinating account of the life of someone who lived in both my fieldsites (as I found out later, this was rather common among Tendring residents). The Newham and Tendring comparison was already done by the participant in many respects. Overall, despite views I strongly disagree with being expressed, it was a pleasant conversation, that indeed resembled a pub discussion, as this research planned to. After I stopped the recording, we talked
for another hour and a half in the pub (I wanted to turn on the recorder again, without success), and then he kindly offered to give me a lift to the next interview location, so we talked more on the drive to Frinton-on-Sea, and some more in the car park.

After the interview, I wrote some reflections, noting how I felt I could relate to this participant more than with others who shared similar political views. I describe John as ‘more open to discussing and engaging with opposing views’ than others. The fieldnotes conclude:

I feel I would not have had such meaningful conversations and eye-opening experiences without starting this project with the idea that what we need is dialogue between British and migrant views, but also Leavers and Remainers. (Fieldwork diary, 8 February 2018)

John was surprised to find that research students, who in his mind broadly translated to wealthy, privileged and ‘out of touch’ individuals, can relate to some of his experiences. My own stereotype of Clacton Leave voters was broken down through experience, and in a similar way, my participants’ stereotypes of Romanians or researchers seemed to be challenged by speaking to me. This reflection on both sides can be achieved at a larger scale, by discussion about experiences among groups of people who do not normally choose to talk to one another (such as academics and Tendring residents in my case), which is what public sociology aims to encourage.

3.3.5.3. Reflexivity as strategy during the research

Reflexivity implies thinking about the potential biases or effects that the selective and multiple positionalities I described have on data collection, analysis and writing-up. In-depth qualitative research, particularly when focussed on specific locations, is hardly generalisable to a wider population or larger territory. In this context, the strong analysis in qualitative research is not the generalisable argument, but the reflexive one. Closely linked with positionality, I see reflexivity as a strategy to overcome the common critiques of data-led qualitative research regarding its relationship with the concepts of objectivity, reliability, validity, and difficulty of replication. Although my study design can be adapted to research, for
instance, another two UK local authorities or areas, replicability in its actual sense is far from straightforward.

A solution is to render the qualitative more defendable, by linking explanations to data, contextualising any material (such as interview extracts) used in the thesis, and considering alternative explanations, even when one explanation is preferred (also suggested by Winnwa and Böhme, 2018). For example, if negative or positive attitudes are explicable through contact with migrants in one example, alternative explanations are not automatically ruled out. Connecting the fieldwork observations to the concepts in the literature is also crucial to offer credibility to the research findings. Moreover, transparency is essential in this process, hence I show fieldwork materials and examples from the data I collected in the Appendices, in addition to using participant quotes in the empirical chapters.

3.3.6. Interview data analysis

3.3.6.1. Working in NVivo

Apart from the first part of Chapter 4 which presents the findings of the ephemera analysis (organised and categorised using NVivo11), this thesis is based on a thematic analysis of interview data in NVivo12. All transcripts from recorded interviews with the 63 residents were coded systematically, while the notes from non-recorded interviews with politicians, activists, key informants and other field observations were used to contextualise these interview findings. The thematic analysis is inspired by data-driven coding strategies in contemporary grounded theory approaches. Although the literature review chapter frames the thesis within a localised contact theory framework, the coding process was inductive, interpretative and open.

Grounded theory approaches in the 21st century differ from the traditional formulations pioneered by Glasser & Strauss (1967). An important distinction is the rejection of the idea that sampling decisions cannot be based on a preconceived theoretical frame or set of assumptions. Recent approaches suggest data analysis should start with a first stage of open coding, labelling the data by answering the question ‘what is this piece of data an example of?’
The second stage is ‘axial coding’, aiming to establish links among the data (Robson, 2011: 491), exploring and describing the phenomena encountered in relationship with others. This stage was particularly relevant for this study, given that I considered comparative elements between the different participant groups and between the fieldsites throughout the process. This is a more focused stage of coding than the first, implying selecting useful initial codes and seeing them in the perspective of more extensive data. The last, and third stage, named ‘selective coding’, consists of looking at core conceptual categories and understanding their story line behind the data (Robson, 2011: 491). Once the initial, descriptive codes are assigned in NVivo and the themes emerging from this process are identified, it is possible to return to coding and applying the thematic codes only, especially with a relatively low volume of data (Welsh, 2002: 10).

After preparing the transcripts, I followed a number of steps to arrive at the themes discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. I selected six participants who are broadly representative of the interviewee clusters in my purposive sample and coded their corresponding interview transcripts: John (Tendring, British, rather negative towards migration), Vlad (Tendring, Romanian, mixed views on migration), Marta (Tendring, Polish, rather positive views towards migration), Diana (Newham, British, rather positive towards migration), Oliwia (Newham, Polish, mixed views on migration) and Robert (Newham, Romanian, rather negative towards migration). I read the transcripts line by line and added codes as my reading progressed. After coding all transcripts, I merged all codes, removed duplications and grouped codes into relevant categories and sub-categories. Then, I progressed with coding all remaining transcripts. While most text fitted in the established coding scheme based on the six interviews, other categories were added during this process.

There are four main categories in the NVivo codebook, with many sub-categories. First, all interviewees spoke about the perceived impact of migration. I broke this down into sub-categories according to the questions of what, how, who and where. The ‘what’ categorises whether what is expressed is a positive, negative, neutral or mixed view. ‘How’ is the framing of the attitudes towards migration. I
adopted the same main categories from the initial frames used in the ephemeran analysis – economic, identity, moral-universal, numbers and security, with corresponding sub-categories. The next part is the ‘who’, which migrants or forms of migration are spoken about. There are numerous options, grouped by origin and skill level. Finally, I categorised the sources of knowledge participants use to justify the attitudes they express. These are anecdotal (through mediated contact or local contact, and then further sub-categories), hypotheticals or non-anecdotal evidence (e.g. based on studies and statistics). The second main category looks at the context of these attitudes, grouped in a range of sub-categories (with further sub-categories) emerging from the data, from participants’ views on Brexit and political involvement to them speaking about local-level issues they care about.

The third level situates attitudes and their contexts within the emerging themes: community, contribution, certainty and control. An underpinning theme of ‘change’ links the four (see the figures at the beginning of Chapters 5 to 7). It constructs the narrative around changes brought by migration but also changes in participants’ views over time and it is fundamental to answering the key research question of this thesis in Chapter 7, of how attitudes towards EU migrants are shaped at the local level. Finally, I added a fourth level called ‘location’, which captures all the specific references to Newham or Tendring. The codebook is included in Appendix C2. It is directly exported from NVivo as a table and the numbers on the right-hand side show how many times that code occurred in the data.

Although this thesis is not concerned with quantifying attitudes towards migration (and argues why quantitative surveys are limited in capturing the kinds of insights provided by a qualitative account), this table offers a broad picture of the interview data. Image 9 shows how this looks in NVivo. Each coloured line is a code and is of the length of the text coded as such. Multiple codes can be applied to the same sentence. To give a hypothetical example (so it contains all four main categories), a sentence such as ‘I heard on the news that EU migrants have put pressure on the NHS. People should pay in before using the hospital here in Newham’ can be coded as:
1. Perceived impact of migration: evaluation (negative), framing (economic -> labour and social security -> healthcare), migrant type (origin -> non-UK EU citizens\textsuperscript{12}), source (anecdotal evidence -> mediated contact -> reading or watching media);

2. Contextual factors: migrant portrayals in the media;

3. Main themes: contribution (economic), control (control of migration);

4. Location: Newham.

![Image 9: Interview coding stripes in NVivo\textsuperscript{13}]

After coding all transcripts, it was still difficult to work with the high number of additional documents. I created NVivo cases for each participant. It was effective to separate the text from the pair and group interviews by participant. It also provided a way to link all information about each participant. Overall, NVivo has been an appropriate tool not only to code the data collected, but also to organise

\textsuperscript{12} At the time of conducting this analysis, the UK was still a member of the EU and I separated ‘non-UK EU citizens’ from comments about British people migrating as EU citizens themselves.

\textsuperscript{13} Screenshot from NVivo. Not all codes applied to the text can be included in one frame as they are too numerous.
the research project (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013: 26), from fieldnotes to relevant articles and coded transcripts, in one place.

Image 10 shows how participant cases work in NVivo. Bobby’s case contains two files – my notes reflecting on the interview and the interview transcript. All interviewees have a memo note added to them, which are case descriptions. I followed Flick’s (2014: 424) structure of interview case descriptions: starting with a statement from the transcript that encapsulates the interview, followed by a description of the participant’s relevant characteristics and then the ‘central topics mentioned by the interviewee concerning the research issue.’ A case description example is included in Appendix C4. A separate document summarising the notes from politicians was also created. A further document, totalling over 100,000 words, was then compiled copying each case description followed by a few quotes from each interview that best reflected the participant’s narrative. In addition, another document contained notes for each of the key themes and its sub themes. These files, in addition to the NVivo analysis, formed the basis of the empirical chapters in this thesis.

Image 10: NVivo participant cases
3.3.6.2. A note on limitations

I realised early in the data analysis process that one cannot do justice to all the data collected given the time and space constraints. By focussing my analysis on the research question, implicitly there is material that is left out. Many participants spoke at length about politics at the time, and although their political views are important to situate what they say about migration, they were not analysed or written about in much detail as they often diverged from the Brexit frame of the conversation. There were insightful narratives about the meaning of being ‘British’ for which I do not have a separate section in the thesis, although some ideas are integrated in Chapter 5 within the theme of community. Especially migrant participants speak about their experiences working, studying or facing various difficulties in the UK. Some of these are integrated in the analysis, for instance when discussing certainty as a theme and reactions to hostility towards migrants, but again, they do not constitute a primary focus of the thesis. Fieldnotes, although used throughout the thesis (especially when writing about selective positionality), are not analysed in a systematic way like the transcripts.

The timing of the fieldwork affects how participants respond as they speak about current day events and policies. Particular important events in time are found to affect the measurement of long-term trends, as well as having short-term impact in attitudes surveys (Jowell et al., 2007: 108). For example, intensive reporting on the European ‘migration crisis’ in 2015 might have affected the measurement of attitudes towards migration that year, but that is not to say that this event does not still impact participants in 2017-2018 when interviewed. The fieldwork is inevitably influenced by the media reporting on the then Prime Minister May’s negotiations on Brexit as well as events related to migration or migration policy. An important moment that was extensively reported in the year of the fieldwork was the Windrush scandal mentioned in the previous chapter (Section 2.3.3).

Alongside the implications of the interview specificities, this analysis is also subject to the broader limitations of in-depth, qualitative research with participants. Researchers are often ‘accused of letting their favourite cases shape or at least colour their generalisations’ (Crisp and Turner, 2009: ix). Although I
draw findings from the attitudes of my British, Romanian and Polish participants in Newham and Tendring, it is challenging to generalise these attitudes in any way. In fact, the thesis argues for a more local-level approach of attitudes towards migrants, so attempting to make generalisations would defy one of the aims and contributions of this research. Transparency and reflexivity, rather than ability to replicate, are the relevant criteria for academic rigour in this sense. Similar to contemporary grounded theory writing, this research is building on theory ‘relevant to a specific problem, issue or group’ (Robson, 2011: 149). The analysis tells how attitudes towards migrants are shaped in two local authorities according to a diverse, but non-representative group of residents and politicians.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter described the qualitative and reflexive methodology adopted in this thesis. It explained the processes behind the ephemera analysis presented in Chapter 4 and the fieldwork on which all empirical chapters are based. It started from the epistemological approach to offering an honest account of the practicalities encountered and how challenges during this research were dealt with, such as with difficult participant recruitment. This chapter argued that reflecting on ethics and positionality is essential when studying a sensitive topic like attitudes towards migration. It illustrated the analysis process with examples in the corresponding Appendices, such as case description or fieldwork materials.

This methodological approach differs from and adds to previous studies on attitudes towards EU migration in three main ways. First, it looks at both local-level and national-level contexts and links the two, by analysing who spoke about migration and how during the 2016 EU referendum campaign and then asking residents to comment on a selection of ephemera. Second, it includes both migrant and non-migrant voices, as well as both politician and ordinary resident perspectives. This bridges the national and the local level and examines whether national-level portrayals correspond to everyday lived experiences. It compares attitudes in two relatively deprived areas which are different in terms of ethnic diversity, as underlined in the introduction of this thesis (Section 1.4). Third, it adopts an inductive, qualitative approach based on fieldwork, filling in some gaps
in knowledge left by a predominantly quantitative survey-based literature on attitudes towards migration in the UK. While broad generalisations cannot be drawn from this local-level small scale study, using NVivo for transcript coding makes the analysis more systematic and it is easier to navigate data from the different participant groups and two fieldsites. The next chapter, Chapter 4, starts developing the empirical findings with the ephemera analysis and participants’ local-level responses to the 2016 campaign portrayals of migrants, before the interview main themes are discussed starting with Chapter 5.
Chapter 4. The brightest and the best, us – and the rest: Framing EU migration through the 2016 EU referendum campaign

The first part of this chapter is based on analysing 120 EU referendum campaign ephemera. I argue that there were three main categories of migrants spoken about (as opposed to being spoken to or speaking for themselves) in the national-level EU referendum campaign: ‘the brightest and the best’ (migrants who ‘contribute’ and are part of the ‘community’), ‘us’ (British people abroad who also ‘contribute’ and are part of the ‘community’) and ‘the rest’ (migrants who are less desirable and who need to be ‘controlled’). The second part of this chapter presents a thematic analysis of local-level responses to the campaign. An analysis of 63 interviews with British, Romanian and Polish residents in Newham and Tendring, alongside 15 interviews with local activists and politicians, reveals three main themes: mistrust, inability to relate on a personal level or locally, and the lack of a constructive debate on immigration, which served to reinforce the stereotypes about migrants promoted by the national-level campaign.

4.1. National level: Who spoke about EU migration and how?14

The EU referendum campaign was a national-level campaign for a UK-wide referendum, but it also took place at a local level, with a multitude of voices involved across the country: politicians, activists and residents, of various backgrounds and nationalities. To contextualise the attitudes towards EU migrants captured through the fieldwork conducted in 2017 and 2018, it is necessary to understand who spoke about EU migration and how during the national 2016 campaign, but also how the arguments about migration were perceived at a local level. This sub-section addresses the first question. Who spoke about EU migration and how? What types of EU migrants were mentioned in the EU referendum campaign and how were they framed? Was there any

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14 The main arguments in the first part of this chapter were published by the author before being re-written for this PhD thesis in a book chapter (Bulat, 2018a) and an LSE Brexit blog post (Bulat, 2017a).
difference in framing according to the migrants’ nationality, region of origin or skill level, corresponding to the literature on ethnic and skill hierarchies?

As expected for a referendum on the UK’s EU membership, most content about migrants is on freedom of movement within the EU (both British migrants to the EU and EU migrants to the UK), comprising approximately two-thirds of the text on immigration. There are differences in the types of phrases associated with British migrants to the EU, as opposed to EU migrants to the UK, detailed in Section 4.1.1. The remaining third of the text is about non-EU migration, including references to Commonwealth citizens, but remarkably ‘future EU migration’ (e.g. from Turkey). Those are discussed with examples in Section 4.1.2. There are a few references to refugees and asylum seekers (often conflated with migrants), and also terrorists. Some references speak about immigration in general. Nevertheless, this is often contextualised within an argument that refers specifically to the EU.

Most frequently, the text on migration relates to numbers or utilitarian-type observations. There are also substantive references to identity and security arguments. However, very little is mentioned from a moral-universal perspective, underlining the dehumanised aspect of the EU referendum debate, discussed in more detail in Section 4.1.3. Although initially I applied the frames adapted from Helbling (2013) to the ephemera text, arguments about immigration were difficult to categorise as they often intersected. What emerged strongly from the data were three typologies of people: the brightest and the best migrants who are welcome (usually depicted using identity and utilitarian frames positively), the British people (‘us’) who become ‘the brightest and the best’ migrants when abroad, and the rest of migrants who are undesirable (portrayed through negative identity and utilitarian arguments). Thus, freedom of movement has been portrayed as a one-way street for us, the British people abroad and perhaps, in some circumstances, the brightest and the best migrants who ‘contribute’ to the UK.
4.1.1. ‘Great for pensioners, great for young people’: freedom of movement as a one-way street

EU freedom of movement, established by the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, has offered EU citizens the possibility to reside with few restrictions in the UK. Simultaneously, it has allowed the same rights for UK citizens who live in other EU states. Although freedom of movement is a ‘two-way street’, referendum campaign materials choose to emphasise one or the other, rather than presenting EU citizens in the UK and British citizens in the EU27 as part of the same picture of reciprocal rights. People exercising their freedom of movement rights in the UK are almost always described as ‘EU migrants’, rather fellow ‘EU citizens’ sharing the same category with British people. When referring to intra-EU migration, overall, the ephemera text dedicates more space to arguments about ‘EU migrants’ living in the UK. However, various items also present how freedom of movement applies to UK citizens and the consequences of a potential ‘Brexit’ for British ‘expats’. Those two groups who benefit from freedom of movement are not given equal attention by either Remain or Leave. In fact, the Leave side of the campaign focuses on EU migration to the UK (and usually its perceived negative impacts), whereas Remain materials almost exclusively present the benefits of freedom of movement for British people.

EU citizens living in the UK are preferred as examples for utilitarian arguments of labour and social security, such as the pressures their migration puts on the UK’s healthcare, education, transport, and other systems. This relates to previous research showing how underlining utilitarian arguments about the EU’s costs and benefits was expected to shift voters’ preferences in the EU referendum campaign (Vasilopoulou, 2016). This frame is almost always occurring concomitantly with the ‘scale of migration’ frame, and often has an ethnic hierarchy dimension, as illustrated in the following ephemera extract, which finds an increase in East European migration to blame for overstretched public services and limited work opportunities: ‘a huge number of migrants from Eastern Europe have come to our country in the last decade, putting pressure on our scarce resources of schools, housing, the transport network and the jobs market’ (Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy Group).

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When being more specific than just ‘EU migrants’ in this context, the leaflets emphasise recent movements of EU citizens, described as coming from ‘poor European countries’, ‘Eastern Europe’, and other similar phrases. The economic interest and identity arguments intersect when it is about Eastern EU movers. Framing East Europeans as less desirable because of their ‘low skilled’ status perhaps masks the fact EU migrants from particular regions of origin (and sometimes even from specific countries, as a couple of leaflets refer to Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian people) are singled out to make certain political points for ending freedom of movement.

One can extrapolate from this strategy that discussing about a hierarchy of migrants in terms of skill during a political campaign is less controversial than about a categorisation by region/country of origin or other identities, yet it still transmits the same message: East Europeans are poorer, they are likely to come in greater numbers, and likely to occupy the jobs of British working classes. While some recent studies conclude that ‘skills trump culture’ in attitudes towards immigration in the UK, the question that remains unanswered is what voters imagine when hearing about ‘low’ or ‘highly skilled’ EU migrants. In the case of the EU campaign ephemera analysed, when specific, low skilled EU migration invariably refers to more recent East European migration. Chapter 5 will show how skill and ethnic categories intersect when participants express their own attitudes towards EU migrants. Image 11, extracted from a Leave leaflet by the EU Referendum Campaign, emphasises this line or argument – migrants from ‘poor European countries’ are responsible for ‘unsustainable burdens’ on public services:
Not all mentions of EU migrants are negative. There are a few examples where an entirely positive case is made for EU migrants. Where such arguments are expressed by Remain campaigners, they tend to have an equally important purpose of labelling their Leave adversaries in negative terms. Instead of making a positive case for migration using evidence for their arguments, some pro-migration leaflets are chiefly a vehicle to portray Leave supporters in a negative light, alienating potential voters, as illustrated by this extract:

The anti-EU little Englanders argue that British indigenous culture is being ‘swamped’ by alien migrants from other EU countries. This noxious chauvinist tone denies the positive contribution immigration has made to British culture, economy and society. Which referendum outcome would encourage and strengthen the racists and ultra-chauvinists most, a Yes or No vote? (Another Europe)

Apart from the direct criticisms on the perceived closed-mindedness of those who want to ‘take back control’ of migration, EU migrants are also spoken about within an economic prosperity frame, similarly to other examples appearing mainly in Remain materials. Specific categories such as EU students, researchers, and healthcare professionals are used as examples in arguments claiming migrants bring a net fiscal contribution and are needed to fill in highly skilled jobs. This emphasis on research and higher education in the campaign was expected
considering these sectors’ achievements have been linked to the benefits of freedom of movement (Corbett, 2016). EU students and researchers are also the only EU migrant group presented within a multicultural frame, with Remain campaigners supporting a diverse environment in universities, as opposed to a nationalistic stance which does not advocate for such diversity in UK university campuses.

EU students represent one of the rare cases where the scale of migration is used within a positive argument: ‘Over 125,000 EU students are currently studying at UK universities. These students help to foster an international, outward-looking culture on university campuses which in turn provides British students with an international university experience preparing them for an ever more globalised world’ (Universities for Europe). Even within this positive framing, EU students are praised as long as they ‘provide’ benefits for British people. In a similar way as the migrant’ tax contributions, EU students are appreciated for the ‘international university experience’ that directly benefits British students, preparing them for their future. On the Leave side, EU students are criticised in some materials, which mention the failure to repay UK student loans and a tuition fee system which gives unfair advantage to EU students over non-EU applicants (e.g. UKIP’s Out Post 2016 newsletter).

When Leave materials speak about EU migration in general, Remain’s narrow argument of economic prosperity is counterbalanced with one of labour and social security, as in the following statements by Vote Leave, which are repeated in several leaflets: ‘Many immigrants contribute to our society. They also have an impact on public services. Experts disagree on the overall effect.’ Vote Leave’s focus on the impact of EU migration on public services in later stages of campaigning (Clarke et al., 2017: 54) is illustrated through political ephemera. A certain ambiguity about the ‘overall effect’ allows the voter to decide which argument speaks most for them, according to their experience.

Although arguing to reduce the number of EU migrants, a few Leave campaign materials effectively give assurances to EU citizens who live in the UK, in the case of a (then hypothetical) Brexit scenario. For instance, in a newsletter by
UKIP, titled ‘The Out Post: EU referendum special edition’, the editor includes letters from readers with a moral-universal frame on migrant rights. A reader’s best friend from France is assured by Madeline, who responds to the letters, that she will continue to have the same rights to live in the UK (Image 12).

Image 12: Ephemera extract (UKIP)

Apart from a few positive references to specific groups of ‘highly skilled’ EU migrants, the scale of migration and labour and social security frames dominate the debate. In the discussion on freedom of movement, references to British people are almost entirely positive and framed in a noticeably different way. Although the word ‘British’ is rarely mentioned, it is implied in how the campaigns address their target audiences. A category of ‘us’ is created and contrasts with EU migrants to the UK when speaking about freedom of movement. Remain campaigners across the board emphasise how beneficial free movement is for
UK citizens who wish to ‘travel, work, study, and retire in the EU, without visas’ (Wales Stronger in Europe leaflet). The official national Remain campaign has several slogans on freedom of movement, repeated in various materials: ‘great for pensioners’, ‘great for young people’ and ‘great for holidaymakers’, as illustrated in Image 13. Nevertheless, some categories of ‘free movers’ are more visible than others in the case of the British as well. For example, some of the EU referendum debate emphasised British pensioners, despite the fact that a majority of British people in the EU27 are of working age and likely to have a worker, rather than retired, status, according to figures from the Department of Work and Pensions (cited in British in Europe, 2018). The benefits freedom of movement offers to British people in work were perhaps not as apparent as those for students or pensioners.

Image 13: Ephemera extract (Britain Stronger In Europe)

In addition, there is also emphasis on British students who have opportunities to study abroad. Remain materials present this type of migration within a multicultural frame, like in the case of EU students to the UK, emphasising how learning different languages and being exposed to other cultures helps the professional and personal development of British students.

Overall, British people living in other EU states are portrayed, particularly by Leave campaigners, within an economic prosperity frame, as economic contributors, unlike how EU migrants in the UK are depicted:

UK citizens living on the continent are usually employed in skilled work; or are retirees living on their pensions and providing valued income, often in blighted Eurozone countries such as Spain and Greece. EU member states are not going to try and take revenge on UK citizens because we decide to leave the EU - they cannot, and it would not be in their interests to do so. (UKIP newsletter)
As this fragment illustrates, British citizens received similar assurances from Leave campaigners as EU migrants in the UK did. One FAQ-style leaflet from UKIP directly addresses British migrants’ concerns, asking: ‘If we left the EU would we still be able to travel, take holidays, work, study and own property in Europe?’ Their answer is clear: ‘Britons were able to do all these things long before we joined the EU, and we will be able to do them after we leave.’

The ‘scale of migration’ frame applies to both EU people in the UK and British people in the EU. The number of EU migrants in the UK is typically described as ‘equivalent to a city the size of [city name]’. Clarke et al. (2017: 48) draw attention to how the net EU migration to the UK was contextualised by Conservative MP Priti Patel (currently UK Home Secretary) as a ‘city the size of Newcastle’. A number of Leave leaflets, notably from the official Vote Leave campaign, relate the national figures on migration to the local level. Depending on where they are distributed, leaflets name Manchester, Newcastle, York, Birmingham, and other locations to refer to a certain number of EU migrants – those coming every year, those who have been arriving since 2004, or other time specific measures. This illustrates the importance of tailoring political communication to relate to localised experiences. By mentioning a town or city the voter is familiar with, imagining the scale of migration in this way has a greater impact, rather than naming some place remote from the everyday livelihood of the person targeted by the campaign message. Indeed, one of the main failures of the Remain campaign, which was pointed out by my participants in Newham and Tendring, was that the arguments on migration failed to engage with personal and local experiences in a meaningful way (see Section 4.2.2).

Moreover, similar to EU migrants in the UK, the campaign materials include a variety of different figures on the number of British people in the EU27, from less than one million to over two million. Campaigners are generally stating migration statistics as fact, but a few do challenge the discrepancies between the net migration figures and National Insurance Number (NINo) data, thus predicting a higher number of migrants. The inconsistencies in the figures used to illustrate the scale of migration do not only reflect the way in which data are selectively presented to support certain political points, but also the fact that, due to freedom
of movement and the UK’s choice not to implement a coherent\textsuperscript{15} registration process for EU migrants, it is not possible to have an exact figure. UK migration statistics tend to be based on estimates using various datasets, each with their own limitations (White, 2019), such as passenger or labour force survey statistics, and therefore cannot represent the ‘true’ number of migrants, as some campaigners tend to use it.

4.1.2. ‘There will be millions more to come’: the alternative of non-EU migration

Apart from freedom of movement, the leaflets speak about non-EU migration and refugees. There are two main contrasting portrayals. On the one hand, there is an image of migrants within the security and ‘scale of migration’ frames. This is what I refer to as ‘future EU migration’, which cannot be accurately described as ‘EU migration’, although the ephemera in question tend to portray it as such. Some campaigners present a future EU expansion to several countries as fact and play into security fears of a wave of mass migration from Turkey and other East European states. In a similar way to the undesirable low skilled East Europeans, ethnicity and nationality are relevant when depicting the ‘future EU migration.’ Turkey is mentioned in most ephemera speaking about EU migrants in the future and other East European countries are also included in some materials.

On the other hand, a less frequent, but positive case is made about highly skilled migrants who have a Commonwealth background. The ‘Commonwealth friends’ are presented in Leave materials as being discriminated against by a migration system that prioritises low skilled EU ‘economic migration’. This portrayal of desirable Commonwealth migrants, as a group of people who are thought have more in common with the British (explained through colonial history in some ephemera), was revived in the UK media during the Windrush scandal of 2018, when ‘honourable Commonwealth citizens’ were pitted against Romanian and Bulgarian ‘criminals’ (LBC, 2018) by some commentators. This hierarchy was

\textsuperscript{15} Some, but not all, EU migrants living in the UK were registered through schemes such as the Workers’ Registration Scheme (WRS), operating for A8 citizens between 2004 and 2011.
created to advance, once again, political arguments for ending EU freedom of movement, perceived to disadvantage Commonwealth people, without necessarily offering detail on how the rights of Commonwealth citizens, or other non-EU migrants, would be improved in practice post-Brexit.

By far, the most frequent mentions of non-EU migration relate to future migration from Turkey. The main argument, articulated on the Leave side, goes as follows: new countries will inevitably join the EU, including Turkey. Turkey has borders with Syria and other territories from where refugees can come to the UK. Therefore, leaving the EU is the only solution to stop ‘millions of migrants’ (both from future EU member states and refugees) from coming to the UK. The politicisation of Turkey as an official candidate for EU membership by Leave supporters has already been noted in research on the EU referendum (Glencross, 2016: 46), but has not been illustrated with detailed examples from campaign materials.

In the case of these ephemera collections, the ‘Turkey argument’ has two sides. One is about the number of people from actual ‘future EU countries’ who will come to the UK as economic migrants. The other one concerns the links made between immigration from Turkey and terrorism, which were started by Nigel Farage during referendum debates (Clarke et al., 2017: 54). It is not only that future EU citizens from future EU countries like Turkey will be able to come to the UK. It is also assumed that Turkey’s EU membership will provide an easier route for people from its neighbouring countries. Emphasising Syria and Iraq on the map plays into security fears related to the long-debated ‘refugee crisis’ prior to the referendum, and also threats of terrorism. The argument according to which the UK is better protected from terrorism while controlling its borders outside the EU is supported by interventions from experts and politicians, such as the following from David Davis MP quoted in UKIP’s ‘The Out Post. EU Referendum Special Edition’ newsletter: ‘The only way we can protect ourselves from the thousands of ISIS sponsored terrorists that Europol tell us are roaming free within the borderless EU is by voting to leave the EU.’
Both key arguments on ‘future EU migration’ are captured in this extract from the EU Referendum Campaign: ‘Allow Turkey to join with its population of 75 million - all of whom will have the right to come to Britain. Turkey’s porous borders with the Middle East will mean even more illegal immigration to the UK.’ Additions to the first argument include mentions of other countries that will join the EU in the future, stated as fact, such as in the following: ‘The EU is expanding to include: Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey’ (Vote Leave). There are also correlations with past EU expansion, by mentioning the newest EU member states, Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia. Image 14 is such an example of contextualisation.

Image 14: Ephemera extract (Vote Leave)

A future mass migration from a future EU is also depicted visually, through maps. For example, one leaflet shows several maps from different stages of the EEC, which later became the EU. The last map, shown in Image 15, with the headline ‘EU projected to double by 2030’ includes a wide range of ‘new member states’, including Israel, Egypt, and even the less well known to the public Nakhchivan (sic) Autonomous Republic. The ‘new countries’ appear in red, while the current EU member states are coloured blue. Two large red arrows point from the ‘future members’ to the UK, suggesting mass migration from the twenty-four listed countries.

The use of blue and red is significant in amplifying the message. If seen as political colours, red could be associated with communism, while blue with conservativism in the UK (or the dark grey used for the UK in the Vote Leave map, with stability). Colour codes are opened to interpretation from the public
who receive these leaflets. Various connotations may be found by different people (as touched on in Section 4.2.2) yet the underpinning idea of contrast will remain the same for both map interpretations. The colour red, used to mark the undesirable countries of ‘future EU migration’, or indirect migration via the EU (in the case of Syria and Iraq), is strategically used to draw attention and create contrast with the rest of the continent. While the leaflet containing this map is promoted by an individual and not an organisation, maps were also used by the official Vote Leave campaign in a surprisingly similar alarmist fashion. Image 16 emphasises five ‘future EU countries’ and mentions their population, thus applying a ‘scale of migration’ frame. In contrast to Image 15, this map labels Syria and Iraq separately though using a different shade of red. Although those two countries are not in the ‘countries set to join the EU’ list, they are highlighted on the map. These maps illustrate the overlap between the ‘scale of migration’ frame and a security frame.
Image 15: Ephemera extract (Individual publisher)

Image 16: Ephemera extract (Vote Leave)
Unlike Nigel Farage’s infamous campaign poster depicting a queue of migrants waiting to enter the UK, the ephemera from the two collections analysed do not contain any visual element depicting migrants themselves. However, those maps are visual cues that create symbolic threats of future migration and refugee movements. In political advertisement, symbolic threats, particularly those supported by visuals, are found to be more effective than economic ones (Schmuck and Matthes, 2017). Maps such as Images 15 and 16 are more ‘acceptable’ visual tools that reinforce these symbolic threats, than showing pictures of ‘migrants’. Lastly, it is not only ‘future EU migrants’, refugees, and terrorists who are spoken about in this context – it is virtually everyone who is not ‘the brightest and the best’ or ‘us’. A complementing argument is that people from across the world can come to another EU state, and then migrate to Britain under free movement rules, provided they acquired some form of residency for their first EU country of migration. One such example is mentioned in a leaflet from the EU Referendum Campaign: ‘Import millions more migrants from Africa and beyond. Once these migrants are established in any EU state, they will have the right to come to Britain.’

The dominance of arguments regarding the ‘future EU migration’ leaves little space to debate other types of non-EU migration. There are a few references to the Commonwealth throughout the campaign, in particular by UKIP and also Vote Leave who underlined that current immigration rules give EU nationals unfair advantages. For example, Steven Woolfe, ex-UKIP politician (now Conservative), is quoted in a UKIP leaflet supporting a single immigration system for all migrants regardless of origin. He chooses two specific nationalities to illustrate his policy point: ‘An appropriately qualified Indian doctor should have the same rights to apply to work in the UK as an appropriately qualified German doctor.’ This message is the foundation of the 2019 Conservative Party manifesto which proposes a ‘fairer’, ‘Australian-style points-based’ system.

4.1.3. The lack of migrant voices in the EU referendum campaign

So far, I showed how both EU and non-EU people are portrayed in EU referendum ephemera using frames to suit already established campaign
positions. Depending on the organisation or individual publishing the ephemera, different groups of migrants are praised, criticised, described, compared or judged. Overall, they are spoken about, not given a voice to speak for themselves. What is striking in the ephemera sample analysed is the lack of migrant voices in a debate about them, during a referendum campaign, the result of which also impacts migrants. None of the ‘experts’ and institutional voices, prominent especially in Remain materials, speak from a migrant perspective. Nor are the vox pops who are employed in some leaflets to illustrate core arguments. The only exception is the presence of British voices who benefit from freedom of movement and argue for its continuation. Although they are technically part of the migration debate, they are never described as migrants, unlike their EU counterparts exercising freedom of movement in the UK.

One example of a British person speaking for freedom of movement is included in a two-page item from the Liberal Democrats, titled ‘Focus on Haringey in the EU’, which quotes several voices from members of the public, making an overall positive case for freedom of movement, but only from a British perspective. The leaflet has a personalised feel as it includes photos of the people who express their opinion. The only extract about freedom of movement is presented under the headline ‘family’ and mentions potential visas that could make visiting family abroad more challenging (Image 17). It also provides insight into how nationality is used in the campaign. Alice, the member of the public quoted in the leaflet, benefited from freedom of movement herself and interestingly underlines how Cyprus, where she spent her teenage years, and where her parents are still living, ‘very much accepted [her] British nationality’. Alice therefore chooses to identify as British and suggests British migrants are welcomed in other European states. An interesting question would be to compare how British people are perceived when living in the EU27, compared to how certain types of EU27 migrants, in particular from some East European countries, are seen by the public in the UK.
4.2. Local level: how did residents and local campaigners react to the EU referendum campaign?

Some voices from British members of the public, either living in the UK or in another EU country (as shown in Image 17) were present in a limited number of referendum campaign materials (particularly from the Remain side), through the form of short quotes. However, more detailed views from the public at a local level were not included and the migrant responses to the issues at stake were completely overlooked. Therefore, this second part of the chapter complements the limited national-level picture constructed by the EU referendum ephemera analysis, considering both migrant (Romanian and Polish) and British responses to the campaign, at a local level. The ephemera analysis shows how the arguments about immigration tend to be made at the national level. This includes discussing various impacts of immigration at a national - as opposed to local - level, with a few exceptions of Vote Leave strategies, such as linking net
migration numbers to the number of inhabitants in certain UK cities, according to the area where the literature was distributed (as mentioned in Section 4.1.1). Therefore, the interview participants in Newham and Tendring add a much-needed local dimension: how was this national-level referendum campaign perceived locally in Newham and Tendring? British, Polish and Romanian residents were asked to comment during the interviews on three pieces of campaign literature, all containing arguments about immigration, which were common in the 2016 debate.

First, the official HM Government leaflet (Image 18), which was intended to reach every household in the UK, spoke about the current controls the UK has over immigration and David Cameron’s renegotiations with the EU to put a welfare cap on new EU arrivals should the UK vote to Remain. Although the official position was Remain, as Glencross (2016: 35) notes, the only ‘positives’ on the page on immigration were the fact the UK is not in the Schengen zone and that the European Arrest Warrant exists. Second, a leaflet from the official Leave campaign (Image 19), Vote Leave, was focussed on arguments about ‘the rest’, ‘future EU migration’ and more recent (East European) migrants. Third, a leaflet from the official Remain campaign (Image 20), Britain Stronger In, emphasised the benefits of freedom of movement for ‘us’, British people.

The arguments about ‘the brightest and the best’ EU migrants were also touched on during the interviews within the context of discussing Brexit, often unprompted, and are covered more extensively in Chapter 5 when analysing the meaning that ‘contribution’ has for participants when they express attitudes towards migration. The Vote Leave and Britain Stronger In leaflets chosen for participants do not only reflect the key arguments on both sides, but also represent some of the most widely distributed types of ephemera in Newham and Tendring, according to local campaigners consulted for this research. In addition to anonymous accounts of campaigners on the ground who spoke about local-level messaging, the local politicians interviewed for this study were also asked to comment on how salient immigration was while they campaigned in 2016 and the main arguments they heard when speaking to residents when canvassing.
The next sub-sections present the three main themes emerging from the interviews with residents, activists and politicians at the local level: mistrust, inability to relate to the national-level arguments (particularly on the Remain side), and the lack of a constructive debate on immigration felt at the local level, which served to reinforce existing stereotypes and limit the ability of voters to contextualise their (sometimes limited) direct experiences with immigration. I also show how campaigners on the ground adapted some of the national-level migration arguments to make them more meaningful and targeted to the local level, particularly on the Leave side, such as appealing to Commonwealth voters with arguments against the ‘unfair’ EU freedom of movement – arguably one of the keys to Leave’s success.

Overall, when reacting directly to the ephemera, most participants, on both sides of the referendum question, tended to be critical and retrospectively challenged statements made in the campaign, when interviewed two years after the referendum. Speaking about arguments they recall from the campaign, not a single participant mentioned a positive one about EU migrants in the UK; what they remembered was primarily migrants being portrayed as ‘taking jobs and benefits’ and as criminals. Perhaps not surprisingly, both when commenting on the campaign in general and the ephemera more specifically, the Polish and Romanian participants (the vast majority of whom could not vote in the 2016 referendum) had briefer or even no comments on some of the aspects of the campaign, with most pointing out they started following UK politics in more detail only after the referendum result was announced. This raises a question on the extent to which migrants’ reactions to the campaign would have been different if they were given a vote or at least a voice to speak about their perspectives during the 2016 campaign. Local politicians and activists, each listening to the opinions of hundreds, if not thousands, of local residents during the campaign, have very similar views as the ordinary residents interviewed. They have mixed opinions on how relevant migration was in the overall Brexit scheme, but they all observed similar attitudes locally and criticise the campaign in similar ways to the residents.
Controlling immigration and securing our borders

Securing our borders
The UK is not part of the EU’s border-free zone – we control our own borders which gives us the right to check everyone, including EU nationals, arriving from continental Europe.

Immigration
The Government has negotiated a deal that will make our benefits system less of a draw for EU citizens. In future, new EU migrants will not have full access to certain benefits until they have worked here for up to four years. The Government will have greater powers to take action where there is abuse of our immigration system. Some argue that leaving the EU would give us more freedom to limit immigration. But in return for the economic benefits of access to the EU’s Single Market, non-EU countries – such as Norway – have had to accept the right of all EU citizens to live and work in their country.

Keeping us safer
EU membership means UK police can use law enforcement intelligence from 27 EU countries, and will have access to fingerprint and DNA information.

EU cooperation makes it easier to keep criminals and terrorists out of the UK. Since 2004, using the European Arrest Warrant, over 1,000 suspects have faced justice in UK courts and over 7,000 have been extradited.
The European Union and Your Family: The Facts

We are sending this to you as someone who cares about the future of Britain and fair access to our public services. This document is to help you make your decision in the referendum on Thursday 23 June.

Fact: Britain’s official bill for EU membership is £19 billion per year or £350 million every week – the cost of a new hospital.

You have to decide whether what we get back from the EU is worth this.

Fact: Five new countries are in the queue to join the EU – Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey.

You have to decide whether this will help Britain, Europe, and fair access to public services.

The BBC says that Leave supporters are much more likely to vote than Remain supporters because few are happy with the EU. It is important that people vote in this crucial referendum whatever their view.

Imagine the question was the other way round: Imagine the vote on 23 June is whether we should join the EU – with the euro crisis, the migration crisis, and new countries like Turkey and Serbia being lined up as new member states.

Would you vote to join the European Union?

If not, Vote Leave on 23 June.
THE UK AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: THE FACTS

On 23 June we face a choice: is it safer to stay in the EU permanently or to vote ‘leave’ and take back control?
It’s a big decision – and there may not be another chance to vote for years. Here are some facts:

- Over a quarter of a million people migrate to the UK from the EU every year. This is the equivalent of a city the size of Newcastle every year. EU law means all members must accept ‘the free movement of people’. Many immigrants contribute to our society. They also have an impact on public services. Experts disagree on the overall effect.

- The EU is expanding to include: Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey. When we joined, there were just 9 member states. Now there are 28, the most recent being Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia. Five more countries are in the queue to join, including Turkey, totalling 89 million people. When they join, they will have the same rights as other member states.

- The European Union has changed enormously since the UK joined the ‘Common Market’ in 1973. The EU has taken control over more and more areas such as our borders, our public services, and VAT. The need to prop up the Euro means that more and more powers will be taken by the EU.

- EU law overrules UK law. This stops the British public from being able to vote out the politicians who make our laws. EU judges have already overruled British law on issues like counter-terrorism powers, immigration, VAT, and prisoner voting. The new deal David Cameron negotiated recently can be overturned by the European Court after our referendum.

- The EU costs us at least £350 million a week. That’s enough to build a new NHS hospital every week. We get less than half of this money back, and we have no control over how it’s spent – that’s decided by politicians and officials in Brussels, not by the people we elect.

- You don’t have to be a member of the EU to trade with it. Countries across the world trade with the EU without being members of it. Switzerland is not in the EU and exports even more to the EU than we do. Some big banks and multinationals think the EU is in their interests. Small and medium-sized businesses think differently. Only 6 per cent of UK firms export to the EU, yet all have to obey EU rules.

- While we’re in the EU, the UK isn’t allowed to negotiate our own trade deals. This means we currently have no trade deal with key allies such as Australia, New Zealand, or the USA – or important growing economies like India, China or Brazil. Instead of making a deal which is best for the UK, we have to wait for 27 other countries to agree it. Most small businesses say that Britain should take back the power to negotiate our own trade deals which we cannot do inside the EU.

- There are risks in voting either way. Experts, politicians, and businesses are divided. People have to weigh up the risks and potential benefits of each course of action for themselves.

Want to know more? Visit voteleavetakecontrol.org/choice or text FACTS to 88802 (standard charges apply).

(Image 19 cont.)
FOR EVERY £1 WE PUT INTO THE EU, WE GET ALMOST £10 BACK
through increased trade, investment, jobs, growth and lower prices
(Source: CBI, CER)

For UK families, UK businesses and UK workers, the benefits of being in Europe outweigh the costs.

BRITAIN STRONGER IN EUROPE

BRITAIN IS STRONGER, SAFER AND BETTER OFF IN EUROPE

Being in Europe is a great deal for people in Britain

© GREAT FOR FAMILIES with lower prices in our shops thanks to free trade – and maternity and paternity leave protected by EU law.

© GREAT FOR HOLIDAYMAKERS with EU action making it cheaper to use your phone abroad and driving down the cost of flights by 40% (Source: ONS).

© GREAT FOR WORKERS with 3 million UK jobs linked to our trade with the EU (Source: CER) and vital workers’ rights, like paid holiday leave protected by the EU.

© GREAT FOR SMALL BUSINESSES who are free to sell to 500 million people across the EU. 200,000 UK businesses trade with the EU, which creates more UK jobs (Source: EMCC).

© GREAT FOR PENSIONERS with the freedom to live, travel and retire abroad – and pensions are more valuable because our economy is stronger in Europe.

© GREAT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE who are free to travel, study and work abroad – and EU funding supports UK universities, helping students get on in life.

BRITAIN STRONGER IN EUROPE
4.2.1. ‘It’s just propaganda’: lack of quality information and mistrust

When reflecting on the campaign and especially when responding to the three leaflets shown, a common reaction was to point out inaccurate statements, figures, or even frame the entire campaign as simply ‘lies’. The mistrust in campaign material is contextualised within a wider theme of mistrust in politics and politicians, which most participants also feel, when asked later on in the interviews about their views on local politics (cf. Bevington et al., 2019). However, when referencing the arguments about immigration specifically, Leave supporters tended to be less critical than Remainers when commenting on the Vote Leave leaflet, whereas no Remain voter trusted the arguments made there.

This difference is most apparent when participants comment on the map included in the Vote Leave material: all Remainers immediately dismissed the suggestion that Turkey will join the EU, whereas some Leave voters identified that as a concern and, in a couple of cases, as one of the reasons they seriously took into account when deciding to vote to leave the EU. In contrast, both Leavers and Remainers were highly critical of the approach Remain took on the issue of immigration, namely ‘preaching to the converted’ by underlining the advantages freedom of movement has for British people, while failing to engage with arguments about EU migrants in the UK. When speaking about ‘others’, such as friends, family and neighbours who voted in the referendum, participants usually consider themselves more critical than those ‘others’, who they saw as taking campaigners’ arguments as fact.

Before detailing how participants reacted to specific leaflets, it is important to understand what people recalled from two years prior to the interviews. Before seeing the ephemera, local residents were asked which side they supported in 2016 and what they recalled on immigration from the campaign, regardless of whether or how they voted. A first point to be noted is that participants often pointed out the limited detail on the topic of immigration, despite it being central to the referendum debates. This already made some less likely to trust campaigners’ intentions. Raluca (Romanian, Newham, neutral on Brexit) speaks for many interviewees when she mentions there was ‘a lot of talk about
immigration without anyone actually stopping to discuss the details.’ Related to the lack of detail, a second point is that a number of participants observed few or no arguments about ‘actual EU migration’, which made them question the agenda of some campaigners who pushed content about refugees, non-EU migrants or a conflation of migrant categories through ‘immigration in general’ (particularly using a ‘scale of migration frame’, as shown in the ephemera analysis). When asked about their thoughts on the campaign, most participants firstly refer to negative arguments which are not about EU migrants to the UK and note the (in some respondents’ views, deliberate) ambiguity regarding the migrant category spoken about. They also point out how the negative messaging is easier to remember, especially after a longer period:

I remember the negative ones more easily, which were generally about the idea of lots and lots of people coming over here...there was a conflation particularly in the numbers of migration and a lack of understanding of the difference between migrants coming here through freedom of movement in the EU versus asylum seekers and migrants from non-EU countries. (Matt, British, Newham, Remain)

Most participants reference Leave arguments about immigration, often those made by specific politicians, most notably Nigel Farage, who was the face of the Leave.EU pro-Brexit campaign. Aside from a ‘scale of migration’ frame without being specific about the type of migrant in question, the arguments participants remembered also fell within the labour and social security frame, notably about migrants not ‘contributing’ and abusing the welfare system, and also security, especially when in reference to refugees. The latter frame was more frequently mentioned by Tendring participants, such as Theresa (British, Remain), who considered the negative arguments about refugees to be central to the campaign: ‘One word: “rapefugees”. That’s all we heard, people speaking about refugees coming over raping our women.’

Some participants pointed out that ambiguity, lack of detail and conflating refugees with other migrants in some cases were deliberate strategies used to capitalise on the limited knowledge voters have on immigration. Instead of providing quality information on the ‘full picture’ by discussing the various impacts of immigration, campaigners on both sides were generally seen as filling in the
gaps in voters’ knowledge with selective arguments which suited their already decided ‘party line’ on migration. Being aware of this strategy also made participants express mistrust, such as seen in Claudia’s (Romanian, Tendring, Remain) one and only brief comment about the Vote Leave leaflet: ‘This is bad propaganda and first of all, it misinforms a lot of people who do not have a clue about geography. This [leaflet] is simply made for who? For Nigel’s [Nigel Farage] people.’

Lack of detail, inaccuracies, conflation of migrant categories and taking advantage of limited public knowledge were general points made about the campaign, with the majority of participants criticising both sides of the debate. There were also specific issues pointed out for Leave and Remain when interviewees described the arguments as ‘lies’ or expressed some suspicion towards them. On the Leave side, particularly coming from Remain participants, the reaction focussed more specifically around the phrase ‘uncontrolled immigration’. Most Remainers (and a couple of Leave supporters) explain why they consider that phrase to be inaccurate. In contrast, most Leavers interviewed believed EU migration is uncontrolled, indicating the fact there is no cap or target being put on the number of EU migrants allowed to stay in the UK. Perhaps most interestingly and relevant to shaping attitudes are the different reactions when one defines ‘EU migration’, as opposed to ‘uncontrolled EU migration’, which some participants were asked as a follow-up question. Louise’s responses are an example of how adding the word ‘uncontrolled’ to ‘EU migration’ can completely change the sentiment and understanding of EU migration, shifting from a neutral-positive depiction to a negative visual representation:

Alexandra: How would you define ‘EU migration’?

Louise: Yeah, just people moving between anywhere, so between all of Europe, so necessarily just coming over here, but just moving around, so people moving from France to Spain or Spain to England or England to Ireland to anywhere, Ireland, Southern Ireland as well, just moving around and people moving around, really.

Alexandra: And what does ‘uncontrolled EU migration’ mean?
Louise: To me, it’s like, oh my God, there’s people just running through Heathrow and Gatwick with their suitcases, or just getting off of boats or just swimming and people hanging under planes, because it just gives you that thought of...this is people, isn’t there, just everyone. And you know, when you go to Frinton, you won’t see one person, because there’s nobody, and you know, you can stand on the green in Frinton and look out and you’re looking over the North Sea, which, you know, people can get on a boat from, you know, somewhere in Europe, and come over, but they’re not doing that, you know, but ‘uncontrolled’, in my brain, it’s like, oh my God, that’s it, we’re a little island, we’re gonna collapse, oh my God, what’s gonna happen? It gives you that kind of instant thought of everything is out of control when... it’s just, oh my God, we’re sinking! (British, Tendring, Remain)

It is not only Remainers who are critical of the Leave campaign and the terminology used to describe EU migration. A few Leave voters also mention mistrust in the Leave campaign, but they tend to frame it as mistrust in politicians and political campaigns in general when they speak about migration, rather than commenting on specific words or arguments used in the campaign materials. For instance, John (British, Tendring, Leave) questions whether politicians would keep their promises, even though he supports Leave’s call to ‘control’ migration:

How can I say this, basically, to me, I put this even for UKIP, even [if] I’m a UKIP supporter, to me, whatever this is, it’s just propaganda, to me, I don’t care what party it is [...] I’ve got slightly more trust in UKIP [...] but to me [...] basically actions speak louder than words so, at the end of the day, all these politicians, they want your vote, they tell you what they want you to know, but at the end of the day, they go on... no matter what’s written on this [leaflet].

The Remain campaign was also considered untrustworthy or misleading by many participants. Firstly, the near silence on the topic of EU migration was seen by some as equal to being dishonest. Remain supporters were highly critical of their side not engaging with the ‘lies’ promoted by Leave and often condemned Remain’s ‘apologetic’ attitude on migration or ‘defensive language’, choosing to mention only ‘the brightest and the best’ migrants or British people abroad. Not being part of the debate on ‘the rest’ of migrants was sometimes seen by interviewees as harmful as promoting misinformation. The silence on the issue was perceived to allow Leave’s arguments to set the agenda, go unchallenged and persuade voters with inaccurate information on migration.

The extent to which respondents challenged what they thought of as ‘lies’ when reading the campaign materials depended on their personal experiences with
migrants, expressed through anecdotal evidence (discussed at length in the context of their attitudes towards migrants in Chapter 7). For example, some participants were quick to criticise the map in the *Vote Leave* leaflet, saying that the argument about future Turkish migration is misleading. This criticism was rarely backed with factual evidence. Anecdotal insight was used instead, for instance by Lorna:

> So, we have Turkish friends who have said to me, you know, really clearly, there is no way that Turkey would join the EU and that they’re not ready and why they shouldn’t. So, you know, I knew that that wasn’t going to happen, I think it’s a misleading document and does not reflect the facts. (British, Newham, Remain)

To contrast to Lorna’s anecdotal evidence from Turkish friends, consider Dean’s reaction to the same *Vote Leave* map. He believed the arguments are accurate and that millions of Turks would come to the UK for economic reasons and have a negative impact. His reaction is also corroborated with anecdotal evidence, in a similar way to Lorna:

> I know someone who works for a Turk and they’re all about money you know, they put money before a lot of things yeah, like me, I put my family and like, my loyalties go well before money…money is just an object, do you know what I mean, whether I got it or not … yeah so, this whole number to me, it’s all about money, 76 million [Turks], do you know what I mean? (British, Tendring, Leave)

Lorna rejected *Vote Leave*’s claim about migration from Turkey based on what she heard from a Turkish friend, whereas Dean accepted the same argument referencing his mediated contact with someone who works for a Turkish person. These are just two examples showing how arguments made at the national level, to appeal to a national audience, are given meaning within local contexts. However, not many arguments, and especially on the Remain side, could relate to residents on a personal level and locally. A second main theme that transpired from the data was the inability of the campaign to speak in a relevant way to the ‘average voter’ on EU freedom of movement.
4.2.2. ‘The reality for them is they don’t want to live abroad’: inability to relate on a personal level and limited local appeal

When commenting on the three leaflets shown or on the EU referendum campaign more broadly, a common theme was that the campaign did not speak for local residents. First, participants commented on how arguments on the topic of migration did not relate to their personal experiences. The most frequent criticisms revolved around how the Remain campaign’s positive arguments about the benefits of freedom of movement for British people were not meaningful at an individual level for those who did not take advantage of those rights due to various reasons. In contrast, those who used the benefits of freedom of movement themselves, for instance working and studying abroad, or had close relatives living in EU countries, gave freedom of movement as one of the reasons why remaining in the EU was their preferred referendum outcome.

Second, some participants commented on the relevance of the campaign at the local level, outlining how the arguments did not fit with their local experiences or that they could not see similar impacts of immigration portrayed in the materials in their local areas. The Leave campaign was considered more successful in appealing locally as it adapted some arguments on migration to the location characteristics, such as those targeted to voters with a non-EU migrant background, whose share of the Newham population is higher than that of EU migrants. Whether Leave or Remain failed to engage people or were successful in motivating them to vote one way or another depended on both the form and the substance of their arguments and campaign materials.

Before reading into the substance of the arguments, the form is relevant: the most effective ephemera were those including stories that evoke emotions, using appealing formats and colours, rather than a dull presentation of facts. Among the three leaflets that participants commented on, Vote Leave won the competition on the most appealing form. A majority of participants criticised the shortage of stories in Remain material, including the lack of EU migrant voices, which could have been used to counter some of the negative arguments promoted by Leave. Remain’s messages on migration, including the
Government’s official leaflet, were perceived as too complex, thus reducing the ability of some voters to pay attention in the first place, let alone relate to them. The immediate reaction James has when comparing the Government’s leaflet with that of Vote Leave is illustrative in this sense:

I remember very vaguely reading it [...] but to be honest, if you just look at both of them, one of them is way more exciting to look at [...] One of them [ha]’s got pictures, numbers [...] the facts, big numbers, people love a good big number, whereas the other one is more complicated because England’s relationship [...] to the EU, is extremely complicated and to explain that to the layman is very difficult, right? Whereas to go, “fuck the EU, they take our money, they let all immigrants in”, that’s much easier, isn’t it? That’s a very easy argument to make, regardless of whether it’s true or not, it’s very easy. (British, Tendring, Remain)

Some participants who campaigned for Remain in 2016 were even more critical of the campaign’s approach than those who didn’t, outlining the problematic overly complex arguments which did not communicate to voters as expected. For instance, Carol, a vocal pro-European campaigner since the EU’s beginning, described the approach of her local group, which did not take into account her advice to produce materials which related to ordinary voters’ everyday experiences:

I volunteered to join [...] a meeting to produce material and everything he was coming up with was the sort of things that you would find written in The Economist or something like that, totally inappropriate. And [I] just could not get him to see that you had to produce material that would be at the right level. And I think this was the case with a lot of the Remainers, totally incapable of putting out arguments that [...] people would understand and take on board. [...] I think because a lot of the people who go to these organisations actually, because of their education and their experiences, they don’t know how to put across messages to people who haven’t had those levels of education and experiences.

The Remain campaign was usually described as ‘very technical’, ‘full of facts and figures’ and there was a general consensus among participants that ‘when it comes to elections and referendums that’s not what wins, it’s the emotional messaging’ (Nancy, British, Newham, Remain). This ‘emotional messaging’ is created by constructing stories voters can relate to, and, in contrast to Leave, Remain was perceived as lacking storytelling techniques, such as having migrants speak for themselves about their lives in the UK or presenting the impact
of migration for the local level that voters can relate to. A number of participants observed the emergence of more personalised stories on migration in the media after the referendum took place and some of them linked them to the recent softening in attitudes towards immigration (Blinder and Richards, 2018). The top three reasons for explaining this positive shift in attitudes towards immigration in the UK have been identified by polling data as: more frequent discussions of the ‘contribution’ of migrants to the UK, personally knowing more migrants at work or socially (particularly for Remain voters) and a belief that fewer migrants will come to the UK post-Brexit, the latter being the most relevant for Leave voters whose views have become more positive (Ipsos MORI, 2019a). Fewer negative stories about migrants post-referendum also features among the top five reasons for changing attitudes.

In the referendum campaign, the ‘stories’ about migrants were mostly negative and predominantly found on the Leave side. Participants remembered stories more than facts and numbers. Stories are described as ‘easy to remember if you don’t know the facts’ (Bill, British, Newham, Remain) and are considered key to persuading voters:

[Remain] they never had the stories, but Leave had the stories, like this guy we were taking about, “oh, I can’t get the workers in”, and I think it was easier for them to have these stories [...] but now, there are stories that are emerging now, that probably would have an impact on the mindset, but they were not there pre-Brexit, or there were there, but nobody actually thought about… they [Remain] were running a very conventional campaign. (David, British, Newham, Remain)

In addition to stories appealing to strong emotions, the presentation of the ephemera was important to whether respondents even picked up the leaflets to read them. In almost every interview, the Government’s official leaflet is described as ‘boring’, ‘awfully boring’, ‘plain text’ or a similar phrase and is discussed in contrast with the Vote Leave leaflet which is seen as inviting for readers to engage with. A number of participants do not recall receiving the Government’s leaflet, but all remember the Vote Leave leaflets. Interestingly, all five interviewees from Jaywick (in Tendring) insisted they never received the Government’s leaflet, which they would have considered useful in order to
become informed. For instance, Tom (Tendring, British, Remain), interviewed at a busy pub, asked everyone around us if they received the Government’s leaflet while showing it to them, then returned to the interview table to comment: ‘they’re from London, we’re from Clacton, he’s in Dagenham, so you’ve got from here, halfway, and in London and no one got [the leaflet].’ The Government’s leaflet also received a fair amount of criticism from the Romanian and Polish participants, who were less vocal on this topic in general. Ionel (Romanian, Newham, Remain), describes it as a ‘very British material’, by which he means ‘it says a lot, but very little at the same time.’

The use of colours and visuals is also remarked on when participants react to the materials, especially in the context of the *Vote Leave* map. Matt, who works as a marketer, recognises the effective techniques:

> The message from the map is, “people you don’t like are going to come to your country”. *It's deliberately in red, in orange, which are colours that make it seem dangerous.* [...] I think that Remain had an issue here, because I think it is very easy to paint an emotional picture that says, “the hoards are up your door”, with that horrendous image that was used by UKIP. (British, Newham, Remain)

Colours were also associated with UK political parties (Labour and Conservative) by a few participants, such as Lyn (British, Tendring, Remain) who commented that Leave’s red colour scheme appealed to some neighbours in her working-class area, who changed their usual red Labour garden posters with *Vote Leave* ones during the referendum campaign.

While the form of the campaign materials is essential as a first step to engage voters, once the leaflet is noticed, the substance of the argument becomes relevant. The inability to relate to the actual arguments about EU migration was central when participants reacted to the leaflets. First, they did not relate to personal experience; the most frequent example was how for some British people, Remain’s key argument about the benefits freedom of movement has for ‘us’ was simply irrelevant. The main point in the *Britain Stronger In* leaflet was that British pensioners, young people and holidaymakers benefit from EU freedom of movement. Leave supporters were quick to explain why these
arguments were ineffective to bring undecided voters over to the Remain camp or to change the minds of those who planned to vote Leave. Ron, a British resident who campaigned for Leave in Newham, describes why he thinks the argument did not resonate with pensioners and holidaymakers:

The problem is there are not that many people here whose dream is retiring to the south of France. And holidaymakers, well, you look at the travel agents around here, their main destinations are not within Europe so arguments that basically boil down to “we’ve removed all these barriers in Europe” just don’t have as much impact on people who are used to go beyond Europe and don’t see that.

This shortfall in Remain’s position was also seen by most Remainers, such as James, whose family from Clacton predominately voted to leave: ‘the reality for them is that they don’t want to live abroad. […] like my dad, like my family and like the people I know, they don’t wanna.’

For the same reason, Remain’s main argument on freedom of movement does not appeal to some of their own supporters, such as Susan, a British Remain voter in Tendring, who remembers the UK before it joined the EEA, and is confident that Brexit would have no impact on retiring abroad: ‘See, I don’t know a time when that wasn’t the case anyway, I don’t remember a time when it was any different, when a pensioner couldn’t live abroad.’ Remain’s argument about the benefits for ‘us’, British people, also received critique from younger participants from less advantaged socio-economic backgrounds, such as James (British, Tendring, Remain), who saw it as ‘an argument from a place of privilege’ or Jo (British, Newham, Remain), who described Remain’s framing as ‘quite sort of elitist’, then explained that ‘if you’re from a middle class family, it’s great, you go on holidays, maybe you run a small business, you know, all this kind of stuff appeals to people who got it fairly good already.’

The only participants who spoke positively about Remain’s arguments on freedom of movement were some of those directly impacted by it or who had close family members who have benefitted, such as Nick (British, Newham, Remain) who travels frequently in the EU for work and plans to move abroad, Bill (British, Newham, Remain), who planned to work abroad (and since the interview
in 2018, has already moved) or Jane (British, Tendring, Remain), whose children are currently studying in another EU country. This reflects previous research showing that greater exposure working, living and travelling abroad shapes more positive attitudes towards migration. For instance, areas where fewer people own a passport tend to have a higher share of Leave voters, leading researchers to hypothesise that not travelling recently correlates with hostility towards other cultures (Delanty, 2017: 117).

While arguments about freedom of movement not relating to personal situations were usually discussed in the context of the Remain leaflet, there were some mentions of how the more negative Leave arguments about EU migrants coming to the UK did not relate to participants’ own positive experiences with migrants, or, less often, the reverse scenario. The arguments specifically about EU migrants were also sometimes criticised for not including any EU migrant voices. For instance, Lorna (British, Newham, Remain) describes Leave as ‘a nasty campaign’ where migration was ‘used as a weapon, a scare tactic, something to frighten people’ and consequently ‘didn’t seem to resonate with my own experience with migration at all.’

Nevertheless, when participants spoke about EU migrants to the UK, the inability to relate to the campaign material was about the difficulty in ‘translating’ the impact of migration at the local level. In the rare cases when positive impacts were mentioned in the campaign, such as those brought by ‘the brightest and the best’ EU doctors and nurses, or the fiscal contribution of the ‘highly skilled’, some participants commented on how this ‘contribution’ was not necessarily seen at the local level, in either Tendring and Newham, which are not particularly affluent areas. Cllr Everett points out how in Tendring, even when voters are aware of the low EU migration in the area, they could see a negative national-level ‘knock on effect’ of migration locally. The impact of austerity is mentioned in this context. In other words, even if some residents accepted that EU migrants bring a net contribution nationally, they struggled to see how these extra taxes benefit their local communities:
Obviously, we were in a climate of austerity, and still are, and people weren't seeing these benefits. They’re saying “oh it’s great for your family, it’s great for your job”, but there’s high unemployment, people on zero hours contracts, lots of child poverty in the country and so the environment that they’re in, they are looking for something to blame [...] therefore they create a scapegoat which tends to be immigrants and foreign people at the moment, so people buy into that. Whereas you can say, “oh the EU would be so marvellous for you”, but since we’re already in it and they haven’t seen those benefits at the moment, people aren’t having a nice time, if you haven’t got a job, you know, then you’re not gonna believe it, you’re not gonna think “oh wow, it’s [EU] doing amazing for me.” (Diana, British, Newham, Remain)

In contrast to Remain’s inability to relate on the freedom of movement arguments, the Leave campaign was seen as more effective locally. A particularly interesting narrative emerged in Newham, where residents, campaigners and politicians spoke about the tensions between EU and non-EU migrant groups. Several participants mentioned how arguments on EU migration were targeted to Commonwealth residents, most of whom could vote in the EU referendum, unlike EU migrants. As Newham has larger than national average groups of both non-EU and EU migrants, these arguments were more heartfelt at the local level. This type of messaging related to non-EU migrants’ personal experiences and struggles with the UK immigration system, portraying Leave as a solution for a fairer immigration system for all. Jack, a Newham British Remain voter with a Commonwealth background, recalls the arguments that persuaded some of his Leave-voting friends:

[The reason] they were for… not necessarily against EU migration, but they were more for Brexit, is because they thought that if they was to stop EU migration, they will increase migration from India, so I said to them, “really? You really believe that?” And apparently, they have been speaking to some people within the Conservative Leave campaign saying that we value those people more than we do those from the EU, so we will make migration fair, okay, so then, what? A year later, “do you still believe that?” “No.” “You voted Leave?” “Yeah.” “So, you think you got it wrong?” “Nah, nah, nah.”

All local councillors and the MP interviewed in Newham were familiar with these arguments on the doorstep. For instance, Cllr Beckles in Newham comments on how immigration was a common issue for South-Asian voters in his ward, who were dissatisfied about the ‘preferential treatment’ that EU migrants receive. Activists for Vote Leave in Newham also confirmed the success of these arguments, mirroring previous research on ethnic minority voters (Abbasi, 2016;
For instance, Daniel explains how initial campaigning in the area revealed a sense of unfairness felt by non-EU migrants, particularly directed towards recent East European arrivals. These anecdotes, collected on the doorstep in the first stages of the campaign, informed a more strategic approach later, aiming to mobilise ethnic minority voters to vote Leave, by promising a fairer system for them and their families. Only 52.8% of voters in Newham opted for Remain, which was considered a success by London Leave campaigners, particularly for a borough where only one in four residents identify as white British.

The winning message, in Daniel’s experience, was ‘the EU migration system is fundamentally unfair on people with Commonwealth background’. This even helped to bring together a group of local activists with Commonwealth heritage, many of whom had not been involved in politics before. Daniel concludes that the success of the campaign he led in Newham was a combination of ‘perceived unfairness about the way the EU discriminated Commonwealth citizens’, for ethnic minority voters, while for white working class voters, it was more about ‘the lack of integration’, but ‘looking more at, ironically, Muslims from Bangladesh wearing headscarves, as opposed to people from Romania, because they’re just more visible.’ For both target groups, the perceived impact at a personal and local level made the difference, rather than national-level arguments. Politicians from different parties noticed these trends in Newham, including East Ham MP Stephen Timms who eloquently concluded that he ‘heard from Asians [about East Europeans] exactly what English people said about them thirty years ago.’ The argument about the unfair migration system that ‘the rest’ of EU migrants, particularly East Europeans, take advantage of, related to individual voters’ experiences and appealed to local level demographics. In general, participants see the campaign as merely legitimising already existing attitudes or amplifying them. Overall, with a few exceptions, the local level picture is of a limited and limiting debate on immigration, unlikely to fundamentally change people’s already shaped attitudes on immigration.
4.2.3. **The absence of a constructive debate on EU migration: legitimising already existing attitudes?**

The five participants in Jaywick who claimed they did not receive the Government’s leaflet also remarked there were no politicians knocking on their doors during the campaign. Most participants had little or no discussion on immigration with local politicians during the campaign, while at the same time some politicians confessed to deliberately avoiding engagement with this topic. With a few exceptions, the polarised, narrow arguments from the campaign, usually failing to relate to personal and local experiences, were therefore unlikely to be challenged or discussed in local contexts with politicians. Participants’ comments on the EU referendum campaign opened a ‘chicken and egg’ debate: did the campaign simply reproduce the opinions on migration that people already had or was the campaign rather an opportunity to influence and potentially change people’s existing attitudes towards migration?

Although some participants believed the campaign constructed migrants as scapegoats for various issues, most portrayed it as simply legitimising already existing negative views towards migration and exploiting those for campaigners’ purposes. For instance, Ben (British, Newham, Remain) believes that ‘the whole reason that those [Leave] campaigns were hitting on migration was because the wave of migrants from the new countries, 2004-2007 onwards.’ Ben was unsurprised that negative arguments about ‘the rest’ in the ephemera often referred to East European migrants – for him, the campaign merely responded to and reinforced some existing negative views towards this group. Michael (British, Tendring, Remain) is even more specific: ‘It kinda felt like the message […] from the Leave campaign was that Polish people were taking the jobs and Romanian people were untrustworthy, […] and that Romanian people were coming over to use our health services […] but there was no evidence to support these things.’

In Chapter 5, an analysis of the ‘ethnic hierarchies’ that participants construct in the interviews show similar stereotypes about Poles and Romanians as the ones referred to by Michael in this quote. Moreover, some participants commented that the Leave arguments towards migration played on existing anti-Muslim
sentiments. For instance, Ionel (Romanian, Newham, Remain), commenting on Leave’s argument about ‘future EU migration’ from Turkey, makes the following observation: ‘Well, probably they wanted to say, look, all those are Muslims, you know […] they tried something based on religion.’ To compare, Vlad (Romanian, Tendring, neutral on Brexit), agrees with this argument, saying that it ‘does not seem ok’ for him that refugees are coming and suggests Islam is the problematic aspect.

Politicians campaigning locally concur with the view that the 2016 campaign, on both sides, was primarily built on existing views and stereotypes, using those for the campaigns’ own ends, rather than encouraging voters to learn more about immigration and challenge some of their views. Politicians had different assessments on how salient immigration was in the local-level campaigns, but they agreed on the dominant narratives. In Newham, it was the perceived unfairness of freedom of movement for non-EU migrants, whereas in Tendring, most politicians mention concerns about non-EU migration or Muslims in particular articulated on the doorstep when being explicit about their wish to control immigration. However, Cllr Miles in Tendring observed that Romanian migration ‘was as much of a concern as Muslims’ for some voters. In both locations, Leave set the agenda on immigration and there was little dialogue among the different campaigns or between voters with different political preferences.

Insufficient effort was made to broaden the debate and make it more inclusive of views outside someone’s comfort zone, including migrant voices. On the contrary, migration was often strategically avoided as a topic, as it was well known to trigger heated debates. To illustrate, in a similar way to other pro-Remain politicians, Clacton parliamentary candidate Callum Robertson, a passionate Remain campaigner, focussed his efforts making the positive case for migration in a nearby area with more sympathetic attitudes towards immigration than in Clacton, where Remain was considered highly unlikely to succeed. Locally in Tendring, he prioritised linking arguments to local issues which were not migration-related, to unite voters, rather than having divisive conversations. Reflecting on the campaign, some of the local councillors interviewed accepted
that more could have been done to make an alternative positive argument on migration. This was not prioritised partly because Remain was confident of winning and migration was a ‘dangerous territory’ to go in, particularly for those trying to connect their political parties with both Leave and Remain voters.

Thus, local elected politicians were not setting the tone or steering the debate, but rather repeated the Leave and Remain campaign arguments (depending on which side they were on) or avoided speaking about migration altogether, prioritising issues seen as less sensitive. The picture emerging locally was Remain speaking almost exclusively about ‘us’ and consequently having an emotional rapport with a narrow range of voters, while Leave pushed stronger messages about ‘the rest’, better targeted at the local level. Meanwhile, local politicians were not leading genuine conversations on this issue, residents’ views were divided, and the much needed local space to have a meaningful debate on migration was nowhere to be seen, giving way to campaign soundbites and often limited personal experiences to decide whether one sided with Leave or Remain on this issue.

4.3. Conclusion

The findings based on the EU referendum ephemera collections illustrate how campaigners cherry-pick types of migrants to suit already decided lines of argument. This practice creates a selective debate, which is unfair for the migrant population, who do not have much of a say in the actual campaign material. The types of migrants spoken about can be grouped into three categories. The first one is ‘us’, namely British-born people. Unlike for EU citizens in the UK, there is a visible positive case for British people to work, study, live, retire in the EU, including by the Britain Stronger In campaign (who were virtually silent about EU citizens). Moreover, British people living in EU countries are depicted as net contributors (as opposed to the ‘freeloaders’ not ‘contributing’ to the UK, as some migrants are portrayed).

The second category is about ‘desirable’ migrants, those who ‘contribute’ and are part of the ‘community’. For Remain materials, they are ‘the brightest and the
best' EU students and NHS workers needed in the economy. From a Leave perspective, a desirable form of migration is represented by highly skilled Commonwealth people, who should be given equal rights to EU migrants, if not prioritised, due to their closer ‘cultural links’ to the UK. As in the case of British people in the EU27, ephemera inform EU migrants living in the UK that they could continue their lives as before after Brexit. At the time of writing, EU migrants need to make an application for the EU Settlement Scheme (UK Government Website, 2019) to continue living in the UK, while British people in other EU states have been offered even less certainty about their future, with each member state deciding on how to regularise their status. The third and last category of people in the ephemera is ‘the rest’, including all ‘undesirable’ flows of people, such as ‘low skilled East Europeans’ or refugees. In contrast to arguments about highly skilled EU doctors and nurses, when speaking about the lower skilled, ‘less desirable’ migrants, ethnic and national categories become relevant in the debate.

Unlike ‘the brightest and the best’ praised by some Remain campaigns, ‘the rest’ are left to be criticised in their adversaries’ materials. ‘The rest’ represents the ‘millions’ of people who either pose a threat to the labour market, public services (such as the ‘poor’ EU migrants) or state security (such as refugees who are seen to abuse EU freedom of movement rules). Depending on the agenda of each campaign organisation, who is included in ‘the brightest and the best’ or ‘the rest’ categories can vary (albeit there are trends). The ephemera analysis shows the lack of a positive case for freedom of movement as a two-way street, and an absence of EU migrant voices in a debate primarily about them. Freedom of movement was at best seen as a one-way street, benefitting those British people who could afford to take advantage of it, who were already among the most likely to vote Remain.

After analysing the national-level arguments about migration, the next question raised in this chapter was how members of the public, both British and migrants, reflect on these campaign materials after the referendum took place and whether their attitudes towards migration correspond to the frames used in this form of political communication. British, Polish and Romanian respondents’ comments
on three ephemera items (Government’s leaflet, *Vote Leave* and *Britain Stronger In*) and their recollection on migration arguments from 2016, reveal three main themes: mistrust and limited quality information, inability to relate to personal or local experiences, and the absence of a meaningful debate on migration.

First, most people were critical of both campaigns, while being generally mistrusting towards politicians. Participants primarily recall the negative arguments about ‘the rest’ and point out what they think of as ‘lies’ about EU migration, such as it being framed as ‘uncontrolled’ by the Leave campaign. Whether they trust a campaign or argument is often based on local-level anecdotal evidence, such as illustrated by Lorna and Dean’s contrasting reactions to the *Vote Leave* argument about Turkish migrants. While the mistrust mainly comes from Remainers commenting on Leave arguments about ‘the rest’, the Remain campaign is criticised for its inability to relate to many local residents’ personal experiences and the local-level characteristics more broadly. The benefits of freedom of movement for British people were not necessarily meaningful for those who did not take direct advantage or by those who believed those benefits would continue regardless of the referendum result, as opposed to those who did study or work abroad or had close family who did so.

Similarly, the few positive arguments about ‘the brightest and the best’ were easy to overlook in the context of a local level perceived as negatively impacted by austerity. The economic ‘contribution’ of EU migration was perhaps not as visible in Newham and Tendring, particularly in some of their most deprived neighbourhoods, were some of the participants lived. Mistrust, limited information and inability to relate, in addition to politicians’ reactive, rather than proactive, approach to discussing migration, created a limited debate, which curtailed the ability of residents to engage with each other and to challenge their own or others’ attitudes. Romanian and Polish interviewees had little to comment on the campaign, compared to British respondents who were usually extremely vocal and critical of the campaign, on both sides. This may be due to the fact EU migrants did not have a vote in the referendum or that they felt the debate was not for them, influenced by the absence of migrant voices in the campaign materials.
The EU referendum created a narrative of desirable and undesirable EU migrants. Those who ‘contribute’ and integrate in the ‘community’ - ‘the brightest and the best’ - are welcome, whereas ‘the rest' need to be controlled. The next two chapters will explore the four main themes based on in-depth qualitative interviews, from the perspective of Newham and Tendring participants: contribution and community in Chapter 5, and control and certainty in Chapter 6. The arguments on EU migration were dominated by the Leave campaign, with Remain almost avoiding the topic. These campaign dynamics did not enable meaningful debates on immigration, which many interviewees regret, when reflecting on the campaign two years later. The direct experiences people had with migrants were mediated through the campaign and other media narratives, but they were not part of an open conversation. This often led to generalisations and rigid community narratives, which Chapter 7 will explore in detail, while bringing together the four themes – contribution, control, community and certainty – in answering the central question of this thesis: how are attitudes towards EU migrants shaped at the local level in the context of Brexit?
Chapter 5. ‘As long as they contribute’: contribution and community in attitudes towards EU migrants\textsuperscript{16}

British, Romanian and Polish participants’ attitudes towards EU migrants are structured around four main themes: contribution, community, control and certainty. This chapter analyses the former two, as illustrated in Figure 3. To be seen as part of the local community, migrants need to be considered as contributors. This key concept of ‘contribution’ takes various subjective meanings in the construction of attitudes towards migration. While the literature focuses either on ‘skill hierarchies’ or ‘ethnic hierarchies’ of migrants, I show how perceived skill level and nationality (or region of origin) intersect when interviewees describe their views towards migrants. Contribution is primarily seen through a ‘common sense fiscal lens’ (Rutter and Carter, 2018) and ‘low skilled’ often becomes a euphemism for ‘East European’. Moreover, migrants’ experiences of downskilling call for a more critical use of the term ‘low skilled migration’ in policymaking. At the same time, many East Europeans can be considered well-integrated into the UK labour market. But this ‘economic integration’ is usually not sufficient for migrants to be seen as contributing to the community. Therefore, the second part of this chapter looks at the meaning of ‘contribution’ beyond its economic framing, illustrating how ethnic and national hierarchies of EU migrants are constructed depending on which migrants are visible at the local level.

\textsuperscript{16} Some arguments in this chapter, particularly on participants’ views towards low skilled migrants, have been published by the author before being re-written for this thesis chapter (Bulat, 2019).
5.1. ‘As long as they pay tax’: migrants as taxpayers

‘How should migration look like after Brexit?’, I asked Emily, a British Leave voter in Newham. ‘It’s tighter controls, you know, it’s not so much keeping everyone out, it’s just letting people in who are going to contribute.’ Emily’s stance is rather common and goes beyond Leave/Remain divides or political party support. ‘I don’t care where anybody comes from if they’re willing to work and contribute’ says Susan, a British Remain voter in Tendring. The narrative of ‘contribution’ is by far the most frequent in the interview data. But what does ‘contribution’ mean for participants? Is migrants’ economic contribution enough for them to be accepted in the community? As shown in Chapter 4, economic arguments about migration were made at the national level during the EU referendum campaign, with limited ability to connect to people’s personal experiences at the local level. In the interviews, participants also tend to frame economic arguments at a national level, as opposed to when they employ an identity-based framing, which is usually rooted in their local-level experiences. The main type of ‘contributions’
discussed have an economic angle. ‘Desirable’ EU migrants are those who are perceived to make a net fiscal contribution, or at least are self-sufficient.

The idea of migrant ‘contribution’ is central in current policy debates in the Brexit context and it is almost always defined in economic terms. Both the current Johnson Government and the previous May Government advocated for a ‘skills-based’ migration system after Brexit. According to the 2018 Immigration White Paper (HM Government, 2018) and the Conservative party manifesto underpinning Johnson’s majority following the 2019 election (Conservative and Unionist Party, 2019: 20), a post-Brexit system welcomes highly skilled migrants. In other words, ‘the brightest and the best’ praised in the 2016 EU referendum ephemera are desirable, while ‘the rest’, low skilled migrants, will be subject to more restrictive immigration controls. A controversial £30,000 salary threshold proposed to differentiate between highly and low skilled migrants was subject to extensive debate in political, policy and academic circles in 2018. This threshold represents, on average, the earnings level at which migrants ‘contribute’ more in tax than they could ‘take out’ in public services. The new immigration system is framed as responding to voters’ concerns, yet public engagement on this topic has been limited, with some notable exceptions (Rutter and Carter, 2018). The studies showing public preference towards highly over low skilled migration in the UK (e.g. Katwala et al., 2017: 20; Kaur-Ballagan, 2017) contain little or no analysis of what the public actually understand by ‘low skilled’ migrants.

Despite little qualitative evidence on public support of specific policies, the UK’s post-Brexit points-based immigration system, announced in February 2020, is centred around salary and skills thresholds. Migrants get points according to the salary they earn, the level of education and their annual income for the job offer they have to have before applying to come to the UK. They need to accumulate 70 points to apply for a visa. There are 0 points between £20,480 - £23,039, 10 points between £23,040 and £25,590 and 20 points for the ‘highly skilled’ defined as earning over £25,600 a year. Throughout the policy paper, EU migrants are described as ‘stock’ and ‘supply’ which are used to fill in labour shortages or highly skilled work. The aim of this system focussed on ‘highly skilled migrants’ is, as set out on the first page, ending the ‘reliance on cheap labour from Europe’
(HM Government, 2020a). While acknowledging employers’ concerns on filling labour shortages, the policy is clear: they will need to ‘adjust’.

Among my interviewees, those with more negative views towards migrants tend to see ‘contribution’ in confined fiscal terms, while those with more positive views regard ‘contribution’ as beyond economic (although the economic component is important for the majority). The interview transcript codebook (see Appendix Error! Reference source not found.0) shows a clear overall picture, with an economic frame dominating, followed by the ‘scale of migration’ frame, then identity, security and least frequently, moral-universal framing of migration. The economic frame has two facets: fiscal and labour and social security. The views included in the ‘fiscal’ category tend to be positive remarks about migrants ‘contributing’, whereas the labour and social security sub-frame mainly contains statements about migrants using welfare benefits or sending money to another country, which are usually used as examples of a migrant not contributing.

My participants see economic contribution through a ‘common sense fiscal lens’ (Rutter and Carter, 2018: 4). Their narratives echo recent polls where a majority agree that migrants who contribute, by virtue of being a worker or a student for instance, should be allowed entry to the UK (YouGov, 2018). Unless further prompted, interviewees define ‘contribution’ broadly as migrants ‘paying tax’ or ‘supporting themselves’. There was only one exception, Robert, a Romanian in Newham, who specified an income threshold that he thought should apply to all migrants. The others’ views resembled Tom’s interpretation, a British Remain voter in Tendring who rhetorically asked, ‘as long as they come over and support themselves, why not?’, or that of Sarah, a Leave voter in the same area, who welcomed migrants ‘as long as they’re paying their tax.’ Migrants who ‘pay into the system’ are seen as deserving rights, such as access to welfare (albeit with some restrictions, such as a certain period of ‘contributions’ before being able to claim), whereas those who do not are considered undeserving of such benefits.

Although there is a consensus that ‘contributing’ migrants are desirable, there are differences in whether participants believe that overall migrants contribute or not according to their expectations. The loose definition of ‘contributing migrants’
usually includes the low skilled category. John, a Leave voter in Tendring, who positions himself as ‘completely opposed’ to the EU’s freedom of movement, describes his ideal immigration system as open to both highly and low skilled workers. It is the fact migrants are in work or in study that matters, rather than the type of work they do:

As long as people are coming here to work or to be educated, it’s fine. People just coming here ‘cos they’re fed up with their own country, it’s not. […] We need people from all professions, we need brain surgeons, we need people to pick up litter in certain places, we need everything, but […] you need […] to be controlled.

The economic contribution is relevant in two main ways: first, migrants are seen as needed to fill in certain skill shortages and secondly, being economically active is considered a form of ‘integration’ in British society – often the first step and perhaps the most important one, according to many participants.

5.1.1. Economic integration and the need for migrant workers

It is interesting to contrast the portrayals of EU migrants in the UK with those of British people abroad. Participants who view the economic impact of EU migrants in the UK negatively tend to frame British ‘expats’ as the opposite: economic contributors, either in highly skilled work, or pensioners investing in the local economy by purchasing property, opening businesses or spending their hard-earned pensions. British migrants’ belonging in the ‘community’ usually goes unquestioned, given their perceived economic contribution. Sarah, although claiming she would welcome those who ‘contribute’, describes how EU migrants do not ‘contribute’ because they ‘send money back home’. Moreover, she believes the UK Government gives migrants free businesses to run, such as ethnic shops. She immediately contrasts this portrayal with ‘contributing’ British people abroad, who invest personal savings in their businesses:

And you’ve got loads of English people in Spain running bars and that, they’re all paying into the economy, they don’t go out and say, ‘oh I want it, oh, I’ll have that bar, there’s not enough English bars here.’ You know, they don’t take from the country, they give to the country, which is what you should do, no matter what country you go to, you give to the country.
Some participants give examples of British people abroad working in similar jobs as the ‘low skilled’ EU migrants, challenging the ‘wealthy expats’ stereotype. Jack, a British Remain voter in Newham, brings up the ‘double standards’ applied to EU migrants:

We had tens of thousands of people, especially from Northern England move to Germany, to Holland, for work…and when people say ‘oh people coming here and taking jobs’, you, British people [were] doing that in the 70s and 80s! We had a TV programme, a comedy about [them], called Auf Wiedersehen. […] So, it’s okay for British people to do it, but not if everyone else does it.

Some participants assume that the higher one’s fiscal contribution, the more integrated one can be in the local community. Interviewees often mention various everyday activities which can support integration, such as attending cultural events, socialising in pubs and restaurants, or simply having the time to form relationships beyond one’s conational networks. Moreover, the ability to improve one’s English language skills, especially given public funding cuts in the provision of ESOL classes (Higton et al., 2019 : 49), is linked to individuals’ financial circumstances. There is an economic dimension of belonging in the local community – migrants need sufficient spare time and money to be able to participate in activities facilitating their integration. To illustrate, Robert comments that many fellow Romanians are low paid, and therefore, in his view, cannot afford to have a British partner and ‘invite them to have a coffee, let alone going to the movies or other things which cost more like ten coffees.’

While economic contribution is expected, there is also a parallel theme portraying the desirable migrant as a humble character. Many interviewees depict EU migrants as ‘doing the jobs British people don’t want to do.’ These jobs entail smaller fiscal contributions e.g. in tax revenue. However, the ‘3D’ (dirty, dangerous and difficult) positions need to be filled. Migrants’ input in taking the jobs ‘that need doing’ is seen as an adequate contribution. Some participants even go as far as Fred, who works in farming in Tendring, concluding that migrants occupying the less desirable jobs ‘are actually the people that are supporting Britain the most.’
5.1.2. Racialised skill hierarchies

Contribution narratives include both highly and lower skilled workers, but participants spend more time speaking about the lower skilled. The ‘brightest and the best’ usually take the form of NHS doctors or university students. Highly skilled migrants’ nationality or region of origin are considered irrelevant or not even mentioned. These migrants are framed as fiscally contributing, often in reference to post-Brexit concerns about staff shortages in sectors like healthcare (Dolton et al., 2018; McKee, 2018) and the need for flexible workers (Rolfe, 2017). Low skilled workers’ contribution is also underlined. But on this end of the skill hierarchy, nationality and ethnicity become relevant.

It is East Europeans who are normally seen as lower skilled, which sometimes can translate to lower contributing migrants. East European workers are indeed overrepresented in the lower skilled job market in the UK and other European countries (Felbo-Kolding et al., 2018). The ‘Romanian cleaner’ and ‘Polish labourer’ descriptions in some interviews are not imagined stereotypes, remote from lived experience. EU migrants’ occupation pattern differs from that of non-EU migrants: while the latter are found in more ‘highly skilled’ jobs such as IT, housekeeping is the third most common job for EU migrants (Rienzo, 2018). Interviewees either uncritically present low skilled EU migrants as East Europeans or challenge the ‘low skilled East European’ portrayals they encountered. Before illustrating how ‘low skilled’ can translate to ‘East European’, participants’ varying definitions of low skilled need to be considered.

Participants were asked to comment on a newspaper headline about ‘low skilled EU migrants’ (see Appendix A8). When they did not define the term in their initial responses, this was followed up by the question ‘What does low skilled EU migration mean to you?’ Individuals’ understanding of the word ‘immigrant’ shapes how they respond to questions (Blinder, 2013). When participants are asked about specific low skilled jobs migrants do, for example their views towards migrant cleaners, as opposed to simply categorising cleaners in a broad ‘low skilled’ category, their attitudes become more positive (Rolfe et al., 2018; Rutter and Carter, 2018).
As noted in the Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.3.), oversimplified definitions of low skilled migrants have been criticised for overlooking variables such as the a segmented job market, job stability and opportunities for career progression (Migration Advisory Committee, 2014: 296). Some scholars, such as Paul (2018), argue that the category ‘low skilled’ is deliberately constructed through policy: repeating selective claims such as ‘we do not need low skilled workers’ leads to framing low skilled migrants as undesirable, despite the need for migrants of all skills levels in certain sectors. A negative framing of ‘low skilled’ is therefore normalised and, in Paul’s (2018: 66) analysis, acquires the ‘status of tacit knowledge beyond contestation’, consequently making challenging policy choices more difficult. Some participants, such as Bill, similarly allude to a strategic use of the category ‘low skilled’ to justify migration control:

Unfortunately, this kind of language, ‘low skilled’, I think it can be a little bit racist in its sense as well, they are talking about people coming from certain nations and working in the service industry and on building sites and those kinds of things. You would argue that lots of those things are actually really important to us. I don’t like the sentiment that the language is tinged with unfortunately, I think it’s taking about keeping certain people from certain countries out of the country rather than it being about skills […] I think it’s disingenuous.

When speaking about the ‘low skilled’, the overwhelming majority of participants referred to ‘seasonal workers’ such as ‘fruit pickers’ or similar occupations. The majority were critical of the term, often bringing their personal experiences to challenge traditional definitions of skill. Migrants who worked below their skill level were particularly vocal in this critique. The first and frequent narrative that emerged when discussing low skilled migration, is how, in the context of EU migrants, this category is almost invariably about East Europeans in general or about specific East European nationalities.

5.1.2.1. ‘Low skilled became a euphemism for East European’: when skill and nationality intersect

Like in the EU referendum ephemera analysed in Chapter 4, while interviewees see highly skilled people as unequivocally bringing ‘contributions’, the lower skilled are left to be criticised more. The objections to ‘low skilled’ migrants are related to assumptions regarding their region of origin, rather than the perceived
lower economic contribution of this group. David, a British-Pakistani in Newham, observed how narratives about ‘low skilled’ migrants became prevalent only after ‘cheap labour started coming in from the new European Union countries’. While highly skilled people are making additional contributions, the low skilled have been framed as taking away benefits from the native population. In his rich description of the rhetoric he encountered, David directly draws the connection between skill level and nationality:

I think high skilled are kind of brought in to fill in a vacuum in your country, to kind of support your country, but low skilled people are kind of correlated with you know, taking away the existing jobs that could be done by people who are already here that are not well trained […] flooding the market, cheap labour, that kind of arguments are associated with low skilled […] I think low skilled are always associated with that argument about our labour market being swamped by people from… basically, from Romania and Bulgaria, just coming in, taking away our jobs.

When speaking about EU migrants overall, the most commonly mentioned nationalities are Romanian and Polish, but this is partly because the sample includes Romanian and Polish citizens who speak about their conationalists in detail. The category ‘East European’ (or ‘Eastern bloc’, heard more often in Tendring) is more common than any other mentions of nationalities. Apart from Romanian and Polish, the nationalities most frequently named in the interviews are Bulgarian, Lithuanian, Greek, French, German, Italian and Spanish (the latter four often discussed in contrast with ‘East Europeans’). When asked to define ‘low skilled’, some participants immediately point to assumptions that particular groups of migrants by nationality or region of origin are more or less skilled than others. They note how it is more acceptable for people to express negative views on immigration through the frame of ‘economic concerns’ using skill hierarchies. Articulating identity-based negative views, such as singling out East Europeans, could lead more easily to accusations of racism or xenophobia, compared to expressing opposition to low skilled migrants.

Even when working in lower paid jobs, other nationalities are not framed as ‘low skilled’ like East European workers. Jack notes ‘there’s an assumption that when they say low skilled workers, they automatically assume East European’ and that is ‘quite silly because technically low skilled would also mean people who work
in retail and that could be American or New Zealanders.’ Similarly, Mark, after enumerating the occupations he would associate with low skilled, such as ‘farming, caring, shop work’, immediately adds that people ‘think of East Europeans, probably Polish people, Romanian, Bulgarian.’ Migrant participants were often directly confronted with such narratives. Doriana describes how some British people were surprised that she could be both Romanian and a lawyer: ‘I would say that there is still very much the impression around that we only do low skilled jobs, that we don’t speak any English […] that we steal and we cause trouble and we drink.’ Oliwia, a Polish office worker in Newham, had similar experiences. In her view, East Europeans are considered low skilled because they accept lower salaries than British workers. She gives examples from her own experience and also her partner’s work, concluding that ‘you can work in construction and you can be skilled and unskilled, you can work in my office and you can be skilled and unskilled, it’s the same, really.’

East Europeans are not the only ones associated with low skilled labour. Less frequently, racialised skill hierarchies include specific non-EU migrant nationalities or regions of origin as the lower skilled, while EU migrants are situated in contrast as higher skilled (but not necessarily ‘highly skilled’) examples. These hierarchies tend to be constructed by migrants, such as Susan’s colleagues from the Commonwealth, who had ‘a problem’ with people from Somalia: ‘when my colleagues came over, they expected to work for a living, contribute to the economy and they seemed to think that people from that part of Africa thought they could just come in and take, and didn’t really have to work for it.’ Like Susan’s migrant colleagues positioning themselves as ‘contributors’ as opposed to low skilled non-contributors from other countries, some of the Polish and Romanian interviewees place non-EU migrants in contrast to their own ‘contributions’.

Among those with an equal EU citizen status in theory, the Roma are sometimes depicted as ‘staining’ the image of East Europeans as welcome contributors. For example, Raluca, a Romanian mother in Newham, speaks about how several people on an online mothers’ forum tried to persuade her to apply for welfare benefits and could not understand why she preferred to work instead. Raluca
condemns this attitude she has encountered when interacting with some conationalists, but emphasises they are usually Romanian Roma and therefore not representative of the majority of ‘hardworking’ Romanian migrants. Flaviu, another Romanian in Newham, is confident that ‘70% of migrants didn’t come to work, didn’t come to invest in themselves’. He gives examples of Roma people in his area who are trying to ‘trick the [welfare] system’, juxtaposing them to his own situation – a ‘contributing’ Romanian who came to the UK for further studies and full-time work. This ‘discursive complicity’ (McGhee et al., 2019), created by adapting negative labour and social security framing of migrants to ‘other’ migrants, therefore distancing oneself from negative portrayals, is common among migrant participants, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.2.2).

5.1.2.2. ‘They don’t stay labourers’: migrants’ downskilling, upskilling and strategic choices in the UK labour market

Participants have different views on whether migrants should be expected to contribute immediately or after a certain period. Almost all Romanian and Polish interviewees experienced working in jobs below their qualifications, from just a few months to over a decade. The exceptions were those with a UK degree and more straightforward career paths, such as law and accountancy (although, while studying in the UK, some did part-time low paid work). Downskilling has been extensively researched, especially in the case of East European workers (Section 2.2.3). In the UK, some Polish migrants accepted ‘any job’ in the hope to transition to a ‘better job’ and then find their ‘dream job’ (Parutis, 2011b). Others refused outright to work below their qualifications (Kozlowska, 2010). Some migrants use their ‘transnational exit power’ to leave poor work conditions in the UK (Alberti, 2014) and others employ a range of strategies to ‘get by’ in a low paid economy (Datta et al., 2007). In this sense, stricter migration rules limiting some East European migrants’ transitions within the labour market could have worsened the precarity of their employment (cf. Anderson, 2010). Romanians, comparatively a less researched group than Poles, were described as ‘some of the most vulnerable workers’ in the EU (Boboc et al., 2012). Downskilling opens a debate about ‘migrating skills’ (Nowicka, 2014) and calls for revising the concept of skilled migration as a social category.
Most participants speak about their own or others’ experiences of downskilling. Romanian and Polish interviewees are keen to underline that rigid low and highly skilled categories overlook the ‘potential’ of migrants. They explain how equivalating skills from their countries of origin and acquiring new skills is often a lengthy process. Therefore, trying to fit migrants into low or highly skilled tick boxes when they enter the UK fails to account for their career progression and skill transfers. For example, Melania, a British-Polish manager in the London construction industry, has recruited East European workers for several years. She characterises the proposals for short-term post-Brexit visas for EU workers as ‘a waste of time and money’. Melania disagrees with using the label ‘low skilled’. In her managerial role, she observed how migrants quickly move from ‘any job’ to a ‘better job’, often while working on the same construction site:

They don’t stay labourers. A lot of people that I put on projects, they start off as labourer, and we upskill them and then they become a plumber, an electrician, a manager [...] Why should they stay a low skilled worker for the rest of their lives and come and go and be a labourer every few months? What kind of life is that? Why not just use the same person that’s got skills?

Otilia is one of the migrant participants who ‘started from below’ when she arrived in the UK and ‘upskilled’, to use Melania’s term. She first worked as a shop assistant on minimum wage. A few years later, she is a qualified HR professional in the education sector. Otilia shares similar experiences with her friends who left Romania at the same time:

I have two friends here; one is a nurse and the other is an architect. I work in HR. But we started by selling clothes in the mall and on Oxford Street, because literally no one else employed us, because we did not have experience. We just finished university and came over here [...] we attended many interviews and a lot of time passed until someone gave us a chance.

Otilia and her friends spoke fluent English but lacked ‘relevant experience’ when they arrived straight after graduating from their Masters’ degrees. For others, like Dominika, low English proficiency was the first barrier in finding employment. Despite having a degree from Poland, Dominika started as an hourly paid cleaner. A decade later, she is a manager in the charity sector:
When someone said, ‘Hi, Dominika, how are you?’, all I could understand was my own name, that was it! But I’ve graduated in Poland, yeah? The only one reason I was a cleaner, that I was working via agencies and doing low-paid jobs...it was only because I wasn’t prepared to go somewhere else, I couldn’t speak, I couldn’t communicate, so that was the only one reason why I had a low-paid job, that’s it.

Some migrants, like Otilia and Dominika, regard low skilled employment as a necessary ‘stepping-stone’ to becoming a desirable, contributing, highly skilled migrant. Others argue there is nothing undesirable in having a low paid job; these workers are also needed, and thus they are contributing. For instance, Marta, an operations manager in Tendring, employs low paid seasonal workers for a variety of jobs. Most are working below their qualifications and many live in the UK only a few months per year. For Marta, migrant workers’ flexibility is an advantage to employers. It can be lucrative not to ‘upskill’ them:

I’ve got a couple of cleaners, they are on their second year of university, engineering or doctors [...] they go for the jobs which, in their opinion, are quite easy and don’t require their English to be on a higher level, because they are prepared to come here, work seven days a week for six weeks or eight weeks to save up as much as they can for university fees.

Marta exemplifies how some highly skilled migrants strategically choose jobs below their qualifications to fund their education or other short-term goals.

It’s not only seasonal migrants who can be content working in a low paid sector. Some participants who have lived in the UK long-term do not regret choosing low skilled jobs. Mihaela, a Romanian in Tendring, worked as a cleaner almost all her life. Her Romanian husband is a van driver. They are not university educated, although Mihaela recently started a part-time degree. Mihaela would like her teenage children to ‘aim higher’, but she considers her work satisfying the family’s everyday needs. The two ‘low skilled’ jobs in the household provide enough for their children’s education, paying for their mortgage and family holidays.

Moreover, British participants, especially those who worked in low paid jobs, underline that low skilled work is sometimes a strategic choice. James comments that ‘just ‘cos people choose to work in a bar or work in a restaurant, that doesn’t
mean they’re a low skilled person’. He illustrates how someone’s current job title does not always reflect their skill set:

One guy I knew, fluent English, fluent Romanian and good Turkish, he came from a village in the middle of nowhere. You can say he’s low skilled, he just works as a cook. But he’s trilingual and really kind and really intelligent, so is he low skilled, just because he’s doing a low-skilled job? No.

James emphasises how this migrant chose to work as a cook, even though he had some language and other transferable skills, which could have made him ‘highly skilled’ in another job.

5.1.2.3. ‘They just don’t wanna do it!’: hardworking East Europeans vs. ‘lazy Brits’

So far, participants’ narratives showed how East Europeans are given as examples of low skilled migrants and how downskilling experiences play a part in challenging those portrayals. There is an additional angle in the construction of skill hierarchies. Even when some EU migrants are perceived as not contributing enough, they still tend to be placed higher in the hierarchy of skill (with a focus on work ethic) than some of their British counterparts. The ‘lazy Brit’ stereotype is evident in both British and migrant interviewees’ accounts, even among those who want lower immigration. A positive stereotype of East Europeans as ‘hardworking’ – as opposed to British workers – often counterbalances (and contradicts) the framing of East Europeans as less contributing, low skilled migrants. Migrant participants who were labelled as low skilled and experienced downskilling usually position themselves higher than their British colleagues in the skill hierarchy. Some use the ‘defensive assertiveness’ narrative strategy identified by McGhee et al. (2019). They redirect the stereotypes they confronted towards the ethnic majority population - it is not East European low skilled migrants who do not ‘contribute’, it is the British.

Research noted the reluctance of British people to work in some low skilled sectors (Rolfe et al., 2018: 38). Migrants are often considered stronger applicants than British counterparts. This is partly because they tend to be higher qualified for the jobs they apply for (Johnston et al., 2014). Additionally, migrants are
appreciated for their flexible working patterns (Rolfe, 2017) and their ‘soft skills’ such as ‘reliability, team-working and confidence’ (Migration Advisory Committee, 2014: 3). Literature also shows how migrants position themselves higher than British counterparts according to skill level. For instance, the Polish builders in Datta and Brickell’s (2009) study consider themselves ‘superior to English builders’ due to their work ethic, among other ‘soft skills’. Migrants’ good performance in certain low skilled roles may lead to assumptions that some nationalities are particularly suitable for specific work (Vasey, 2017), further strengthening the ‘East European = low skilled’ portrayals.

Most Polish and Romanian participants counter the negative narratives of low skilled migrants as not contributing. They mention British workers as counterexamples to positive depictions of their conational. These attitudes are usually expressed when participants mention their expectations before migration, highlighting the differences between the ‘work culture’ in the UK and their countries of origin. For example, Zofia, a Polish woman in Tendring, describes herself as ‘not content with little’, unlike her British colleagues:

The English people, many of them are lazy, the culture is lazy, they don’t want to learn this, they don’t want to do that […] they are very happy in the situation where they don’t have to actually work, so, the minimum, having just TV, like, basic car outside and don’t go on holidays.

Migrants’ self-positioning in the skill hierarchy is rooted in personal experiences, but it also references others’ assessments, such as the feedback they received from peers and managers. Raluca is confident that EU migrants’ rights will be secured regardless of the Brexit outcome. She justifies this based on what her manager told her:

He told me not to worry, that he would give me all necessary paperwork, if I need a visa, he would take care of it, and that’s because he cannot afford to employ English people, because, first of all, they do not do the job, and he even called them ‘lazy’, this was the exact word he used. And secondly, they are very costly.

She continues: ‘he employed an English woman, she worked for him, and she was complaining that she is not allowed to lift more than 10 kilos because of back
pain. And she brought some documents from her GP so she can prove it!’ Raluca immediately jumps to a conclusion about her British co-workers: ‘So, clearly, they are lazy, that’s it, what other opinion could I have about them?’ Similarly to Raluca’s, Igor’s views rely not only on his personal observations, but equally on what his British friends told him: ‘I know a lot of British people who say the same thing, like we need migration, because British people are too lazy to do the low paid jobs, because they only wanna do the good earning ones.’

British participants, including those in lower paid work, also frequently mention the ‘lazy Brit’ stereotype. For example, Dan from Tendring, a self-employed handyman, distances himself from other British workers: ‘I’m not the average Englishman, I’m inspired by the world and by culture, but a lot of English people get lazy.’ Unlike some of his friends who ‘expect a lot to come to them’ without doing ‘too much work’, Dan takes great pride in having set up his own business and spending his free time helping other locals to find employment.

Some participants completely dismiss concerns about migrants’ impact on the availability of jobs in the UK. They blame British people for not being able to succeed in the job market. One example is Louise, who comments that some Leave voters ‘think that people coming from the EU are taking their jobs and that’s the reason why they can’t get a job, not that they’re lazy and they don’t wanna get a job’. In contrast, migrants are praised for their better work ethic. The process of migration itself is considered positive in developing skills, as Jeremy describes:

> Some people in Clacton, dare I say, just sit on their bums all day and they’re not likely to go abroad because they’re just not that way inclined, but I think people who are more likely to travel have actually got more enterprise and more ‘get up and go’ and are more able to contribute.

However, a few participants, particularly from some of the most deprived areas in Tendring, point out that even when British people want to work in lower paid jobs, it is more profitable for migrants to take up those offers. Some explain how finding ‘local jobs’ has become more difficult. The high cost of commuting to work in neighbouring towns and cities represents a barrier for working class British people. Some believe that migrants receive a superior work ‘package’, such as
including free or subsidised accommodation and food. Other times, participants note that migrants are more likely to be single and live in overcrowded conditions, which means they pay a lower percentage of their salary on rent. John speaks at length from this particular perspective. He is aware that ‘there are plenty of these jobs like farming that British people just don’t want to do’. But he also believes that local migrant workers ‘get some sort of subsidised living, they also get some sort of subsidised food’, while ‘British people don’t get that’. As an unemployed person on welfare support, he points out that British people often have no work opportunities that ‘pay off’ in their local areas. John speaks about the cost of commuting from Clacton to nearby Colchester (where there are more vacancies) and calculates why this makes low paid work less profitable for a British person, compared to a migrant who, in his view, is offered accommodation near their workplace.

Overall, migrants are seen as welcome contributors ‘as long as they pay tax’. Nevertheless, there are different views on the net contribution of all migrants to the UK. Economic contribution is seen as an important aspect of integration. When discussing the highly vs. low skilled binary, there is more agreement than disagreement among participants. Most participants are critical of the negative low skilled migrant stereotypes and reflect on their personal experiences of downskilling or working in low paid jobs to underline the need for migrants with various skill levels. Whether it is about East European ‘hard workers’ compared to ‘lazy Brits’ or highly skilled West Europeans compared to low skilled Eastern counterparts, nationality matters in constructing skill hierarchies. Migrants tend to distance themselves from those who do not ‘contribute’ at least as much as they do, such as British workers in some cases, but also other migrants. However, adequate economic contributions are not sufficient for migrants to become desirable. The second part of this chapter unpacks contribution beyond economics. The focus shifts from migrants as taxpayers and workers in the UK job market, to migrants as good neighbours in Newham and Tendring.
5.2. ‘As long as they integrate’: migrants as good neighbours

I interviewed Dan at the beach bar in Jaywick. He stopped other passers-by, inviting them to share their opinions on Brexit. At one point, Dan greets another man and asks, ‘Do you know that England is leaving the EU?’, to which he replies that he doesn’t. After explaining what Brexit is, Dan asks if Brexit matters, to which the man says, ‘Not really’. After a couple of silent seconds, out of nowhere, the man adds, ‘There are too many immigrants in here, aren’t they?’ Dan responds: ‘Where are they, I can’t see them?’ The man points in the direction of Clacton - ‘Down that way.’ ‘And what sort of immigrants?’, Dan continues. The man responds: ‘Not speaking the language’. He adds that those immigrants are ‘just doing nothing’ and should be ‘sent back’. ‘There you go, from the people’, Dan resumes our interview after the man leaves.

This was not an isolated occurrence. During my year of fieldwork, I listened to many conversations (most of them ‘off the record’), which unfolded in a similar way to that of Dan and the fellow villager. This anecdote illustrates the intersection between economic and identity-based arguments. For this Jaywick resident stopping to answer Dan’s questions, ‘the problem’ was migrants ‘not speaking the language’. Those migrants were seen as ‘not doing anything’, therefore not positively contributing. This intersection between economic and cultural perspectives transpires in most recorded interviews, albeit perhaps less directly. The question that arises is: what should migrants do to be accepted in the community, apart from working and paying their taxes?

A ‘common sense fiscal contribution’ is usually not enough to become a ‘desirable’ migrant. Some participants stretch the concept of contribution beyond its usually attributed meanings relating to economic aspects. They emphasise how migrants contribute to the community, not only to the exchequer. Examples of contributing beyond taxation include caring for older people, volunteering in local neighbourhoods, diversifying the cuisine and other cultural aspects such as music. Those non-economic contributions are framed within subjective interpretations of integration. Improving migrant integration is high on the agenda of current policy discussions. By way of illustration, during the May Government,
the Home Secretary Sajid Javid announced plans for citizenship policy reform, which included proposals for ‘tougher English language requirements’ (Home Office, 2018).

Participants mention less frequently non-economic contributions, compared to the economic ones detailed in the first part of this chapter. Yet the cultural arguments about migration are presented by interviewees in a much more nuanced and heartfelt way, with a stronger focus on the local level. There is a divide between those who consider integration as migrants’ sole responsibility and those framing it as a ‘two-way street’, where British-born people have an equally important role in facilitating it. The participants who see EU freedom of movement as a reciprocal system, rather than a benefit for ‘them’ (when commenting on the ephemera) are more likely to see integration as a two-way process. Interviewees identify various components of integration. While the vast majority agree that language is a crucial element (and by far the most frequently mentioned in the interview data), there is less consensus on the relevance of other aspects. For instance, a certain period (months to years) is seen as necessary to allow migrants and British-born people to have meaningful contact, which facilitates integration. Nevertheless, some participants point out that the faster the pace of migration in an area, the more challenging integration becomes, despite higher likelihood of intergroup contact.

5.2.1. Cultural integration: a two-way street?

I asked all participants what the term ‘integration’ means for them. This was usually followed up by asking whether EU migrants were integrated according to the definition they provided. Responses ranged from detailed descriptions of different aspects of integration, to short statements such as Louise’s ‘just getting on with it’ or Dean’s ‘live and let live’. Aside from work (as economic integration), language, religion and cultural habits constituted a complementary, ‘cultural’ side of integration. Participants criticised certain migrant groups for not being ‘integrated’, but they often justified the lack of integration through factors which individual migrants cannot control. One narrative stands out from the interview
data: the more ‘visible’ the migrants, the more likely they are perceived as ‘not integrated’.

Before discussing the hierarchies constructed within identity-based narratives, it is important to understand the range of perspectives participants express on the topic of integration. Views diverge according to whom is held responsible for migrant integration. Some interviewees believe it is migrants’ duty, especially of those planning to live in the UK long-term. There are different expectations of integration depending on the period migrants want to spend in the UK. Overall, there is a broad consensus that, as one of the Tendring councillors put it, ‘The key to integration is language and meeting people who live in the area’. Schools were consistently given as examples, especially by local politicians, where ‘integration happens’ – both for the children and young people in the school system, but also for the parents whose contact with other groups is facilitated by school meetings and activities.

Migrants’ (perceived) level of English language was central to participants’ subjective definitions of integration, albeit serving different purposes. Susan, who grew up and worked in east London before retiring in Tendring, recalls her last experiences in Newham walking on the high street and hearing people who ‘were not speaking English’. This becomes problematic for Susan if the migrants in question want to stay longer-term:

I think people find that a bit off-putting. I mean it depends how long they’re gonna stay. If I went to live in another country where English wasn’t the first language, if I would have planned to stay there for any length of time, I would try to learn the language.

According to a recent poll (YouGov, 2020), a quarter of the British public feel ‘very bothered’ or ‘fairly bothered’ when hearing those from a non-English speaking country communicating in their own language. Not all participants feel ‘put off’ when hearing other languages spoken on the streets. Some say that migrants should be comfortable speaking in the language they choose with their friends and family, but they also stress that language skills are essential to integrate in the workplace.
Zofia struggled speaking English when she arrived in the UK from Poland. However, she comments that ‘the problem with Polish people in this country is that they can’t speak English, many of them.’ She gives the example of health and safety training as a situation when it is important employees have adequate language skills. Marta uses her ‘success story’ as a migrant without a university degree to illustrate that being fluent in English is possible, whatever one’s level of formal education. She strongly believes that migrants should prioritise speaking English fluently and adapting to UK culture, with the aim to naturalise as British citizens:

I’ve always, since I moved down here [Clacton], and I lived here for twelve years now, I always wanted to have British passport anyway. I don’t believe that […] when you move to another country you should live like you would live in Poland […] I believe that when you move down to this country you should know everything about it and you should speak the language the country speaks and you should have a passport from that country.

Even though Marta received negative comments when she spoke in Polish with a friend in Clacton, she justifies negative attitudes towards migration, empathising with locals’ concerns of migrants ‘not integrating’. As a manager, she often finds herself asking her migrant employees to ‘speak English’ because British workers feel ‘left out’ in a group of predominantly Russian and Polish speakers.

In addition to improving language skills, some participants believe migrants should be proactive in joining local activities. ‘Going to the pub’ is given as an example in several interviews as a way to improve integration outcomes. East European migrants are portrayed as different from natives: they prefer to socialise with friends at home after work, compared to British colleagues who go to the pub. Being part of the local ‘pub culture’ has some pre-requisites: an economic component (paying for drinks), a good enough level of English to interact in a ‘pub quiz’ for instance, and various ‘soft skills’, such as confidence, needed to start conversations with strangers in one’s non-native language. Some participants believe that one should wait for the East Europeans to join their British colleagues at the pub, while others also think that pubs should cater more towards East European communities.
While migrant participants such as Marta and Zofia tend to place more responsibility on migrants, British respondents are more likely to underline the role British residents and Government have in integration. Cuts in Government funding for ESOL classes, coupled with a rapid increase in migration in recent years, are identified as causes of patchy local support for migrants. British participants who used to live abroad and faced barriers with local languages sympathised with migrants and advocated more vocally for better Government intervention. Language skills are central to Michael’s definition of integration, but he believes it is the Government’s responsibility to provide the spaces for newcomers to learn and practice. However, others find local support adequate. Mirel, a Romanian in Newham, criticises those who ‘fail to integrate’ by not speaking English, mentioning he had an easy time finding and attending ESOL classes.

British people are often portrayed as not making use of opportunities to interact with migrants in their local areas. For instance, Diana describes various ethnic businesses in Newham and contemplates the moment she decided not to join some Bulgarians for a drink in a restaurant. She concludes that integration is a shared responsibility between British and non-British residents:

I ended up hiring some guys to do some work in my garden who were Bulgarians from the local area, and they were like, ‘You are two seconds from our Bulgarian restaurant, why don’t you come down and have a drink with us?’ And you know, I never did. I should have done, probably, but it’s like, you just tend not to. […] I think it’s on us as much as it is on migrants to join in what they’re doing, you know, we don’t make any effort to get involved in you know, Bulgarians having a party in the Bulgarian restaurant, so why would they come to Wetherspoons [pub]?

But interviewees do not only observe limited interaction between migrant and non-migrant groups in some areas. They also speak about the changing nature of contemporary life and how limited free time and precarious situations can inhibit community cohesion. For instance, some participants remember Newham as a once close-knit working-class British area, which changed with increased migration, but also with shifts in the local economy and housing market. For example, it is difficult to form long-term community relations when having to consistently move from one shared house to another, a practice less common a
few decades ago. For Emily, ‘born and bred’ in Newham, integration means communities ‘speaking to each other’. However, over the years she noticed that ‘no one really talks to anyone’ anymore in Newham: ‘people just don’t sort of integrate and talk to each other anymore, you know, because people are moving in so quickly.’ Ben, who moved from East Anglia to Newham, felt more ‘integrated’ as a British resident only after having a mortgage and attending regular baby clubs in the same location. One local councillor in Newham was particularly vocal on this issue, emphasising how establishing meaningful interactions between different groups of residents is difficult because almost half of local residents in some areas like Stratford move to different parts of the borough, out of the borough or out of Newham entirely every year.

In this context, some participants like Ben challenge the ‘double standards’ applied to migrants. While migrants are expected to become active in local communities, some British residents live rather isolated lives. Most studies focus on how either locals perceive migrant integration or how migrants feel about their own integration. What the literature overlooks is how British-born people feel in their communities, particularly if they are internal migrants in the UK. This is an important part of the local-level integration picture. For instance, Louise notices some migrant groups prefer to ‘stick together’ but adds, ‘does it matter? ‘cos we all live kind of separate lives anyway.’ Yet some participants praise the ‘community spirit’ in their local areas. This is most apparent in Jaywick, where Dan organised the weekly ‘Happy Club’ (which I observed during the fieldwork), supporting fellow residents in need.

Compared to Newham’s neighbourhoods where hundreds of EU migrants lived, Dan, a community leader who ‘knew everyone in Jaywick’ could only point me to one Polish family residing in the 5,000-strong village. Most participants considered the pace of migration important when speaking about integration prospects. As a general trend, the longer migrants were present in an area and people ‘got used to’ them, the more positive attitudes became. Some Polish participants note that attitudes towards their national group have softened over time (although some also indicated that the EU referendum made them feel less welcomed). But attitudes have not softened towards all types of migrants. Oliwia
comments that while portrayals of Poles have changed from ‘Polish plumbers stealing British jobs’ to ‘hardworking Poles’, the negative stereotypes of Romanians persist.

Older and newer migrants are situated on a spectrum of perceived levels of integration. Some think EU migrants are more integrated than non-EU counterparts, emphasising economic contributions and good language skills. Others favour non-EU migrants, especially those from the Commonwealth, focussing on shared culture (albeit there are mixed views on religion, particularly negative attitudes towards Muslims). These narratives mirror the EU referendum campaign arguments analysed in Chapter 4. While ‘the brightest and the best’ are contributors to the economy, ‘Commonwealth friends’ are preferred for their ‘shared values’.

Contrastingly, Romanian and Polish migrants place non-EU migrants at the bottom of the integration hierarchy. While migrants and minorities tend to be more positive towards multiculturalism (e.g. Verkuyten and Martinovic, 2006), there is also evidence that migrants’ views become more similar to those of the native population over time (e.g. Braakmann et al., 2017). The first part of the chapter showed how skill hierarchies intersect with national and ethnic categories, with East Europeans being the main example of a ‘low skilled’ migrant. Similarly, skill hierarchies cannot be separated from ethnic and national stereotypes when discussing contribution beyond economics. The lower skilled migrants are more visible, and it is the most visible migrants who are seen as the least integrated.

5.2.2. Classed ethnic and national hierarchies

Migration scholarship tends to discuss ‘ethnic hierarchies’ (Ford, 2011) separately from ‘skill hierarchies’. Survey questions separate skill level and region of origin, but these become almost always interlinked in participants’ narratives. Previous studies show differentiated attitudes not only by skill level (Section 2.2.3), with a preference towards the highly skilled, but also by nationality or region of origin, with more positive attitudes towards migrants considered as ‘culturally proximate’ (Section 2.2.4). A more complex picture
emerges when considering nationality as a variable. As Blinder and Richards (2018) note, there is similar opposition to immigration from Romania and Pakistan in the UK, although the broad assumption would be a preference towards European migrants. Moreover, ethnic and national hierarchies depend on who is constructing them (Section 2.2.2). Negative views towards non-EU migrants are recorded in Polish migration scholarship (e.g. Eade et al., 2006; Rzepnikowska, 2016) and in studies of Romanians in the UK (e.g. Moroșanu, 2011). Recent Brexit research shows the flip side to EU migrants’ negative attitudes towards non-EU counterparts. The ethnic minority Leave voters in Begum’s (2018) focus groups often positioned East European migrants at the bottom of their constructed hierarchies.

My interviewees have different views on whether hierarchies are organised by region of origin or draw on specific national and ethnic stereotypes. For example, Igor thinks that the country weighs more than the region of origin: ‘a French person would be treated better than an East European, and I personally find [those from the] States will be treated better than a person from India.’ To contrast, Bill observes ‘different types of categories’ depending on when a country joined the EU, with each subsequent wave of migrants being seen more negatively. He comments that ‘a lot of people did see different types of EU nationals’, but he rarely heard stereotypes based on migrants’ nationality beyond an overall negative image of A8 and later, even more so, A2 Central and East Europeans. Nevertheless, hierarchies of migrants become more sophisticated, and often gendered, depending on the issue discussed. For instance, when the topic is language as an aspect of integration, negative portrayals usually involve East European men or non-EU migrant women. When speaking about criminality, Romanians top the list, while Muslims become subject to negative attitudes expressed on migrants’ religion.

Participants construct various ethnic and national hierarchies, but they all depend on which migrants are visible at the local level. I asked interviewees whether they could identify an EU migrant ‘just by looking at them’. For some, EU migrants are visible through verbal cues, while others consider non-verbal aspects most important. The third category of participants find it difficult or even impossible to
distinguish EU migrants from British-born people. Most interviewees draw attention to EU migrants’ ‘invisible’ whiteness. If one solely reads my British respondents’ descriptions of EU migrants, they would be inclined to believe that all EU migrants would identify as white. This is similar to how Romanian and Polish participants tend to equate Britishness with whiteness, at least before migration (Manolova, 2018).

EU migrants are ‘white, but not quite’ (Halej, 2014). The more highly skilled they are perceived, the less visible they are assumed to be, and therefore they become less different from a white British person. In other words, the ‘identifiable’ EU migrants are not the French professionals in Stratford, but the Romanian construction workers in East Ham. On a few occasions, participants emphasise that East Europeans are ‘darker’ (in skin tone or hair). For example, when asking her to guess where I’m from, Mary was confident I was not ‘Western’ because I have ‘darker hair’. However, descriptions of non-verbal cues are dominated by references to visible dress codes, such as uniforms from the ‘lower paid’ sector (e.g. construction gear) or wearing styles reminiscent of British ‘chavs’ stereotypes (Jones, 2011).

5.2.2.1. ‘It’s poor people with thick accents versus rich people with understandable accents’: invisible, visible and hypervisible EU migrants

Participants speak about three main categories of EU migrants: invisible, visible and hypervisible. EU migrants are invisible when they are alike to the majority native population, such as white migrants who speak English with a British accent, especially those who arrived in the UK as children. Yet even when they are noticeable in some ways, EU migrants can still ‘pass’ as invisible if they are not perceived as too different. This is usually the case for West Europeans. Some participants observe how West Europeans are sometimes not even categorised as migrants – this offers them a status of an invisible, desirable fellow EU citizen. Diana says she cannot identify an EU migrant but is certain that British people

17 ‘Hypervisible’ is a term used by Reddy (1998) in the discussion of how whiteness seems invisible to those who are white, who reinforce the invisibility by creating hypervisibilty of those who depart from the ‘norm’.
‘only mean East European’ when speaking about visible migrants: ‘they wouldn’t look at my flatmate and go “Oh, she’s a migrant”, ‘cause she’s Swedish’. In this example, being Swedish is sufficient not only to be invisible as a migrant, but to not be categorised as a migrant in the first place. Mark observes that it is difficult to label ‘professional people’ as EU migrants: ‘I wouldn’t be able to tell that my French neighbours are French rather than British by looking at them, but I think that’s how they dress.’ This intersection between verbal cues and class stereotypes is summarised by Jo, who points out that ‘what people are getting at when they say high and low skilled, it’s […] poor people with thick accents versus rich people with understandable accents’. The higher skilled one’s job, the more likely their level of English is considered adequate or their dress similar to British people, and the less visible they are in the local community.

West European migrants are not always invisible. Sometimes they are visible, but usually in a positive light as individualised nationalities. This contrasts to the presentation of a homogenous group of East Europeans who are ‘all the same’, as Linda from Tendring repeatedly described them. British interviewees have significantly more experience travelling to Western than Eastern Europe and sometimes refer to their knowledge of French or Spanish words, which helps them identify Western EU migrants through verbal cues. For example, Mary, who has German-born family members and visited several Western European countries, comments: ‘German I would recognise, French I would recognise, Italian, yes, Spanish, probably, ‘cos we go to Spain a lot, but no, I wouldn’t be able to distinguish between Polish, Romanian, Albanian, all those East European languages, they all sound the same.’ Conversely, participants such as Klara observe that descriptions of specific nationalities, such as Romanian and Polish, are used to generalise about all East Europeans ‘being the same’.

Unlike Mark’s French professional neighbours or Diana’s Swedish housemate, other migrant categories are visible. Interviewees’ accounts include ‘future EU migrants’ (such as Turkish), Muslims and some non-EU nationalities (particularly Indian in Romanian and Polish participants’ narratives). When speaking about EU migrants, the visible migrants are invariably East Europeans. For many participants, EU migration was once an invisible phenomenon, but it has become
visible following A8 accession which prompted a rapid increase in intra-EU migration. Jane, who lived in Newham before moving to Tendring, remembers the moment she noticed a change at Forest Gate station in 2004:

I went in, and was walking to the end of the platform and nearly every person was white, and I thought, this is odd, I’ve never seen this before, is it a day trip or something like that? [...] I noticed walking along, I was hearing languages I didn’t recognise, which I’m guessing were either Polish, maybe Russian [...] and I was just fascinated, how could there be a change you know, so quickly [...] that was a noticeable difference. I would’ve gone down there and there’d be majority Asian, or you know, a mixture of people, you wouldn’t have thought twice.

What captured Jane’s attention was the speed of change, rather than the change in itself. This rapid change did not only bring people, but also new spaces. When asked to describe migration in their local area, participants usually refer to ‘ethnically marked’ establishments. Unsurprisingly, they do not point at the numerous Italian pizzerias or the curry houses that have flourished for a longer time in the UK. In fact, many consider those as part of British culture. The problematic ethnically marked spaces are the shops displaying Polish or Romanian flags, such as shown in Images 21 and 22. For instance, in Tendring, some participants recall locals’ objections when a first Polish sklep opened in Clacton-on-Sea.

These ethnically marked spaces are connected with particular types of migrants. Descriptions of people frequenting Romanian and Polish shops are based on class stereotypes. Some migrant participants underline they never or rarely visit those shops, distancing themselves from the type of clientele they portray. The ‘low skilled men’ and ‘chav’ stereotypes are not only present in discussions about shops or other ethnic businesses, but also when participants describe particular transport routes in London. For instance, Ben commutes on the Jubilee line to east London and notices how:

You always get a group getting on, it’s covered in paint, obviously working in construction or decoration. They are always East European. I can’t exactly tell you where, maybe Romanians in there as well, but they are definitely East European, you can pick them out before you can hear them speak.
The stereotypes of ‘visible’ EU migrants correspond to the frames employed in participants’ narratives. Poles are most likely to be discussed within an economic ‘hard worker’ positive stereotype. This contrasts with Romanians, who are visible not only through similar workers’ clothing as Poles, but also through anti-social behaviour. Cllr Miles notices the portrayals of Romanians and Poles are rather different in the local area: Romanians tend to be depicted by some locals as travellers engaging in some criminal activities, while Poles are praised as hard workers and economic contributors. Carol is sure ‘there are quite a lot of Poles in
Clacton’, because several Polish shops appeared in the town in recent years. Yet Poles are not visible because ‘they keep themselves to themselves’. Tom compares Poles and Romanians in Tendring. Poles are seen as positively contributing through work and staying invisible. However, Romanians are not contributing and become visible through antisocial behaviour and crime:

There’s a really big Polish community in here, but you never hear from them, they always just get up, go to work, do the job, do their own thing, stay out of the way, don’t cause any trouble, so people don’t mind. But when the Romanians come to the hotel, the Royal Hotel in Clacton, they was everywhere, they was on the streets begging, people were being mugged on the streets, people didn’t feel safe to walk the streets […] they was only there about three months and they wrecked it so bad that it was inhabitable […] And that’s what people don’t like.

Other participants in Tendring recounted similar incidents about migrants at the Royal Hotel. In these other accounts the migrants were not Romanian, but Syrian refugees. Tom’s positioning of Romanians within a security frame is also present in Newham, where several participants emphasise street drinking as a local concern, an experience that is also supported by almost all local politician interviewees in Newham, who emphasise constituents’ complaints regarding this issue and their own observations. Cllr Tripp in Newham noticed that when Leave voters spoke about migration as a reason to leave the EU, it was almost invariably about East Europeans. It is East Europeans, but more specifically Romanian men, who are seen to engage in antisocial behaviour, such as street drinking, a visible behaviour which was mentioned when some residents justified their views on immigration, according to the local politicians campaigning. On this issue, migrant participants’ portrayals of their conationals are almost identical to those of British respondents.

Most Romanian and Polish interviewees distance themselves from the negatively visible and hypervisible conationals. A few participants even underline that someone not being able to identify them as Polish or Romanian is a positive thing. Romanians and Poles acknowledge that not all EU migrants are integrated. But they see this group of migrants as more integrated and less visible than non-EU counterparts. For instance, Otilia thinks EU migrants ‘dress European’, as opposed to some non-EU migrants in her local area wearing traditional religious
or national clothing. For Raluca, both EU and non-EU migrants are visible. Unlike other migrant participants, she does not counter negative stereotypes of EU migrants through positive representations, but depicts non-EU migrants in an even more negative light:

Not this house [immediately next door], but the other one, they’re Indians there […] two among them drink heavily [beau de rup], heavily, heavily, heavily, and when I say heavily, I mean it leads to smashing doors, windows, breaking fences, so all those ugly things. No one on this street, not a single Indian or neighbour bothered to call the police. Well, if he was Romanian, believe me, or Polish or another East European nationality, believe me, a whole load [duhoaie] of police would come. Am I right?

Raluca describes in detail the criminal activities and antisocial behaviour or Romanians she met in Newham. Nevertheless, she (and a few other migrant participants) simultaneously depicts EU migrants as ‘not as bad’ or as visible as ‘other’, non-EU migrants.

5.2.2.2. ‘When I am in East Ham, I feel like in a Bucharest suburb’: the boundaries of acceptable visibility

While migrants ‘keeping themselves to themselves’, like the Poles in Clacton, is sometimes seen as positive, it can also become negative when it is interpreted as segregation. One Newham councillor explains the ‘pockets’ dominated by East European residents through the ‘myth of return’ – many East Europeans he spoke to arrive in Newham with the intention to stay for a short term only and thus see little value in engaging with other local communities, improving language skills or changing cultural habits. However, most have remained Newham residents for a long term, despite not planning to be, initially. The ‘little Romania’ (Harrison, 2018) and ‘new Poland’ (Tweedie, 2016) are not only phrases in British tabloid press headlines, but lived realities for some participants. Those who notice isolated migrant groups in their local areas often criticise others for failing to understand the impacts of migration. Susan comments that politicians ‘who live in areas that have not got any migrants at all, have just no idea how some people feel when nearly everyone around them speaks another language.’ Nevertheless, others think that migrants living alongside their conationals is a predictable and not necessarily negative phenomenon – ‘it’s natural’, as Mary describes it, or ‘it
feels more secure’ for migrants, in Fred’s words. A few interviewees draw parallels to British people abroad who prefer to live in British communities or speak only in English. Unlike segregated EU migrants, British people are perceived as economic contributors to their countries of migration, which sometimes becomes sufficient to ignore the lack of ‘cultural’ integration.

It is mostly migrant participants who draw attention to the hypervisible migrant areas. Many Romanian and Polish interviewees remember their initial surprise when encountering a multiethnic UK. This is particularly relevant for those living in Newham, but also comes across in the answers from those in Tendring, who often travelled to London or other higher migration areas such as Colchester. Claudia speaks for many participants when articulating her expectations before migration: ‘I expected to come to England to be among the English, not the immigrants!’ Like others growing up in small towns, she expected migration to mostly consist of foreign students and didn’t imagine a sizeable proportion of British people with ethnic minority backgrounds. When seeing ‘white people’ on the streets of Newham, Bianca, another Romanian, assumes ‘they’re Romanian, or perhaps Polish, but it’s usually Romanian’, because ‘you don’t really see people who are white British.’

When describing EU migrants’ hypervisibility, several participants refer to the East Ham area. Raluca, who lives close to the East Ham underground station, asked me if I saw the Romanians there: ‘right in front of the tube station, vis-à-vis, there is permanently a gaggle, a group, many people, many Romanians flocked there, they spit, they swear, they make all sorts of noises.’ I tell Raluca that I observed the same situation (and even stopped to take fieldnotes) on my way to her house. She then adds that it is those instances of negative hypervisibility that make British people generalise about Romanians: ‘Do you realise that the people who see them there every day and find out they are Romanians… they make an impression?’ Repeated encounters with hypervisible Romanians, or (less frequently) other East Europeans, prompt some participants, such as Mircea, to conclude that there is little difference between living in East Ham and Romania:
When I am in East Ham, I feel like in a Bucharest suburb: exactly the same, there is no difference at all [...] I feel like home, everyone is hanging out on the street, everyone is selling you something, they spit on the streets, [sunflower] seeds [seminte], exactly the same.

While some participants find themselves in ‘little Romania’, others feel like in ‘little India’. Unlike Raluca and Mircea who have worked mainly with East Europeans, most of Bianca’s work colleagues are Asian. She also lives on a street with predominantly non-EU migrants: ‘where I live in East Ham, I feel like in India [...] it smells like the things in the mosques [...] and it’s full of only Indian shops and the like, I mean I don’t see how they are integrated when they have created a little India.’ Although Bianca also speaks about ‘pockets’ of East Europeans, she positions herself, and Romanians overall, as higher in the hierarchy of integration and less visible than non-EU migrants. A few British participants also see non-EU migrants as more visible, such as Mary, who describes going out for lunch in Newham with her family and feeling ‘quite isolated because everyone was dark, everyone was Indian or African, we were the only white people there.’

The construction of hierarchies of invisible, visible and hypervisible migrants are based on what respondents see, usually in their local areas. In Newham, where a minority identify as white British, participants are more likely to overstate the UK share of the migrant population. Some frame the Newham demographic picture as the rule, rather than the exception. Other participants reflect unprompted on this bias. Emily, who voted Leave partly because of immigration, indicates that her EU migration estimates are influenced by her local-level experiences: ‘If I was living in Newham and I was just thinking, off the top of my head, I would say something like 70% [migrant population] or something ridiculous, but then if I lived in another borough I would probably say maybe 5% or something.’ While walking hundreds of miles of Newham streets observing different areas, my own previous knowledge and experiences were challenged. I felt surprised sometimes walking an entire five minutes hearing only Romanian being spoken. While trying to detach myself and avoid generalisations, I could sense the impact of personal, especially some negative, direct experiences in circumstances I encountered (such as with Romanian men making unsolicited
comments while I passed by). I related to my participants who described experiencing similar situations in their everyday lives.

In contrast to Newham residents, participants in Tendring tend to underestimate the number of migrants. EU migrants in Newham become hypervisible through large groups, such as the Romanians in front of East Ham station. In Tendring, they become visible because they are few enough to stand out immediately. For instance, Bobby thinks it is easier to identify migrants when they are surrounded by British people. He mentions how if there was ‘one Indian guy sitting at a table’ in the busy café where our interview took place, people’s attention would immediately be drawn to him. This was different to his experience in east London, where ‘you didn’t notice who anyone was, it wasn’t any hint of it really, at least it wasn’t that I noticed, it was cosmopolitan.’ The slower pace of migration in Tendring is sometimes seen as enabling better integration. Emma, who claims she is ‘the only person with Black children’ in her neighbourhood, considers attitudes in Tendring to be more positive, compared to east London, where higher migration constrains community cohesion, ‘separating us all’.

It is not only migrants who can become visible in local communities. Some interviewees discuss at length the impact of internal British migration. Out of the twenty-two recorded interviews with British Tendring residents, ten grew up in London. Eight spent most of their childhoods and working lives in Newham. Both the Clacton and East Ham MPs mention the movement of British people within the UK unprompted in the interviews. Housing is a common theme – while some of Giles Watling’s constituents told him they chose Clacton for a retirement property in a sunnier part of England, Stephen Timms comments on how Newham attracts British workers, in particular young people, from across the UK due to its more affordable rentals, compared to other London boroughs.

But migration also plays a role in this internal migration – while some move out of London to areas like Tendring as they wish to live in a less diverse place, some move to areas like Newham for their ethnic diversity. Clacton-on-Sea in Tendring becomes ‘East-End-on-Sea’ for participants like Susan, who chose the seaside town for a quieter retirement. While Mircea feels East Ham is like a Bucharest
suburb, Susan compares Clacton with the East End a few decades ago. For Ron, ‘Clacton is by definition the end of the line’ for East Enders wanting to move. There are mixed reasons to leave Newham, varying from the appeal of the Clacton sunshine to purchasing a cheaper retirement property. A few participants refer to increased immigration as a reason to move out of Newham. ‘Born and bred’ in Clacton, Jacob suggests that ‘the only migration that Clacton had generally experienced is people moving from London to Clacton.’ Others also note how Tendring is a ‘dumping ground’ for families in need of local authority support. Theresa, who used to work in drug and alcohol rehabilitation when living in West Ham, witnessed how ‘antisocial families’ were moved from the East End to Tendring. Emma, who became homeless in east London, told me how she was offered housing support, but she had to move to Tendring to receive it.

A similar, parallel picture of internal British migration emerges in Newham. While a decade ago the spike in migration consisted of East Europeans, Jack notes how currently the newcomers are ‘hipsters, people who work in the media, who are renting or buying here because it’s cheaper than in Hackney.’ Liam, who moved to Newham from the south of England, adds that the transport links in Stratford are key to why young British professionals choose this borough. Like the pensioners buying houses in Tendring, the young British workers coming to Newham are seen as economic contributors, highly skilled professionals in Newham’s expanding tall office buildings. While these graduates join a diverse community matching their predominantly pro-immigration attitudes, the British who moved out of Newham because of immigration often rediscover the lost ‘community spirit’ in places such as Clacton. However, British people who migrate, either internally or to other countries, are unlikely to be held to the same standards of ‘integration’, either economic or cultural, compared to migrants moving to the same places. Liam summarises this perspective:

No one is saying we’re gonna build a wall between Stratford and Tower Hamlets to stop people coming here […] everyone seems to be like, “oh okay, well, you know, my friend Carl moved to East Village, I don’t think he’s a migrant, you know, he hadn’t lived there before”.
Some British interviewees self-identified as migrants, giving examples of how they moved from one region of the UK to another, or from one London borough to another. The identification as an internal migrant serves different purposes. For some participants speaking about their migration history from east London to Tendring, such as Sam and Sarah, these experiences are used to emphasise increased international migration as a reason to relocate to a lower migration area, for instance. A few local politicians and activists in Tendring, such as Tasha Osben, noticed that the residents with strong anti-immigration views tend to come from east London or other areas with high immigration. Nevertheless, other participants, for example Liam, who moved to London from the South-West of England, self-identify as a migrant in the context of expressing positive views towards migration and positioning themselves as more proximate to international migrants.

5.3. Conclusion

To be welcomed in the local communities of Newham and Tendring, migrants need to ‘contribute’. This contribution can be broadly split into two, often overlapping, frames - economic and identity-based. While economic integration is more frequently mentioned, narratives of cultural integration are more detailed and relevant to the local level.

On economics, there is a broad consensus that migrants are desirable ‘as long as they pay tax’. This ‘common sense fiscal lens’ includes both low and highly skilled migrants as contributors. Participants emphasise the need for migrant workers across different skill levels. Migrants’ experiences of downskilling challenge often rigid definitions of ‘low skilled’. Migrants tend to detach themselves from negative portrayals of low skilled EU migrants. Some embrace their low skilled status (like Mihaela), others present their successful transition from low to highly skilled (such as Otilia), and most point the finger at their ‘lazy British’ or non-contributing EU migrant counterparts.

The originality of this chapter is in illustrating why economic and identity debates on migration cannot be separated. Migrant skill categories intersect with ethnic
and national hierarchies in participants’ narratives. The most visible migrants are low skilled and East European. Usually, economic contribution is not sufficient. Economically contributing migrants are welcome ‘as long as they integrate’. There are different views on whether responsibility for integration rests with the individual migrant or also with British people and institutions. British interviewees tend to place East Europeans last in the integration hierarchy, while Romanian and Polish participants usually put non-EU migrants at the bottom.

When speaking specifically about EU migrants, East Europeans are often perceived as negatively visible, hypervisible and lower skilled. Their portrayals contrast with West Europeans, who are either invisible or positively visible. Visibility itself is not necessarily problematic, unless it is associated with negative actions, such as not speaking English or antisocial behaviour like that identified by Mircea and Raluca in East Ham. The make-up of the local areas is also affected by British ‘London migrants’ (moving from London to Tendring or from other areas to Newham), who are overlooked in discussions of contribution and community. Participants construct hierarchies according to the impacts of migration they perceive locally: while some in Newham are conscious they may overestimate migration, others in Tendring point out the opposite.

The current UK policy debates focus on a system prioritising highly skilled migration and an integration agenda with language acquisition as a top priority. Yet participants’ accounts show there is no ‘one size fits all’ solution to immigration policy dilemmas. ‘As long as they contribute’ – pay tax and integrate - migrants are welcome. The difficulty is how to account for the nuances in public opinion beyond these broad statements. What does ‘low skilled’ mean for participants? What do people understand by ‘integration’? What are the different meanings of ‘contribution’? In what ways do migrant skill level and nationality intersect?

This chapter used qualitative data to analyse the meanings behind some of the most frequent terms in immigration debates. Despite this relatively positive picture showing support for migrants who contribute, there is also a strong sense among participants that migration needs to be controlled. The more one is seen
as contributing, the more they are welcomed in the community. The less one is seen as contributing, the more they need to be controlled as a migrant. The next chapter explores the latter two main themes in the interview analysis, control and certainty, before Chapter 7 looks at how participants’ views from Chapters 5 and 6 are justified and shaped.
Chapter 6. ‘It’s not about stopping people from coming, it’s about having control’: control and certainty as aspirations

Chapter 5 argued that the British, Romanian and Polish residents in Newham and Tendring welcomed migrants who ‘contributed’ economically and ‘integrated’ in their local communities. This chapter complements that analysis, focussing on the other main interview themes, namely interviewees’ desires for certainty and control. Many participants notice an ever-increasing precariousness and unpredictability in their everyday lives. Most feel that politicians are not listening to ordinary citizens’ concerns. As Figure 2 illustrates, this environment leads to a public appetite for more control, including stricter controls on immigration. Interviewees’ narratives construct a pre-referendum picture of lost local-level opportunities. Many were ‘unsettled’ by austerity policies. The predicted impacts of Brexit add an extra layer of uncertainty, especially for migrants, whose status in the UK is directly affected by the referendum outcome.

Usually, participants blame politicians and ‘the Government’ for creating these uncertainties. They criticise migrants’ own behaviour as individuals or a collective surprisingly seldom. While migrants are often explicitly distancing themselves from other conationalists, as shown in the previous chapter (Section 5.2.2.1), British interviewees tend to hold responsible migration as a phenomenon facilitated by politicians, rather than migrants as individuals. Participants concur that migration, especially of those who do not ‘contribute’, requires controls. However, their views differ when detailing what would constitute an ideal migration policy. While some prioritise reducing the overall number of all types of migrants, most advocate for more accurate data on migration and restrictions on specific rights EU migrants currently have, in particular access to welfare. Despite offering practical suggestions for migration policies, the majority of participants, both

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18 Some arguments in this chapter, particularly in the second part (regarding participants’ views on controlling low skilled EU migration), were published in an academic article (Bulat, 2019) before being rewritten for this chapter.
Leavers and Remainers, are sceptical about whether migration would significantly change post-Brexit.

Figure 2: Interview analysis main themes - Certainty and Control

6.1. Unsettled and uncertain: Losing control

I met 40-year old Alfred in a community café in Newham in 2018. He was unemployed and moving from one lodging to another, often sleeping on the streets. Before the interview, he told me that many of his friends experienced similar situations. He then linked these circumstances with his decision to vote Leave in the referendum:

I was very low at the time, 'cos yes, I am going through a lot of economic problems of my own, I felt very low and all the brainwashing that these migrants are coming in to take our homes, our jobs, everything...make you despair, you know.
Although not as extreme, other participants encountered financial difficulties and observed that their quality of life decreased in the years immediately preceding the 2016 vote.

Most participants speak about growing inequalities in their local communities. They tend to hold the Government, politicians and authorities responsible for budget cuts and other policy decisions leading to these outcomes. Some identify ‘uncontrolled’ migration as the root cause of certain problems they experience, for instance difficult access to housing, schools or employment. Yet this is also usually blamed on successive national (UK) or supranational (EU) governments and structures which are seen to facilitate the perceived negative impacts of migration. It is migration as a phenomenon, rather than migrants as people, that is sometimes portrayed as the scapegoat for participants’ everyday uncertainties. Crucially, all interviewees broadly feel that their individual voices cannot significantly impact key decisions governing their lives. This strengthens the sense of losing control on matters important to them, including migration policy. This first part of the chapter expands on how participants became ‘unsettled’ by austerity, further Brexit uncertainties and a sense of not being listened to by politicians.

6.1.1. ‘We don’t call it politics, we call it politricks’: austerity, poverty and inequality

Dan from Tendring did not experience the same level of hardship as Alfred from Newham, but he has seen how many have been ‘left behind’ in his village, ‘forgotten’ by those in power:

There’s a lot more money in London than there is in Clacton, so I do believe that we get left behind very often. [...] Who cares what people around here think? That’s what they [politicians] think, that’s how it feels [...] there’s no infrastructure here, there’s no reason, is it? We get an air show once a year, we get people come to the beach, that’s about it. London’s full, full steam, all day, all night. Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, that’s where the money is. So, I think you’ll find that it’s all about money. We don’t call it politics, we call it politricks, ‘cos all the money disappears, am I right? Start your thing with that! They don’t call it politics, in Jaywick, they call it politricks [...] See, this whole Brexit thing is all linked to the way life is now, life is at the worst it’s been since, since the beginning of the century, like the last century.
Dan contrasts Jaywick and Clacton to what he considers a wealthy London, the place ‘where the money is’. However, for many participants in Newham, London is far from being homogenously prosperous. They differentiate between deprived neighbourhoods in east London and affluent areas, which are often found next to the ‘left behind’ ones.

The British, Romanian and Polish interviewees were all asked to freely describe the areas they lived in (in Newham or Tendring, or both, for some participants). They also answered connected follow-up questions, such as whether they felt ‘at home’ where they resided and whether they thought their views were represented in local or national-level politics. Most interviews are underpinned by a narrative of ‘lost control’. This is based on lived experiences of austerity effects, combined with further Brexit uncertainties and the failure of politicians to engage with the issues that local residents prioritise. Very few participants speak about feeling ‘at home’ in the sense of being comfortable or secure in their everyday lives. There is a relationship between a high level of uncertainty (and perceived rapid changes at the local level) and a preference towards stricter controls on immigration. Nevertheless, the picture is more nuanced than a linear relationship and is shaped by participants’ individual experiences. A few interviewees even find their precarious living circumstances as a point of commonality with migrants in similar situations. This leads to expressing more empathetic views, for instance towards those who ‘have nothing’ in their countries of birth and migrate for a ‘better life’.

The context in which participants feel not listened to enough is one of austerity, increasing poverty and inequality. When speaking about their local neighbourhoods, interviewees mention issues affecting them personally. Although there were no direct questions asked on this particular topic, most participants mention the impact of austerity in their own or others’ lives. Austerity is usually discussed when interviewees speak about cuts in local services and housing shortages. Some also bring up crime as a local issue, while a few are equally concerned about the environment. Each participant constructs a hierarchy of local issues. The extent to which migration plays a role depends on the context in which interviewees encounter these problems. Those who did not experience positive impacts of migration locally are more likely to link the effects
of austerity with migration. This is similar to how participants who did not make use of freedom of movement are less likely to see this policy as beneficial (Chapter 4).

These findings add to previous literature showing how voters in the local authorities most impacted by austerity policies were more likely to choose UKIP in 2014 and subsequently vote Leave in 2016 (Fetzer, 2018a). In my sample, it is participants living in poorer parts of their constituencies who speak more at length about how austerity impacts their everyday lives. Narratives about austerity and immigration are often interconnected. For instance, Sarah expresses concerns about migrants committing crimes in her area. However, she justifies a perceived increase in criminality pointing at local budget cuts, which limited the local police station’s opening hours.

Whether it affects their lives directly or they see it from a relative distance, the majority of participants draw links between the asymmetric local-level impacts of austerity and the Brexit vote. There is a strong sense that authorities – the current or previous governments, ‘Westminster’, local governments, particular political figures or political parties – have failed to support local communities. For some, the UK ‘getting over Brexit’ as soon as possible would allow politicians to focus on ‘real issues’ like austerity, inequality and poverty. For others, implementing the 2016 vote would exacerbate these problems. Meanwhile, in the midst of Brexit negotiations when interviewed in 2017-2018, participants feel powerless and many feel voiceless in the political process.

6.1.2. ‘What’s the point, when they’re not listening?’: powerless and voiceless

All participants express their views on local politics and they often comment on national-level politics as well. They elaborate on whether they consider their opinions, including their position on immigration policy, are represented by politicians. Whose voices get heard in the Brexit debates and in UK politics more broadly? Across the spectrum of political preferences, my participants think that ordinary residents’ views are not seriously listened to by politicians. Some describe themselves as ‘left behind’ by rapid changes in their local areas. This is
one of the explanations for the Brexit vote covered in previous literature (e.g. Goodwin and Heath, 2016). Others think that it is politicians with their strategic policy choices who deliberately ‘let down’ people like them (for this line of argument, see Watson, 2018). There is a range of views in both Newham and Tendring. Overall, participants’ narratives are similar, despite one area being inside the capital and the other on the east coast of England. The insight from this fieldwork supports the call by other scholars for less reductionist approaches when exploring the ‘geographies of Brexit’ (Gordon, 2018; Peace, 2019).

Moreover, studies explaining the Brexit vote have been criticised for almost invariably depicting the ‘left behind’ as a British white working class (Bhambra, 2017). By comparing migrant and non-migrant voices, I show how local residents from different class and ethnic backgrounds share similar feelings of being ‘forgotten’ by the political system. It is especially younger British and migrant participants, including those identifying as middle class, who express uncertainties regarding their future. Newham is a case study of an urban, ethnically diverse area in the capital that has high poverty levels. It differs from the typical representations of the ‘left behind’ as older, predominantly white, British working-class towns and villages in the north of England.

The findings from this study complement previous arguments for the re-conceptualisation of the ‘left behind’ as the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas, rather than the spaces inhabited by ‘traditional’ white working class populations (see Furlong, 2019). Overall, my participants’ narratives about politics are almost identical to those illustrated in recent Brexit research. They show an erosion of trust in Westminster politicians and a belief there is a ‘rigged economy’ (Bevington et al., 2019: 4-5) depriving many of opportunities which others had in the past. This qualitative data also offers nuance to situate previous quantitative findings pointing at the increased scepticism towards UK social and political systems (e.g. Ipsos MORI, 2019b).

Although participants agree that politicians do not listen to their views, there are differences in how they reach this conclusion. Some feel they can express their opinions openly, but others believe their freedom of speech on certain issues,
such as immigration, has been curtailed. Another narrative, common in the migrant sample, is of those who are disenfranchised but wish to express their views more vocally. Several British participants also mention how most\(^\text{19}\) EU migrants could not have a vote in the 2016 referendum, despite it being a decision impacting their lives directly. This latter observation is placed within a wider critique of the near absence of migrant voices in the referendum campaign (see Section 4.1.3).

For a few migrant participants, the 2016 referendum represented the moment they became interested in UK politics. Their political activism follows a decision in which they had no say. It enables them to feel more in control, through adding their voice to Brexit debates, for instance, by joining the campaign for a second ‘people’s vote’. However, Brexit did not make any difference for some migrants, who continue to be politically uninvolved. Paulina, a Polish migrant and active UK political party member, expresses her frustrations after unsuccessfully trying to engage Polish voters in the 2018 local elections. She notes how some fellow Poles deliberately ‘keep out of politics’, because they fear being ‘on a register’ and are suspicious of politicians’ intentions.

While most participants feel they can express their views, some refuse to participate in politics because they see no or little prospect of their voice having an impact. Bobby, who campaigns for a political party in Tendring, concludes that while his close friends are highly involved in local politics, young people ‘don’t vote much at all around here’. This perspective is pronounced in the more deprived areas, such as Jaywick, where all interviewed residents mention a lack of engagement in politics, particularly among the younger generation. Dan, an active community leader, explains: ‘You’ve got the older people who are old fashioned, they think, “ah, we can make a difference with this vote”, but younger people…they don’t believe they can have an effect’. The participants in Jaywick are not interested in politics mainly because they feel politicians do not listen to them and therefore cannot represent their views. While Bianca from Newham admits she registered to vote hoping this would boost her credit score (but never

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\(^{19}\) Citizens of Malta and Cyprus could vote as they are part of the Commonwealth, and Irish citizens could vote in accordance to the Ireland Act 1949.
participated in the local elections she can vote in as a Romanian migrant), Emma from Jaywick outright refuses to be on the electoral roll. As a single mother-of-five who had been homeless, she believes politicians cannot relate to the struggles of people like her:

I don’t vote, I don’t register to vote. When it comes through the door, I know it’s a legal requirement, but I throw it in the bin. I don’t vote because I think, what’s the point, when they’re not listening? […] you need to put somebody in there that […] can understand what they’re going through…bring somebody, you know, a single mum in, bring a working family on, you know, on a low income, that have been homeless.

While most are either involved in politics to different levels or refuse to engage altogether, others want to engage, but feel they cannot express their views. A minority of interviewees spoke in detail and unprompted about the ‘political correctness’ which prevents them from expressing their opinions. This consequently limits their ability as individuals to feel in control over the political process. In Tendring, a few participants chose to be interviewed in their own homes. A few mentioned not being comfortable speaking about immigration in a public place. During the two-hour interview (preceded and followed by more discussion), Sam and his family give numerous examples of things they feel they are ‘not allowed’ to say anymore: using the N-word, singing ‘Baa, Baa, Black Sheep’ in schools, or displaying a golliwog by their window (this narrative is similar to that of some focus group participants in Valentine, 2008: 329).

After enumerating these examples and showing me some objects such as the golliwog, Sam concludes: ‘How disgusting is that, we’ve lost all freedoms and all rights!’ - ‘We’ve lost freedom of speech!’, adds Sarah. She comments that ‘double standards’ are applied to white British people like herself, compared to migrants, who are permitted to use the language for which she would suffer consequences: ‘We can get arrested for so many things, foreign people can’t.’ Sarah is one of the participants who would like to be more involved in politics, but she is aware her views would be considered racist: ‘I’d like to go on them discussion programmes, you know, on the telly, where they got all the MPs sitting round the table there, but they wouldn’t let me speak up’. When asked about their local MP,
Sam and Sarah admit they do not know his name and comment they were told ‘not to bother, ‘cos nothing is going to get done’.

A sense that ordinary citizens lost control of the political debate is particularly strong when some participants speak about immigration. They see immigration policies being decided remotely from residents, by the UK Government or the EU, without their explicit consent or consultation. For instance, Susan describes her frustration when trying to raise her concerns about refugees with one of the 2017 general election candidates in Clacton. This experience made Susan less likely to engage with politics: ‘I said [that] they’re holding onto houses for refugees, but not housing the people who were actually born and live here and she [local candidate] just said, “oh, what, do you want us to turn them away?” So, really, she had no understanding [...].’

Direct experiences with politicians who appear dismissive of the ‘genuine concerns’ of residents intensify the feeling of being far removed from the decision-making processes. It is within this context that some participants expected to regain the lost control through the 2016 vote. Nevertheless, for many participants, and especially for migrants, Brexit brought even more uncertainty. While some migrants feel unrepresented and even excluded by the political system in the UK, almost all local politician interviewees note the low engagement from East European migrant communities in particular (often contrasting with higher levels of political engagement in other migrant groups) and their wish to hear more about the issues those groups have. The main narrative in politicians’ interviews, based on their experience speaking to East Europeans especially during local election campaigns (as EU migrants can vote in local elections) was that East Europeans are ‘contributors’ economically, but they are not interested or involved in politics.

6.1.3. Brexit and continued uncertainties

Like participants in other recent research (Bevington et al., 2019), some of my interviewees hoped to see the Brexit debate ‘done and dusted’ to enable politicians to focus on issues such as the impact of austerity. However, when
interviewed approximately two years after the referendum, most were disappointed in how Brexit unfolded. The seemingly endless negotiations between the UK and the EU worsened the feelings of uncertainty and loss of control for many. Living in a state of uncertainty since the referendum is unsettling. The implementation of a result which aimed to give ordinary people more control over their lives took away certainty from others, especially EU migrants. When speaking about Brexit, the loss of control is mainly related to migrants’ status in the UK and predicted economic impacts. Migrants’ narratives are more detailed, although there are some British participants whose plans were directly impacted by Brexit uncertainty.

Most Romanian and Polish participants are concerned that the UK would become less welcoming for migrants. A few speak about experiencing increased hostility since the referendum, while others believe nothing has changed so far. When mentioning EU migrants who plan to leave the UK, who already left or who changed their plans to come, participants refer to the changing image of the UK as a once tolerant and open country. For instance, Mădălina expects a lower number of EU migrants choosing the UK after Brexit. This is not necessarily because stricter immigration rules will deter them, but rather due to not feeling welcome. Mădălina plans to stay in the UK. Yet the thought of leaving the country crossed her mind the day after the referendum, when she went out with a group of EU migrant friends and asked herself ‘why am I in this country?’ - She felt rejected as a migrant, but most importantly, as a migrant who contributes. ‘I pay taxes so that […] an English person [is] living off benefits’, she adds after claiming she feels unwelcome. In the context of Brexit uncertainties, some participants are quick to justify their existence in the UK, explaining how they are ‘contributing’ and therefore should be welcome. These rationalisations are usually based on pitting themselves against other groups, such as the ‘lazy Brits’ or less contributing non-EU migrants.

Many migrant participants experienced hostility at some point while living in the UK. Only a few describe cases of discrimination. For example, Raluca speaks about being paid a lower rate than British workers for the same cleaning job in a hotel. Some interviewees also mention instances of hate speech. Marta, Raluca
and Dominika received verbal abuse on the streets or at work when speaking their native languages. While some link these occurrences with the Brexit vote, most see the expression of anti-immigration sentiments as long predating the referendum. They attribute these experiences to being East Europeans, a migrant group subject to negative media and political portrayals in the UK. Robert frequently hears comments such as ‘What, are you Romanian? And you work, you don’t beg or steal?’. He thinks these remarks become part ‘normality’, reaching a ‘stage where they became amusing’. Whether migrants notice any difference in how they are treated after 2016 depends on the level of hostility they experienced before the referendum.

The ‘Brexodus’ of EU migrants leaving after the referendum has been extensively discussed in the media, particularly after ONS figures confirmed a significant decrease in net EU migration (Office for National Statistics, 2018c). Most participants refer to this Brexodus in different ways, such as by giving examples of EU migrants they know who left or speaking about their own relocation plans. For those who plan to leave the UK, Brexit uncertainties represent a ‘final straw’ rather than a main reason for moving to another country. Although she felt disheartened by the referendum result, Otilia is confident Brexit is not the reason to leave the UK. She decided to return to Romania in the near future to have a better work-life balance and higher quality accommodation and food.

Similarly, a few of Melania’s Polish and Lithuanian acquaintances returned after realising they could have a higher standard of living outside the UK: ‘we have a better wage [in the UK], but the tax and living costs and just everything, it’s extremely different to somewhere like Poland for example.’ For Joanna and Stuart, who were packing when I visited their home for the interview, Brexit weighted more heavily as a deciding factor, but it was far from the only one. When commenting on the couple’s decision to move to another country, Joanna notes: ‘they [politicians] think that migration is a tap they can turn on and off as they please, but they can’t, because people’s emotions are a very important aspect of it’.
Although many migrant interviewees share Joanna’s feelings, the majority plan to remain in the UK for good, whatever the Brexit outcome. The referendum result encouraged a few to apply for a permanent residency card20 followed by British citizenship, in the hope to secure their existing rights. Participants have diverse reasons for not considering return migration. Bianca, who only visited Romania twice during the last five years, does not see adequate career opportunities in her country of birth, while Mirel’s main reason for not returning is the ‘corrupt political system’. Migrants like Raluca and Doriana, whose extended families live in Newham, think that Brexit will have little or no impact on long-term residents like themselves. Those with families in the UK also mention that it would be more difficult for them to move than single, younger migrants. Nevertheless, some migrants who arrived more recently also consider that Brexit will not affect their futures. Mirel moved to the UK after the referendum and believes everyone currently working in the UK ‘will be fine’. Robert also speaks for migrants who want to stay in the UK but also feel ‘ready anytime, to leave anywhere’, aware that their skills would be welcomed in other countries.

Alongside concerns about their rights post-Brexit and how welcome they would feel, migrant participants express economic worries, like many British interviewees. Many respondents point at the predicted negative economic impact of Brexit on their communities, which are already relatively deprived. Some speak about their personal finances worsening since the referendum. Raluca gives examples of price increases at Lidl where she goes for her weekly food shop. Otilia also voices concerns about the economic impact of Brexit. She explains how the prices at her work canteen rose, while her monthly pay did not change: ‘I have been [working] there for two years and a half, when I started, the coffee was 60p, it was 90p last year and this year it’s one pound’. These everyday experiences that Raluca and Otilia describe are framed within a theme of economic uncertainties, which also contribute to migrants’ decisions to stay or leave the UK.

20 The EU Settlement Scheme for EU migrants was open to the public after the fieldwork concluded.
The perception that ‘there’s more poverty here than there’s ever been’, as Jacob summarises it, influences some British participants’ decisions to move out of their areas as well. The more secure someone feels in their everyday life, the more likely they are to feel unaffected by Brexit uncertainties. Dan is worried that further economic uncertainties could disproportionately affect Jaywick residents. However, he is not personally troubled by possible negative Brexit impacts: ‘it doesn’t affect me, ‘cos I’ve got my own car, my own house, I work, I earn money, so it really doesn’t affect me.’

Unlike Dan, several British participants feel anxious about their future and plan to move to other parts of the UK or abroad. Like for migrant participants, their reasons are varied. For instance, Emily is ‘not happy’ in Newham and is waiting for a social housing ‘swap’: ‘I definitely want to move out, maybe next year, so yep, there will be one less UK person from Newham’. While Emily wants to live in an area with lower migration, Theresa plans life out of Clacton, in the Remain-majority Scotland. She does not feel ‘at home’ anymore among a majority of Leave voters with different views than her own, particularly on immigration. The Brexodus of British people has been overlooked. Since I completed the fieldwork, two younger British participants informed me of their relocation to Spain and the Netherlands, respectively. In both cases, the decision was taken to ‘escape’ Brexit uncertainties and take the ‘last chance’ to use their freedom of movement rights as EU citizens.

6.2. ‘The Government made me prejudiced’: the perceived consequences of immigration policy choices

The first part of this chapter illustrated how participants feel unsettled and uncertain in various ways, losing control over different aspects of their lives. The ‘take back control’ Vote Leave slogan related to those who felt ‘left behind’ by politicians, those who suffered the consequences of austerity and those who wished to have a stronger voice in decision making. A key question for this thesis is to what extent migrants (or the ‘uncontrolled migration’ from the ephemera in Chapter 4) are held responsible for this loss of control. While some participants blamed the uncertainties and problems in their lives on cuts in services resulting
from austerity policies or other political decisions, others found migration as the reason for pressures in their communities. However, when speaking about migration in this context, it is still politicians and governments who are held accountable for the (mis)management of migration policies.

Scapegoating individual migrants rarely occurs. Throughout the fieldwork, I reflected on whether my migrant background made participants more likely to blame the Government, rather than migration or migrants. However, my findings reflect recent studies by British researchers with British participants. Previous research shows a similar tendency of holding the UK Government or other actors in positions of power, such as ‘rogue landlords’ (Rutter and Carter, 2018: 109), responsible for issues such as overcrowding and undercutting wages (which are commonly associated with migration in media and political narratives). Blaming individual migrants is usually embedded within Romanian and Polish interviewees’ narratives of distancing themselves from ‘other’ migrants or within descriptions of specific events e.g. a crime committed by Romanian migrants in the local area. Migration as a phenomenon is linked to criticisms of other policy domains, such as housing, employment and security. It is also discussed independently from other policies, with some participants highlighting the mismanagement of migration policy by successive governments.

6.2.1. Perceived policy failures

Failures in other policy domains are linked to the impact of migration. Housing is by far the most frequent example given by participants. Sarah, Linda and Sam all had stories of hardship. Sam, a wheelchair user, struggled to get housing support, while Linda left school early and now struggles to pay for her vocational training while providing for her two children. Sarah was forced to retire early due to an illness. They all speak about negative impacts of immigration on the aspects they are most concerned about - school places for Linda’s children, NHS waiting times for Sarah and housing for Sam. ‘The Government’ is consistently scorned and held responsible for the loss of control in their everyday lives. ‘The Government made me prejudiced!’, Sarah concludes, to everyone’s agreement. She then explains:
There’s so many English families living in one room, they let all these [migrants] in and they’re rehousing ‘em, giving them a house and everything, having them build for ‘em... that’s why the Government has made me prejudiced. The English people don’t count anymore in this country, it’s all gotta be for foreign people...and if you say anything about it... [Sam: you’re racist] you’re wrong.

Sarah and her family are persuaded that migrants receive free housing straight after they arrive, while British people are left to queue for years and often end up, like Sam, not receiving the support they need. Although they criticise migrants who do not ‘contribute’, it is the British Government who is identified as accountable for leaving their family behind and making their lives ever more insecure. Politicians are seen as enabling a perceived set of policies (e.g. ‘free housing’) allowing migrants to have easier lives than British-born people. Similarly, Emma is in no doubt that migrants ‘jump the queue’ for housing assistance. Although she empathises with a Polish friend who accepted the offer of a council property in London, this situation left her increasingly frustrated with ‘the system’:

When I asked for help, like when I was homeless, not from my own fault, just simply because of marriage broke up and I ended up in a hotel with five children and they weren’t willing to help me, but then there was a Polish lady with two children who got housed, who was really lovely, we used to have coffee in the morning and things like that you know, we’d helped each other out with the kids and that you know, she was in the same boat as me, she got housed, straight away... and that bothered me a bit.

Emma adds that she would have been ‘quite willing to give her a couple of rooms in the house if they gave me a house’. Instead, she felt ‘left on the doorstep’, while the Polish woman received assistance. Emma blames the ‘unfair system’ and generally has positive attitudes towards migrants. She is also sympathetic to the plight of refugees. Nevertheless, the experience of unsuccessfully seeking housing support in London shaped her views on migration policy: ‘it’s not even about racism, it’s about...they need to deal with what’s going on here first, before they let others in.’ Sarah and Emma blame the Government, but they also advocate for more restrictive migration rules to ‘put British people first’. Other participants believe problems like difficult access to housing support can be solved without a change in migration policy. Especially British Remainers, such
as Jane, portray austerity as an intentional political strategy to position groups of people against each other and shift the blame from governments to migrants.

Apart from the Government, there are also other actors who are blamed for creating an uncertain environment. When participants speak about housing, landlords are usually considered to be accountable too. For instance, Elisabeth feels that the ‘modern slavery angle’ is ignored when discussing the impact of migration. She observed migrants in precarious employment getting ‘trapped in a cycle of having to pay their rent’. Landlords are depicted as ‘purely trying to make profit from them’:

Something that has become a problem in Newham is things like HMOs, there is a lot of illegal HMOs because landlords just take advantage of lots of people wanting to live in the borough [...] I don't think it's necessarily about the people who are moving in, but maybe the conditions that they are having to move into.

Like Elisabeth, others, especially in Newham, raise overcrowding as a problem connected to migration. This situation is not normally seen as migrants’ fault, but as a consequence of landlords permitting these unsuitable conditions for migrants to ‘move into’. Mirel, who recently moved to West Ham from Romania, describes the area as ‘suprapopulated’. He lives in a shared three-bedroom house with seven other migrants. He is ‘living quite decently’, but other friends are in worse situations, ‘where they live almost 20 people in a house’. When the ‘greedy landlords’ are not held accountable directly, the blame falls again on the Government. Mark criticises those in power for not sufficiently investing in housing: ‘there’s just not enough housing, anywhere in London, but I get the impression that lots of new people arrive in Newham and West Ham and you know they struggle to find decent housing.’

6.2.2. Mismanaged migration

Several policy areas are interconnected when participants describe the impacts of migration. EU migration policy is also extensively criticised on its own. The Government tends to be blamed for mismanaging migration policy. Some participants note the UK’s decisions not to impose all available restrictions within
the EU framework, while others comment on inadequate resource planning in areas witnessing a rapid increase in the migrant population. Specific governments and politicians are mentioned when discussing the decisions which created the conditions for the 2016 referendum. Ron regards Brexit as ‘a proxy vote against the Blair Government years after it happened’. Comparatively, some Remainers see the Leave vote as ‘sending a message’ against the Cameron administration. Yet the Blair Government’s immigration policy decisions are also criticised by some Remain supporters. Lorna believes that opening the UK labour market to A8 states without restrictions in 2004 contributed to creating the sense of losing control:

And it was like oh, it won’t be families, it will just be single people who will come for work for a bit and then go home, and at the same time my son’s primary school had lots of young children from those countries so you could see in your day to day life that, that wasn’t true. And I think that, that was a scary moment for a lot of people, the Government had got it very wrong.

This is an example of how Government promises do not match lived local-level experiences. This disconnect decreases trust in politicians. Other participants also mention how the Government vastly underestimated the number of A8 migrants arriving in 2004. These concerns are echoed by some local councillors as well. For example, Cllr Paul in Newham underlines that the rapid increase in (predominantly East European) migration in Newham was underestimated and therefore it was impossible to match funding for the additional resources needed locally in good time. In his view, this has provoked a sense of uncertainty but also frustration among Newham residents, both British-born and longer-term migrant residents. Some chose to vote Leave in their ‘economic self-interest’, hoping for fairer resource allocation with a ‘controlled’ migration system post-Brexit.

In Lorna’s view, the failure to accurately predict migration flows led to insufficient resource allocation, which aggravated existing pressures in local communities: ‘Had they prepared people and prepared the infrastructure, it wouldn’t have been a problem, but they didn’t really think it through.’ Many participants note there are more migrants living in the areas which need most support from authorities. Some consider this is a practical choice by migrants themselves. For example, Flaviu comments that more migrants live in deprived neighbourhoods in east London.
because they tend to work in lower paid jobs and thus cannot afford renting in more prosperous London areas. Other participants suggest that migrants are deliberately ‘placed’ in those ‘left behind’ locations. Alfred noticed this practice in the homelessness charity which assisted him. Without sufficient Government funding, those areas are seen to foster increased competition over resources between migrants and non-migrants. James explains that it is British residents in precarious circumstances who feel most negatively impacted by migration: ‘my privilege insulates me from the impact of migrants.’ Like Dan who is not concerned about the potential economic impacts of Brexit on his personal life, James highlights that he does not compete for the same jobs that most migrants do: ‘I don’t react or worry about immigration, because I don’t really care if someone takes construction jobs – I don’t work in construction. My brothers and my dad do, but they’ve got good jobs and they’re like, they’re very safe, very secure.’

Some interviewees also speak about authorities choosing not to apply existing legislation which could benefit the areas subject to rapid changes. Participants living in poorer neighbourhoods and those in low paid jobs themselves emphasise concerns over migrants undercutting wages (either their own or hearing these worries from others). This is another impact of migration which is framed as being avoidable, if the Government acted accordingly. Several participants observed migrant workers being underpaid in their local areas, sometimes paid below the minimum wage. Doriana believes that if the minimum wage was enforced in a stricter way, employers would not risk paying migrant workers less than British workers or less than the law requires them to. In her opinion, this would lead to more positive attitudes towards migrants as concerns about undercutting wages would be removed: ‘if you pay people better, then the Polish carpenter is gonna cost just as much as the British one, because everyone will be able to afford it.’

There is a sense among participants that politicians are more inclined to change immigration rules than other policy areas. For example, when speaking about housing provision, holding governments responsible is often coupled with a ‘there is no alternative’ view. Most participants feel that very little would change in
practice, even with a change of politicians - ‘they’re all the same’, as many put it. Comparatively, changes in immigration policy are seen more likely to occur and lead to significant impacts. In other words, many interviewees see the scenario of having fewer migrants using public services as a more realistic one than having a Government who will redistribute funding in a different way, improving public services in their local areas through this strategy.

For some, the uncertainties affecting their everyday lives cannot be addressed without changing the immigration system. Emily is sceptical of positive changes on healthcare and housing. Tougher restrictions on migration seem like a more viable temporary solution:

Until we sort our systems, until we sort our things like the NHS, which no one government is gonna do [...] until we sort out our housing, you know, I think we just actually just put hold on anyone coming into the country at the moment.

Emily explains how, while working for the NHS, she has seen first-hand the difficulties the system faces, such as increasingly longer waiting lists for patients. But Emily has little faith that a government will solve these problems (‘no one government is gonna do’). ‘Controlling migration' by not allowing any more migrants in the UK will not deal with the underlying system issues. However, in Emily’s view, it will prevent the worsening of the current situation. Ron explains why the Leave campaign resonated well on many Newham doorsteps when he was canvassing in 2016:

The main message was that it needs to be got under control. Particularly in an area where there’s a lot of renting, a lot of turnover, and a lot of HMOs, there’s a lot of population pressures. I don’t know if you saw the train today, the train is often rammed, literally rammed packed, you can barely move. I mean, a lot of people equate the overcrowding with migration.

Like Emily, Ron believes that lower net migration would reduce pressures on public services quicker (and more realistically) than investing in better transport infrastructure, such as providing more frequent trains at his local station.
As illustrated in the examples so far, it is the mismanagement of migration policy, rather than migrants themselves, who become scapegoats for everyday uncertainties and grievances. While participants generally speak about ‘migration’ as a broad category, when detailing issues around the rapid increase in migration in their areas, the references are to migration from A8 and A2 states. Comparatively, scapegoating individuals is uncommon, and it emerges primarily through migrant participants’ narratives (cf. Tuckett, 2017). Many Romanian and Polish interviewees reject the suggestion that their presence in the UK causes the issues that migrants are often accused of. A first strategy of distancing themselves from blame is positioning in contrast to the ‘lazy Brits’ stereotypes described in Section 5.1.2.3. For example, Klara dismisses concerns that EU migrants negatively impact local services, adding:

I had a girl coming to me saying ‘oh, I’m sixteen, how do I get a council place?’ She wasn’t even pregnant or had a child […] I think they [British people] just can’t adapt and because of the inequality that grows in the world they have to blame someone, so who would they blame? Immigrants [laughing].

Although Klara mentions the ‘inequality that grows in the world’, she points at individual behaviour (the unreasonable expectations that some British people have) to justify why migrants are not responsible for inadequate housing support.

A second approach to deny negative impacts of EU migration is to blame ‘other’, usually non-EU migrants. Bianca uses this strategy to explain why she thinks some British people are not content with immigration:

What they don’t like is this mass, this big wave of immigrants coming from Asia, that’s what I think. However, taking into account they colonised half the globe, it is difficult to come back now and say, ‘go back home’, when we colonised you. So, then, knowing that you cannot turn against those whom you colonised, let’s turn against those other ones [EU migrants], because it’s easier, that’s my view.

Bianca thinks that public services are overstretched by the ‘big wave’ of non-EU migrants. She sees Asian migrants as representing a majority in her East Ham neighbourhood. Bianca considers that the British cannot blame Commonwealth migrants due to historic reasons and thus EU migrants become scapegoats when
they are not responsible for the accusations. Unlike Bianca and Klara, other migrant participants, such as Robert and Flaviu, identify EU migrants as the cause of some public grievances, for instance when speaking about specific crimes Romanians committed in east London.

Whether participants blame EU migrants as individuals or EU migration as a set of policies depends on the knowledge they have about migration and other policy areas. First, there is the extent to which they believe intra-EU migration is ‘controlled’. The meaning people attribute to ‘controlled’ (as opposed to ‘uncontrolled’) is crucial, as illustrated by Louise’s reactions to the two terms in Section 4.2.1. Believing immigration is controlled offers a sense of having more control over one’s life. If immigration is seen as ‘under control’, participants’ narratives become less about ‘migrants taking jobs’ from British people, but more about individual decisions which make obtaining desired jobs more or less likely. Second, participants have different levels of awareness of how the welfare system works in the UK. Knowledge of migration also impacts whether they underestimate or overestimate net EU migration, which, in turn, shapes how they perceive the scale of impact on public services. Participants who believe that the UK controls EU migration tend to have more positive views than those who feel that EU migration is simply ‘uncontrolled’ or became ‘out of control’ after 2004.

Many participants feel a loss of control over their lives and the future of their communities. This is fuelled by perceived policy failures. Some interviewees explain how migration policy has been mismanaged. There is scepticism that significant changes would be implemented by politicians to solve issues such as pressures on housing and the NHS. Lowering migration represents an ‘easy fix’ for some to ensure that current hardships are not intensified. This prospect of a less uncertain future prompted some participants to ‘take back control’ at the ballot box in 2016. The slogan acted as an empty signifier, adopting different values according to people’s individual experiences and circumstances. ‘Taking back control’ becomes significant through localised experiences and subjective interpretations of what has been ‘lost’ in the first place. For Sarah and her family, it implied getting easier access to welfare support, such as housing, that is currently limited or denied to them. Nevertheless, as the next (and last) section
of this chapter shows, participants’ ideal immigration policy does not necessarily match the post-Brexit immigration proposals or what they realistically expect when they are interviewed two years after the referendum.

6.3. The Brexit settlement: taking back control?

When speaking about some negative impacts of immigration they observed in their local areas, participants tend to blame governments, politicians or other people in positions of power, such as landlords. While only a few interviewees scapegoat migrants as individuals, the majority agree that a certain level of ‘control’ over immigration is both desirable and required. Since the 2016 referendum, attitudes towards immigration have softened (Duffy et al., 2017; Kaur-Ballagan, 2019), even among the most sceptical Leave voters. One of the discussed lines of interpretation in this context is that some assumed that more control over immigration was already implemented after the referendum result or is expected in the near future. But what does ‘controlling immigration’ mean in practice for participants?

Usually, the term ‘control’ (often in the phrase ‘more control’) is used without providing further details. Politicians’ interviews reflect these observations. Usually, voters do not speak about wanting immigration to be stopped, they simply want it ‘controlled in a sensible way’, as Cllr Everett from Tendring pointed out. I prompted my interviewees to speak about migration policy using specific examples. Participants were asked whether they thought immigration would change after Brexit and how. One of the other questions was to present what their ideal migration policy would look like if they were ‘in charge’. It is important to note that the interviews were conducted mostly in 2018. The Windrush scandal dominated the news on immigration and much of the post-Brexit migration policy detail was not decided. The EU Settlement Scheme for EU migrants already living in the UK only opened to the public a few months later. The interview material captures ‘expectations’ at a particular point in time and compares those with the ‘realities’ of 2018 immigration policy. Participants’ accounts reflect the uncertainty around future migration policy and the status of EU migrants post-Brexit.
6.3.1. Expectations vs. the reality of immigration policy

Participants are aware of Brexit uncertainties and often find it difficult to answer the interview questions on migration policy. Overall, they expect the post-Brexit immigration system to become somewhat more restrictive than the current one. British, Romanian and Polish residents on all sides of politics are sceptical regarding the prospect of substantive post-Brexit immigration reform. Only a few are convinced that Brexit would significantly reduce net migration to the UK.

The narratives of Leavers and Remainers largely differ on this topic. Remain supporters tend to emphasise the unsettling environment created by Brexit. They draw attention to how some EU migrants plan to leave and how a ‘hostile environment’ would prevent others from coming. They think migration from non-EU countries would have to increase, as migrants will still be needed as workers in a range of sectors in the UK economy. Leave supporters hope to gain control over immigration and reduce net migration. A few participants quote high net migration as a key reason to vote Leave in 2016. When interviewed in 2018, during the May Government, they express a lack of trust in the Prime Minister to keep the Leave’s campaign promises on immigration. This feeling would probably be different if participants were interviewed after Johnson won a Conservative majority in December 2019.

Many participants predict that neither Remainers nor Leavers ‘get what they voted for’ on immigration - preserving EU freedom of movement or a points-based system, respectively. They fear this could aggravate tensions between the two sides of the Brexit divide. Moreover, some comment that not fulfilling Leavers’ expectations on migration policy could potentially lead to an even more divisive public debate on immigration. They believe the overall number of migrants arriving in the UK will remain similar, but the likelihood of an increase in non-EU migration would not fit some Leave voters’ expectations. Nancy is one of the concerned participants. She speaks about meeting Leave voters who wished Brexit would reduce migration from outside the EU:

I worry that people might even get angrier because they feel they’ve got this thing that they campaigned for such a long time and it didn’t deliver what they
wanted to. If what they wanted was a halt to non-EU migration, then that’s not what they’re getting [...] it makes me wonder if people might just become angrier.

Likewise, Joanna listened to some people claiming a vote to leave the EU would limit all types of immigration. She responds to that view: ‘Your white nurse will be a brown nurse now. Shock horror when they [Leave voters] will find out.’

Some participant narratives on post-Brexit migration are racialised, especially by the Romanian and Polish interviewees who position EU migrants as more ‘desirable’ or ‘contributing’ than non-EU counterparts. Mirel states that Brexit ‘won’t stop immigration for them, I mean at least their Indians and everyone else from the ex-colonies will remain.’ Ionel elaborates on a similar point:

Well, there won’t be East Europeans coming, there will be Commonwealth, so what did you solve? Because they’ll still come. You wanted to limit immigration and you’ll still have them coming, because you need them, you know? No, it won’t stop […] No, other colours will come, other values will come.

In addition to a reduction in net migration, another expectation built through the Leave campaign was creating a ‘fairer’ immigration system. Participants also tend to be sceptical of this. Some are worried that far from making the system fairer for all migrants, a post-Brexit system will level down rights for all, creating the conditions for even more precarious migrants with fewer rights. Robert reflects on those circumstances. He mentions the risk that a higher number of people could be living in the UK unlawfully post-Brexit and the Government would be unable to remove all overstayers from the country.

After commenting on their expectations, participants describe their ideal migration policies. A small minority of interviewees advocate for a more liberal migration policy than currently exists under freedom of movement for EU citizens. In other words, very few participants support complete ‘open borders’ or extending freedom of movement to more or all migrants, beyond the EU’s external borders. Most participants, including a majority of Remain supporters, prefer a certain level of ‘control’ – but this term takes different meanings depending on the context. Policy suggestions range from a simple registration
system for all migrants upon entry to the UK, to only issuing visas to those who have a job or study offer. On the other end of the spectrum to the ‘open border’ enthusiasts, a few participants believe there should be an active effort to bring down the number of migrants across all categories, including the ‘contributors’. The findings from my sample mirror broader trends captured through quantitative survey research, showing a small minority supporting open borders e.g. 15% globally surveyed recently by Ipsos MORI (2019b).

The desired changes to EU migration depend on what participants know about the current state of EU freedom of movement rules. David elaborates on how EU migrants can be removed from the UK in some circumstances according to EEA regulations, such as if failing to prove they are a ‘qualified person’ (student or self-sufficient with comprehensive sickness insurance, worker or self-employed) after three months. Other interviewees, like John, are certain that migration from EU countries cannot be subject to ‘any controls at all’. There are also participants like Ahmed who think the UK Government can do ‘whatever they want’ in any area of immigration policy. Some interviewees admit to having limited knowledge or being confused about how migration policy works in practice.

Recent UK post-referendum research argues that while public opinion on immigration appears highly divided, there may be a ‘hidden consensus’ on this issue - ‘British voters could be more pragmatic and open to compromise on EU immigration than widely assumed’ (Buchanan et al., 2019). Survey participants were provided information on an EU rule enabling member states to remove free movers who are not within one of the ‘qualified person’ categories after three months. Two thirds believed that implementing this restriction would offer an adequate level of control. The same analysis emphasises that almost half of the British public, including a majority of Leave voters, incorrectly assume that the UK cannot impose any restrictions on EU migrants (Buchanan et al., 2019). After accessing neutral expert information on EU freedom of movement, a majority participating in Renwick et al.’s (2017) Brexit citizens’ assemblies want to keep freedom of movement of labour, while applying the greater controls that freedom of movement rules already provide. These findings provide a broad picture, but should be seen with caution, given there are several assumptions behind the
survey questions on freedom of movement. In addition to the criticisms already made to Buchanan et al. (2019) in Chapter 2, there also could be an assumption among participants that the ‘three month’ rule would enable excluding job seekers, when this is not the case if the jobseekers are considered to have genuine prospects of employment in the member state. In other words, some participants may be under the false impression that this freedom of movement ‘with more restrictions’ is limited to those working, studying or self-sufficient.

My participants’ qualitative accounts support these conclusions. They contextualise and nuance this idea of ‘freedom of movement with greater restrictions’ as a compromise between Leavers and Remainers. There is a wide range of opinions expressed on freedom of movement during the interviews. The key difference is whether participants see it as freedom of movement of labour or freedom of movement of people more broadly. While Liam describes it as ‘free market on steroids’ which is positive for businesses, Nancy supports freedom of movement because of the individual rights granted to migrants and their family members. Nevertheless, even when some participants accept the premises of freedom of movement, they think there will be a point where there will be ‘too many migrants’ in the UK. Several participants are concerned about overpopulation, stressing that the UK ‘is an island’ and therefore, in their view, there is limited ‘space’ for migrants to arrive.

Some interviewees also add another layer of complexity, asking whether EU migrants (or any migrants) should have the exact same rights as the British, or even more rights in some cases – for instance, on family reunion under EU, as opposed to UK, law. This latter point is usually raised in the context of EU migrants being promised continuity of their rights after Brexit. Overall, participants’ specific policy suggestions on changing EU migration policies can be grouped into two dominant themes: controlling numbers and controlling access to welfare.
6.3.2. Controlling numbers: knowing ‘who is in the country’

One of the uncertainties of EU migration policy is not having a precise number of EU migrants living in the UK. Some participants emphasise that EU migration statistics are based on estimates. Many mistrust figures on immigration. The ONS confirmed participants’ concerns in their recent report showing how EU migration has been significantly underestimated. For instance, in the year of the referendum, EU net migration using adjusted data was at least 16% higher than previous unadjusted estimates (White, 2019). Participants’ views on the appropriateness of current levels of immigration depend on whether they think the net EU migration figure put in front of them during the interviews (three million) is an overestimate or an underestimate. On both sides of the Brexit debate, interviewees criticise the quality of data on EU migration.

The absence of an exact number of EU migrants in the UK opens space for a narrative of lost control. Emily summarises this perspective: ‘you can’t have a specific figure, can you? How can you know, if it’s uncontrolled?’ Interviewees concur that the UK should know ‘how many migrants are here’, as Ron underlines: ‘I think you asked earlier about what you do with migration [policy], probably number one – get accurate numbers’. Even among vocal Remainers, there is a sense that ‘there was more that we could do’ to minimise public concerns on immigration. As Jo points out, having a precise number of migrants leaves less room for overestimations and offers people more certainty. Some participants who are positive about migration, including a couple who support open borders, comment that knowing the exact number of EU migrants enables more efficient infrastructure and public service planning. These views are consistent with previous research which showed a consensus on ‘keep[ing] better data on migrants’ (Renwick et al., 2017: 7).

Implementing ID cards has been discussed in other research, mirroring many of my participants’ preference towards a registration system for all EU migrants. Two thirds in a recent YouGov poll were in favour of introducing the otherwise unpopular ‘ID cards for all’ policy if this enabled more control over EU migration in the UK (Buchanan et al., 2019). Jack, a Remain voter in Newham who is highly
knowledgeable of immigration rules, thinks that ‘we should relax our visa requirements’. ‘Rather than spending money on visa processes’, he continues, ‘we should probably spend more money on recording how people arrive, who arrives and put a system in place where if they are not in employment after 3, 6 months, whatever, then they have to [go back].’

Some participants contrast the lack of a registration system for all EU migrants in the UK with EU countries they know about, in which such systems are operating. Bill, another Remainer in Newham, has a very similar perspective to Jack. He adds that the UK could have had a registration system in place without the need for Brexit to happen: ‘like Germany does, but we didn’t, because it was cheaper to just not do anything’. Bill’s ideal ‘ID card system’ policy would not only allow for better planning of public services. It would also serve to easily differentiate between those ‘contributing’ migrants who ‘deserve’ access to services and those who do not fit this category:

So if I moved to Leeds, I’d have to register and, similarly, if anybody from the EU who wants to move to Leeds then that can kind of…because Belgium do that, so if you move there for three months and you’re not self-sufficient, you haven’t got a job, not self-sufficient, whatever, you are not given a residence card and basically you can’t access any services. So, we could’ve done things like that if we wanted to curb EU immigration.

Bill’s system would operate at the local level and register all residents, whether they are internal migrants, like the ‘London migrants’ moving from east London to Tendring, or the East Europeans arriving in East Ham. Nevertheless, speaking about the number of migrants is not simply about ‘knowing who is in the country’. As shown in the last example, one purpose of a registration system is to assess who is ‘contributing’. These narratives of controlling the number of migrants are almost always connected with entitlements to using welfare and other services.

6.3.3. Controlling access to welfare for migrants

Access to welfare is acceptable as long as migrants are ‘contributors’. Controlling access to welfare is by far the dominant, and sometimes the only theme in participants’ responses when they describe their preferred policies. It is also much more prominent in migrants’ narratives than in British participants’
accounts. Most Romanians and Poles have strong views that access to welfare should be conditional, for both their conationals and other migrant groups. This adds to previous research on Polish migrants showing similar tendencies (Osipovič, 2010; Osipovič, 2015). The need for stricter immigration control is usually placed within a frame of labour and social security. This is most notable when participants mention access to healthcare and housing, both impacted by austerity. Emily’s experience working in the NHS in London shaped her belief that migration is a strain on resources, concluding that migrants’ access to free healthcare should be limited. In contrast, Jacob, who manages a GP practice in Tendring, observes that the vast majority of patients are white British. He underlines that concerns about migrants abusing the NHS are not legitimate. Joanna lists some negative views she heard about ‘the benefit migrants’, but then indicates that the number practise ‘health tourism’ is ‘so ridiculously small’ that ‘introducing a system to control this would cost more than it takes away.’

Some participants also proposed stricter controls on housing benefits. Research shows migrants are less likely to live in social housing compared to natives (Battiston et al., 2014). There is no evidence that social housing allocation favours migrants (Rutter and Latorre, 2009). The participants who believe the opposite are most likely to back limiting housing support for migrants. Most recognise that the welfare system is not a ‘free ride’, but many still believe a more restrictive system is desirable. Limiting welfare access for migrants is often thought to improve British people’s experiences using the welfare state in times of austerity. To illustrate, Emily, who read ‘quite a lot in the papers’ about migrants ‘milking’ the welfare system, ‘found it a maze to get through’ when she tried claiming an allowance for housing. Unlike Sarah, she does not believe that migrants are offered welfare support automatically. However, she concludes that ‘we don’t have a lot of money in this country for whatever reason’, therefore ‘getting a tougher hold on it [welfare system] isn’t a bad thing.’

The local councillor interviewees who had housing, welfare and revenues in their area of responsibility also commented that they have seen a proportionally small number of migrants claiming housing support compared to British residents. For instance, Cllr Gray in Newham knows ‘hand on heart’ that he has only
encountered one EU migrant living in social housing in the area he represents. He points that many EU migrants live in council properties which were sold to British people who are now renting them, thus potentially creating a false assumption that the migrants are supported by the welfare state, when, in fact, they rent privately. In Tendring, Cllr Platt, married to a Romanian and with many Romanian acquaintances in the area, mentions that he does not know ‘a single Romanian on benefits’, after enumerating the variety of skills Romanians bring to the local area with personal examples: a GP, a care home manager, a teacher, several entrepreneurs and the Romanians at a nearby car wash.

Among the 63 participants, there are much wider views on the extent to which migrants use the welfare state, compared to the local politicians who seem to agree on this topic. Some interviewees think that migrants would not have any incentive to look for welfare support, unless they found themselves in extremely precarious situations. David details the difficulties EU migrants face when asked to meet the ‘habitual residence test’, debunking claims that the welfare system is abused. In contrast, Tom and Dan believe the system is fundamentally flawed because, in some cases they observed, ‘it pays off’ to live on welfare payments than work in low wage jobs. They make elaborated calculations during the interviews, trying to figure out how a combination of welfare payments compares to the pay offered by some local employers. Tom finishes his remarks by saying: ‘So, if you start at the bottom and you’ve got a low paid job, you may get £1000 a month, but they’re probably already getting £1000 a month by staying at home.’

For some British participants, limiting migrants’ access to welfare is mentioned within a narrative of ‘putting natives first’. The purpose is to offer certainty to the British citizens who find accessing welfare difficult and ‘make work pay’ for everyone. Comparatively, migrant participants present much more detailed policy proposals on welfare access. Some justify these preferences referring to their own experiences as East European migrants navigating worker registration systems and having fewer rights in the past. For example, Marta registered as a Polish worker before the scheme for A8 migrants ceased to exist in 2011. Robert applied for a work permit when he arrived in the UK, years before restrictions from Romanians ended in 2014. Both Marta and Robert see a return to these
restrictions as a potential solution to Brexit policy dilemmas on controlling immigration. Such controls include limiting access to welfare.

Most migrant participants support more restrictive policies on welfare. Flaviu expresses mixed opinions about the impact of Brexit, but he ‘300% agree[s] with Brexit’ if Brexit means limiting the number of what he sees as undeserving migrants claiming welfare. Raluca thinks that the 2016 referendum was more about stopping ‘giving away benefits’ to migrants than reducing net migration. Otilia goes even further suggesting that the referendum question should not have been on EU membership, but on migrants’ access to the UK welfare system:

    This referendum should have been, ‘do you agree to change the law so that people won’t have access unless it’s after 4 years of taxes?’ You paid your taxes, you have a work contract, you have an address, you have where to live, you have some savings and you’re not a beggar who can die on the street, well, then yes, fine, benefits and other things.

Otilia’s proposed policy changes are similar to the ones mentioned in the Government’s EU referendum leaflet. Before the 2016 vote, the then Prime Minister Cameron negotiated further restrictions on welfare for EU migrants to be applied if the UK chose Remain. When reading that leaflet, most participants, and more vocally among migrants, agree with the proposals of accessing welfare only after having ‘contributed’ for a specified period.

Changes in EU migration policy on its own, such as implementing a registration system or limiting access to welfare, are deemed insufficient to restore the control lost by people in their local communities. Reforming migration may seem more realistic than changing other policy areas. Yet participants tend to connect migration policy with suggestions for local investment. Ron’s ideal migration system is ‘got to be around what [the country] needs, it’s got to be accompanied by proper investment’. He explains: ‘A lot of communities were never given the funds for integration and they’ve got to receive the support before, not after’. In this sense, ‘knowing who is in the country’ would enable local authorities to allocate budgets for migrant integration more efficiently.
Other participants would like to see the positive impacts of migration distributed more equally across the UK. The majority acknowledge there are benefits of immigration, especially to the UK economy. However, they notice that their communities did not become more prosperous as a result (cf. Runge, 2019). Some interviewees suggested investing the taxes EU migrants pay in more deprived areas such as their neighbourhoods in Newham and Tendring. Jan, a Polish resident who campaigned with Leave, is confident that migrants overall bring a net fiscal contribution to the UK economy, but considers that this contribution has not been spent according to local need and priorities, leading some to blame East European migration; he suggests that the tax surplus should be allocated exclusively to areas which experience rapid increase in migrant populations.

Similar proposals have been discussed in current Brexit debates in the media (e.g. Peace, 2019), particularly in reference to Global Future’s (2019) proposals for a multi-billion fund to invest EEA migrants’ contribution to the UK exchequer more equally across regions and particularly in small cities and towns. For instance, Jo argues that ‘what should have been done before the referendum came up’ was to offer working class communities ‘a migration settlement’ in the form of local investment. In his view, this would have promoted a message that ‘there are positives to migration, we want to share the positives with you.’ Other participants are critical of valuing migrants only in terms of their tax contributions, as illustrated in Chapter 5 and argue they should not be held to higher standards than British people. Migrants have a wide range of views and specific proposals for changing EU migration policies. Nevertheless, they are not confident that politicians will deliver on what they expect them to.

6.4. Conclusion

The Brexit vote occurred in a context in which many felt they have lost control over certain aspects of their lives. As Alfred’s story illustrates, not feeling certainty over one’s life can influence a preference for stricter immigration control. Participants’ accounts build a picture of limited opportunities at the local level, affected by austerity policies. Generally, the more secure someone feels, the less
control over migration they wish to see. Having a say over migration policy can be interpreted as regaining some control in a political system in which most participants do not feel their voices are represented. While most feel they can express their views (and a few do so actively in local politics), they also think they can have no or limited influence as individuals. In contrast, others consider they cannot express their honest views publicly, particularly their concerns on immigration, which politicians rarely engage with. Brexit adds another dimension of uncertainty over already precarious lives. Migrant participants are concerned about their rights post-Brexit and how welcome they would feel in the UK. Most participants speak about potential economic impacts that could create even more uncertainty.

This loss of control in everyday life is usually blamed on governments and politicians. Participants speak about policy failing British people in areas like housing. Migrants as individuals are rarely held accountable, with the exceptions of some migrant participant narratives where Romanians and Poles distance themselves from other migrants who do not ‘contribute’ like them. It is migration as a phenomenon which has been mismanaged, and once again, governments are to blame. Other actors, such as landlords allowing overcrowded conditions or employers underpaying workers, are also blamed for some of the asymmetric impacts of migration in certain areas.

In this context of ‘losing control’, some feel the need to regain certainty over their lives. They are broadly sceptical that austerity policies would or could be overturned, thus controlling migration is often seen as an easier answer. Restricting immigration policies is considered more realistic than the prospect of better resource redistribution. ‘Control on migration’ is a solution to prevent uncertainties from worsening, rather than reversing them. The inadequate planning of local services is often linked to not having an exact number of EU migrants in the UK. Participants’ proposals for more control on EU migration takes two forms. First, ‘knowing who is in the country’ is important for most participants, including Remainers who are overall positive towards migration. Specific policy change suggestions include implementing the EU freedom of movement ‘three-month rule’ and a registration system for all EU migrants on arrival. Second, and
particularly among migrant participants, there are strong views on limiting welfare access for those who are not perceived to ‘contribute’.

The level of ‘control’ that participants want depends on their knowledge of how the current immigration system works. Those who believe the UK has no control over EU migration are more likely to prefer more restrictive immigration policies. Despite having various suggestions for their ideal immigration policy, most interviewees describe an uncertain post-Brexit future, which is unlikely to deliver what many hoped for in 2016. Some expect fewer EU migrants arriving after Brexit, but they also predict an increase in non-EU migration. There are mixed views on the Brexodus of EU migrants. The referendum outcome is not necessarily the main reason for which some migrant participants plan to leave the UK. Brexit uncertainties can also lead indirectly to more certainty in some participants’ lives. Most migrants reflect on changes in their rights post-Brexit, and some have already taken steps to secure their immigration status regardless of the outcome of the UK-EU negotiations.

As Chapter 5 argued, ‘as long as they contribute’, migrants are welcome. However, to create a system where migrants are seen as contributing, migration also needs to be controlled. The current debates on UK migration policy focus on finding a consensus, healing divisions between Leavers and Remainers. Yet, with a few exceptions, the discussions overlook migrants who are directly impacted by these policies. This chapter analysed the nuanced meanings behind the idea of ‘control’ when speaking about immigration. It included both migrant and non-migrant voices who described their post-Brexit expectations and how migration policy would look if they could design it. As illustrated in several participant quotes throughout this chapter, opinions on controlling migration are based on the extent to which participants felt the impacts of migration in their everyday lives. Chapter 7, the next and final empirical chapter, addresses the question of how local-level intergroup contact shapes the attitudes towards migration presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. It does so by examining the role of mediated contact through political, media and ‘community narratives’ and direct contact, both at the local level and beyond.
Chapter 7. ‘It’s not you, it’s the others’: mediated and direct contact in shaping attitudes towards migrants

Chapter 4 set the context of this research, analysing how migrants were portrayed in the EU referendum campaign and how local residents and politicians in Newham and Tendring responded to these messages on immigration. Chapters 5 and 6 showed how participants constructed different hierarchies of migrants when expressing their attitudes towards migration. Those two chapters explored the four main themes in the interviews - community, contribution, control and certainty. The views of British, Polish and Romanian interviewees are influenced by a mixture of direct and mediated contact with the ‘other’ (and their conationalists, in the case of migrant participants).

This final empirical chapter answers the main research question underpinning this thesis: how does local-level contact shape attitudes towards EU migrants? It draws on the findings presented so far, focussing on identifying the sources of knowledge participants use when justifying their attitudes (summarised in Figure 4). Overwhelmingly, interviewees refer to localised direct experiences with migrants. Those instances of contact either confirm or contradict the mediated attitudes constructed through political, media or community narratives. The first part of this chapter illustrates these forms of mediated contact with examples from the interviews. The second part elaborates on localised direct contact. It discusses how participants’ views are influenced by encountering the ‘other’ when abroad or in the UK, including at the local level in Newham and Tendring. In a few cases, episodic localised direct contact is sufficient to weaken long-standing views on immigration. But most participants speak about a shift in attitudes following repeated direct contact with migrants, which allows time for reflection on their previously held positions. While direct contact challenges some participants’ attitudes, mediated contact prevails for others.
Figure 3: Interview analysis overarching narrative – Change

Figure 4: Attitude shaping framework combining mediated with direct contact, based on participant narratives
7.1. Justifying attitudes towards migrants

As already seen through some of the participant quotes used in the previous chapters, British, Romanian and Polish residents employ a range of strategies to justify their views towards migrants. The four main themes discussed so far – contribution, community, certainty and control – are situated within an overarching narrative of change (see Figure 3). Participants describe how their local areas have changed over time and point at the different ways in which migration contributed to those changes (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2.1). They also speak about shifts in their own attitudes towards migrants. Interviewees frequently refer to ‘moments of change’ in their attitudes towards migration or particular types of migrants. This chapter elaborates on the ways in which such changes occur. While most participants speak at length about direct contact, all are exposed to mediated contact, which frames their local-level experiences. When does local-level direct contact become sufficient to challenge and even replace previously held attitudes shaped by mediated contact? After exploring both mediated and direct forms of contact, the last section of this chapter addresses this crucial question.

Chapter 2 reviewed previous research on the role of mediated and direct contact in attitude formation. It emphasised the characteristics contact needs to have in order to challenge and change attitudes. What stands out in my sample is a large majority of participants who present their attitudes solely using personalised, anecdotal evidence in the form of local-level individual experiences. This parallels research showing how people justify political choices through anecdotes, and persuade others using this strategy (for instance, see Miyazaki, 2016: 59 on discussing politics online via Reddit). This occurs even when they are not directly prompted for examples during the interview. There are hundreds of references to detailed, personal, localised contact with migrants in the UK and some about meeting the ‘other’ abroad. In contrast, only a handful of participants use (sparingly) what I coded in NVivo as ‘non-anecdotal evidence’, such as mentioning reports, research studies or statistics. After using a non-anecdotal
source, they usually still add a personal anecdote to confirm the findings they quote.

Responses based on non-anecdotal evidence differ from the nuanced accounts of local-level experiences. They tend to be vague, broad statements, lacking specific numbers or substantive explanations. To illustrate, Liam argues that migrants contribute economically as follows: ‘I know that as a total proportion, overall, all EU migrants or expats or people from the European Union who come here contribute vastly more to the tax treasury than they take out.’ He immediately continues by enumerating specific, more detailed examples of EU migrant economic ‘contributors’ he personally knows, such as his partner. Participants’ preference for anecdotal evidence supports the conclusions of recent UK-based research on public messaging on immigration, according to which ‘myth busting’ using facts is ineffective in changing opinion (Ballinger et al., 2019: 23). My findings also mirror research on cognitive bias, illustrating how facts and statistics are more likely to be remembered when they agree with people’s internalised views (Pronin, 2007).

Like non-anecdotal evidence, ‘hypotheticals’ are also rarely used. This strategy is adopted by a few participants who generally have negative views on immigration. They position themselves in opposition to certain behaviours they accuse migrants of displaying. For example, Dean states that migrants have a negative impact on the welfare state, because some abuse the system. He continues with a hypothetical: ‘If I’m to go to someone else’s country, I don’t expect there to live for free.’ Sam talks about how certain migrants are not part of the local community as they cannot adapt their cultural practices. He also uses a hypothetical scenario, claiming that if his family moved abroad, they would ‘eat what they eat’. Sarah adds: ‘We’d speak their language.’

Contrasting to the few responses based on non-anecdotal evidence or hypotheticals, attitude justifications drawing on personal anecdotes tend to be detailed. British, Romanian and Polish participants are generally aware of the same key arguments on migration and stereotypes of different migrant groups. Interviewees’ opinions on the impact of EU migrants are contingent on the extent
to which they consider the stereotypes (both negative and positive) to be ‘rooted in reality’. This ‘reality’ is usually constructed through a collection of limited interactions at the local level, framed through mediated forms of contact. National-level narratives of migration can influence how participants make sense of local-level contact with migrants. Localised attitudes are mediated in various ways. The main forms of vicarious contact in my participants’ accounts are media, political and community narratives.

7.2. Mediated contact in shaping attitudes towards migrants

7.2.1. ‘I remember when Nigel Farage…’: Political narratives

Participants’ attitudes are mediated through what is said about migrants in the political sphere. Chapter 4 (Section 4.2.3) argued that my interviewees came across little meaningful discussion of migration locally. It showed how some pro-migration politicians actively strategised to avoid debating migration on the doorstep. The Remain campaign was almost silent on EU migration, while politicians on the Leave side frequently spoke about this topic. Chapter 6 (Section 6.1.2) also discusses how some participants do not feel comfortable expressing their views on migration. While all interviewees have opinions about migrants, few have had the opportunity to share their experiences and engage in a detailed conversation on this topic. The British, Romanian and Polish residents experience migration in Newham and Tendring to varying degrees, but are all exposed to political, media or community narratives. These external influences are unlikely to be challenged through discussions, especially with people who have different views and experiences. Thus, the ‘loudest voices’ on migration, who tend to be politicians, fill in the space left by the lack of detailed and honest conversations at the local level.

It is not uncommon for participants to first refer to political narratives when starting to speak about a certain aspect of migration. They note that politicians disproportionately emphasise the negative impacts of migration. The most frequently mentioned politician is Nigel Farage. Some interviewees quote infamous statements he made on immigration, particularly on East Europeans. Even if the interviews took place two years after the referendum campaign, many
participants vividly remember Farage’s ‘breaking point’ poster from 2016. They also recall earlier statements, such as his comments on Romanians when interviewed by James O’Brien on LBC in 2014. Participants have much more to say about Farage’s (and UKIP’s) views on immigration than about any other politician or political party. Perhaps the only exception is when some discuss the Windrush scandal and blame it on the Conservative party.

Participants point out that controversial statements on immigration from politicians like Farage receive extensive media attention. Therefore, a narrow political framing of immigration can set the tone in media narratives. A few exemplify how alternative voices on immigration are often treated as a mere response to the negative views, rather than an equal part to the debate. Most importantly, these political narratives are often seen as a possible substitute for direct contact. Mădălina considers that Farage’s comments about Romanians can lead to someone having a negative attitude before meeting Romanian migrants in person:

I remember Nigel Farage who said that ‘if a Romanian lives next door to me, I’ll move’ or ‘I won’t like if a Romanian moved into my house’ […] and those are things which are said by a politician in a rather powerful and influential position…and after that, you meet someone who did not have anything to do with a Romanian, and they already have an idea shaped, towards a negative [view].

While Mădălina does not recall Farage’s exact words, a negative message on immigration stayed with her years after the interview was aired on radio. Farage was ‘in a rather powerful and influential position’ in 2014, when the party he led, UKIP, came first in the European elections. These messages received a wide platform to gain even more traction. Other participants refer to the same interview

21 James O’Brien: And what about the line about not wanting to live next door to Romanians? It’s perfectly acceptable for people not to want to…
Nigel Farage: I didn’t say that, I was asked if a group of Romanian men moved in next door to you, would you be concerned?
James O’Brien: What about if a group of German children did, what’s the difference?
Nigel Farage: Well, the difference…you know what the difference is. (LBC, 2014)
with Farage. This includes British respondents, such as Jack, who remembers feeling ‘very ashamed, uncomfortable’ when hearing the politician’s comments.

Nigel Farage’s ‘breaking point’ poster is also mentioned by several participants. This illustrates how visual portrayals of immigration as a threat can be more effective in capturing public attention (Schmuck and Matthes, 2017). For some, this poster becomes a symbol capturing the political narrative on immigration during the referendum campaign. Others refer to it when holding politicians (and the media) accountable for stoking fear through conflating migrants with refugees. Liam explains this strategy:

> Look at the Nigel Farage poster about breaking point, that was scary Asian looking people, you know, brown looking people coming from far away and coming to live in your house, that was the message they were trying to say, ‘unless you vote to Leave, we’re gonna import 70 million Turks’ […] they’ll all come and live in your front yard and you won’t like that, in part, because, you know, you don’t like the fact they are Muslim and you don’t like the fact that they are a different race.

Overall, the Newham and Tendring residents depict a context where negative messages on immigration dominate the political scene. Some of the local politicians interviewed are positive about immigration. Yet they have found it challenging to provide equally persuasive arguments as those underlining the negative impacts of migration. Several comment there are limited opportunities to engage ordinary citizens on this topic and counter negative stereotypes about migrants. While some residents blame politicians, some politicians think the media (and social media) are the main influence on individuals’ attitudes towards migration. Giles Watling, the MP for Clacton, concludes that many ‘believe the headline without looking at the story behind it.’ Local party campaigner Michael has similar observations: ‘people were talking about, sort of… essentially what was in the Daily Mail or The Sun headlines, and they had nothing to back it up.’

### 7.2.2. ‘You watch it on the telly’: Media narratives

Most participants speak about vicarious contact enabled through media sources. Media and political narratives are often interlinked, as politicians’ views on migration become news items or are extensively quoted. Research shows the UK
media tend to frame immigration negatively (Chapter 2, Section 2.1.4). I asked participants to comment on the kinds of stories about migration they read or hear about in the media. Moreover, I showed them six recent (at the time of fieldwork) newspaper headlines about EU migration (see Appendix A8) One of these, reading ‘1 in 3 EU migrants claim tax credits’, was ‘fake news’ – I wrote it to test knowledge on welfare and prompt conversation on that topic if needed. Participants with more positive views on migration are more likely to question the accuracy of this ‘fake’ headline. Those who are more sceptical about the positive impact of immigration are more likely to advocate for stricter access to welfare and believe the headline is correct.

The media are criticised for similar shortcomings as the EU referendum campaign. They are seen as failing to provide a balanced picture on migration and show the ‘human face’ of migrants. Several participants are disappointed that the media did not make an effort to explain how EU freedom of movement works in practice. In their view, this allowed some statements from politicians to go unchallenged. For instance, the knowledge on migration that Jane acquired through the media did not match her personal experiences. She remembers with frustration how ‘various debates such as Question Time’ gave voice to misleading comments on freedom of movement. She refers to politicians claiming that British people will still be able to work and study in the EU post-Brexit exactly as they do under EU membership. She rejects these comments using examples from her children who are studying abroad. Participants identify several themes in media stories about immigration, similar to those from during the 2016 EU referendum campaign. The main ones focus on the impact of migration on welfare, public services and security. Ahmed’s comment is rather typical: ‘We read every day in the newspapers, like, it’s not good for the NHS…more immigration, more burden on the NHS and services.’

Many participants noticed an increase in the number of negative articles on EU migration immediately preceding and following the accession of A8 and A2 countries. Both migrant and British participants recall media stories about East European migrants and specific nationalities from the region. The most frequently mentioned are Romanians. Several participants emphasise the media conflating
Romanian and Roma (Vicol and Allen, 2014). Some participants are confident that Romanians have been subject to the most persistent negative media framing among all EU migrant groups. Jeremy argues that Romanians have been negatively portrayed for decades. He remembers images of Romanian orphanages in the British press thirty years ago. Other participants argue that Romanians became visible in the media before being given full rights to work in 2014. Dominika notices that Romanians received more negative attention than her Polish conationalists: ‘When the border was open for work to Romanians, I remember watching the news […] where they were saying the Romanians are coming, they’re gonna steal from you, you can’t trust them, they’re horrible people and all of that.’ She contrasts media portrayals of ‘Romanian criminals’ with those of Poles ‘stealing jobs’.

The media are seen as cultivating narrow, stereotypical representations of EU migrants. Bill underlines how the media ‘build this image of what a Romanian should look like, how they should act, how they should dress.’ Chapter 5 (Section 5.1.2.1) illustrated how ‘low skilled’ can become a euphemism for ‘East European’. Some participants note that media narratives reflect that correlation. For instance, Oliwia comments that Romanians received more ‘bad press’ than Polish migrants and hence could be more likely to be perceived ‘as very low skilled workers’.

After the EU referendum, interviewees have noticed more media stories presenting migrants in a positive, more personalised light. Examples include reports on the rise in hate crime and uncertainty over EU migrants’ rights post-Brexit. Nevertheless, not all participants regard this as a positive change. Some are concerned that these media narratives could create panic and anxiety among migrant communities. Lyn appreciates the media reporting on hate crimes, but also thinks that extensive coverage of the issue would worry migrants unnecessarily. Her personal observations do not reflect media narratives on this topic. She speaks about always being ‘prepared to stand up’ for migrants but concludes that ‘nothing happened’, despite fears of a backlash against migrants following the 2016 vote. There are also mixed views on how the media approaches the issue of EU migrants’ rights in the UK. The numerous media
stories on individual migrants denied permanent residency (often due to administrative errors) led Paulina to delay securing her status:

What put me off doing it is reading quite a few stories on the news about immigrants who’ve been here for years or were even born here and they applied for residency… as soon as they [Home Office] replied, instead of getting residency, they, I think, they were asked to leave the country.\textsuperscript{22}

Paulina informed herself about her rights post-Brexit through the media and believed these cases are rather common. Thus, she decided not to risk making an application, because she feared receiving a deportation letter like those EU citizens in the news articles she read.

Participants express a variety of views on whether media can be trusted. There is a spectrum, from those who quote media stories on migration as fact, to others who completely reject media narratives. Most are in the middle – they criticise how the media frame immigration, but they acknowledge there is some ‘reality’ (usually confirmed by their lived experiences) behind the headlines. For instance, Flaviu noticed that east London local newspapers have increased their coverage on Romanian migrant criminal gangs. While he suggests sometimes negative stereotypes can be unfair to migrants, he also speaks about his direct contact with Romanian criminals when working in security.

A few participants use media stories as fact when backing up (usually negative) statements on migration. For instance, Dan claims: ‘I watched the \textit{news report} yesterday where migrants were landing on the Spanish beach and there was tourists there on holiday helping refugees off boats…it’s only a matter a time before it’s here.’ Although Dan supports policies assisting refugees in need, he quotes this and several other media stories as fact without any further contextualisation. The group interview with Sarah, Sam and Linda took place at their house while the TV was on, showing the news at some point. They all consume daily news and refer to a variety of media when justifying their attitudes

\textsuperscript{22} Paulina is likely referring to a situation in 2017 when ‘up to 100’ removal letters were sent to EU migrants in error after their permanent residency applications were rejected (Busby, 2017).
towards migration. When Sarah is asked to describe the impact of migration, she refers to the media in the second sentence:

You can’t find a positive thing, innit? It’s not that they’re bringing money into the country, because you watch it on the telly, the programmes and so on, one bloke got 40 children over and getting registered with a doctor… another one in Poland, claiming for this wife and son, and they live in Poland!

This response reflects a dominant negative labour and social security frame in the media, according to which migrants abuse the welfare system.

Another main media theme identified by other participants is security. Examples usually refer to crimes committed by migrants in the UK. Again, Sarah uses media narratives when expressing her views on migrant criminality:

I watched another programme, ‘cos I go watch a lot of them, I watched another programme on here, and they said they know of 5,000 murderers they’ve let in, so you’re on about 15,000 from these countries [Turkey, Syria and Iraq], I think.

The case of the Polish man claiming welfare for his family living in Poland and the ‘5,000 murderers’ are both decontextualised pieces of information, which are trusted and quoted as fact. Sam recommends I watch the ‘programme on the telly about Oxford Street’ to see for myself that shoplifters and cash machine fraudsters are mainly Romanian. Another participant, John, quotes some refugee figures from ‘one of the Brexit websites’. While claiming he is ‘not 100% [sure] whether you can trust the figures’, he still concludes that ‘we do seem to have a rather large proportion’ of refugees ‘compared to other countries.’ John, Sarah and Sam all voted Leave, with immigration high among their reasons. Their views and justifications based on media sources are criticised by Remainers, such as Mircea, who characterises Leave voters as victims of ‘media brainwashing’:

Elderly people, indeed, who perhaps did not ever leave their small town or their village, and they voted Leave because this is what they were told, this is what they saw on the television, this is what they thought: why should others come to my town or village?

Another Romanian, Doriana, underlines how media narratives often constitute the only type of contact with migrants that certain voters have. She criticises those
who are not proactive in listening to different sources and points of view. However, she later quotes precisely one single media source to back her portrayal of Leave voters:

They have to be open to listen to the other arguments, a lot of the people that voted Leave, they weren’t interested in anything... I’ve seen this news article, on TV, and it was this old lady, she was being asked about EU and the reporter said to her, ‘but you know that if we leave the EU, this college is not gonna get any more funding?’ and she was going, ‘I don’t care, I don’t care, I just want out.’

Although on opposite ends of the referendum divide, Sarah and Doriana use media sources in a similar way. While Sarah argues there are no positives to migration by quoting one TV story about a Polish migrant, Doriana negatively depicts Leave voters through one vox pop in a news report.

Most participants question whether certain media stories about immigration are true. However, this does not prevent media narratives from shaping attitudes. Emily’s response illustrates this point:

But I know people come here, claiming benefits and sending benefits home to children they’ve got, who live out of the UK and I don’t know if it’s Daily Mail scare stories or, you know, how true they are, but when people do things like that, it makes some think, well, hang on, what’s going on? We don’t want this, let’s vote Brexit.

Emily has some doubt regarding the accuracy of the media she reads (‘I don’t know if it’s Daily Mail scare stories’). Like Sarah, she has mediated contact with migrants claiming welfare for children living abroad. The news prompts reflection on immigration and motivates her to take action (‘let’s vote Brexit’). Other participants distrust the media because they see stories as deliberately exaggerated, even when they start from a certain ‘reality’. For example, Darius read multiple news articles about Romanians abusing the welfare system. He does not deny such cases exist, but he believes the migrants interviewed by the press are paid to make comments that suit a particular agenda:

Someone went on the television to say he receives around 2-3,000 from the state, that he lives on benefits and he was saying how he’s tricking the state, no… you have to be a little bit naïve to believe this thing, how can you trick
a state for 2-3,000 pounds and then go public to do this thing on the television?

Apart from those quoting media stories as fact and the ‘critical middle ground’, there are a few participants who reject media narratives on migration. One example is Mădălina, who is vocal against the negative portrayals of Romanians. As a Romanian in the UK, she feels personally attacked by some media narratives:

I remember, I was on the bus, I was going to college and I don’t know, that period when Romania was integrating in the European Union impacted me rather a lot, because various stories were in the newspapers, every single day, on the front page.

The same portrayals influencing British people’s attitudes towards Romanians also had an impact on Mădălina’s behaviour. She describes feeling uneasy about disclosing her nationality in the period when Romanians made the UK press headlines:

They [media] showed various cases, you know, those who are the very worst, but they do not necessarily reflect the rest of Romania, and I then felt shame when saying I am Romanian if somebody asked me. Sometimes, I avoided saying it, you know, ‘I’m from Romania’, it was only when they specifically asked me.

Overall, participants’ comments on media narratives show it is difficult to detach from negative stereotypes of migrants, especially if alternative views and sources (such as direct contact with migrants) are absent. Place-based knowledge thus becomes relevant in shaping views towards migrants. In both Newham and Tendring, there are a few interviewees who have little direct contact with migrants. However, Tendring residents speak more about how being critical of the media is challenging. For example, Jacob understands why some of his old childhood friends take media narratives on migration for granted:

A lot of people in Clacton, I think it’s very insular, probably don’t see that [positive impact of migration] and therefore their views are shaped by what they read in the Daily Mail, Daily Express and Sun and […] they accept that as fact. […] I don’t blame them, you know, why? If I would’ve stayed in Clacton and just sort of, don’t know, done a blue-collar job, I’d probably… I’d
probably have the same view, I wouldn’t… I’ll be exactly the same as they are.

Like Jacob, Michael travelled outside Clacton-on-Sea numerous times. He speaks about some of his neighbours who do not travel and live within a small circle of family and close friends. Their contact with certain groups of migrants happens solely through the media. Michael underlines the more limited selection of newspapers in his town, compared to other towns and cities (this is something I also noticed while visiting newsagents during fieldwork):

If you go to any newsagents or the supermarkets, if you look in terms of, say, *The Guardian*, they sort of order about six, [...] the *Mail* - they bring them in by the trolley, it’s literally… and I think that kind of, is a very clear indication of where the local people’s views lie.

Nevertheless, being exposed to media sources with different angles on migration does not necessarily change views, especially if one has been exposed to a powerful narrative for an extended period. Furthermore, some participants think that the more progressive media are unpersuasive on immigration in the same way the 2016 Remain campaign was (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2) – heavily using facts and figures and failing to relate to their local-level experiences.

7.2.3. ‘I hear it on the streets’: Community narratives

The media report politicians’ comments on migration. They build narratives around those statements, but they also use ‘case studies’ of migrants (such as the ‘criminals’ and ‘benefit claimants’ that some participants read about). This process feeds into the construction of community narratives. Attitudes are mediated even further as the ‘news’ circulates more informally in local communities. Previous research considered these ‘local myths’ on immigration. ‘Fake news stories’, especially promoted via social media, are thought to influence prejudices (Ballinger et al., 2019). Recent research looking at ‘local myths’ on immigration in the UK (including on EU migrants) shows how the people most likely to believe those narratives are also those least likely to have direct contact with migrants. Negative community narratives are more popular among people living rather socially isolated conditions, those with a lower level
of education and with broadly sceptical views on immigration (Rutter and Carter, 2018).

When speaking about views in their local communities, my participants almost exclusively refer to negative comments on immigration. Fred explains how local-level myths on EU migration are shaped in Clacton: ‘people were trotting out the things that they’ve read in the paper, you know, that migrants were taking resources away from English people, they were taking jobs away from English people.’ In the months prior to the 2016 referendum, Theresa observed how some Clacton residents spoke about the ‘refugee crisis’ while it was widely reported in the media:

I was not surprised really, on social media, and out on the streets, and I’ve heard this out on the streets in Clacton as well, people laughing and cheering at pictures of children, drowned migrant children, babies, drowned, you know them, and I don’t understand it, how can you cheer and say ‘good’, when you see a child that’s drowned?

Community narratives bring national-level media and political accounts to the local level, becoming more meaningful for individuals. In some instances, interviewees justify their claims on immigration through what they ‘hear around here’ in their local areas. On other occasions, they signal opposition to these mediated attitudes. At the same time, these narratives are considered effective in shaping attitudes as they are more personalised. Some participants think community narratives are beneficial, as they create a space for people to reflect on their attitudes alongside others living around them. In their view, this represents a more desirable outcome than not discussing the topic of immigration at all or deliberately avoiding it.

However, most participants who describe community narratives point at their potential negative impact on the migration debate. Several emphasise hearing residents conflating refugees with migrants and non-EU with EU migrants when discussing immigration. For instance, Lyn recounts that some of her work colleagues voted Leave to reduce ‘all immigration’ and did not necessarily distinguish between EU freedom of movement and other types of movements of
people. This confused picture enabled media narratives on refugees to have a stronger impact:

I think people were getting confused as to what migration [it was about] and it was all becoming very blurry and, obviously, with this Syria and awful events like that, I think people were just like ‘oh, just stop it all, from everywhere’, I think that’s what happened with Brexit, I think that a lot of people saw this as a chance to stop anyone from legitimately coming to the country, European or otherwise.

Some participants elaborate on misrepresentations circulating about EU migrants in their local communities and usually distance themselves from those views. Previous research suggests that negative community narratives on migration emerge from a small number of people. Common ‘local myths’ include a belief that migrants receive free goods, housing and other advantages (Ballinger et al., 2019: 11).

Participants in both locations talk about a community narrative of migrants abusing welfare. While Sarah in Clacton thinks that migrants receive free housing on arrival, Jack in Newham rejects this same narrative, which he heard from others in his local area:

*They talk* about housing a lot and people are saying ‘oh, I can’t get council housing because they are getting it all for refugees and immigrants’, ‘oh, once we are out of the EU, we can get our council housing back.’ No, council housing is sold off, that is why there is none left.

Similarly, Matt says he ‘definitely heard arguments about benefit tourism’, but that he considers them ‘lies’. Dan, who has mixed views on immigration, describes what he hears in Clacton, dissociating himself from the predominant community narrative on Polish migrants:

*From what I get from people*, that people are fed up with a lot of the Polish and that, you know, they’re seeing a lot of them around, that’s what, people’s stigma is you know… *not mine personally*, just *what I hear on the streets*.

Participants in both Newham and Tendring speak about similar community narratives on immigration. However, there are some differences, as narratives adapt to reflect specificities in certain areas, sometimes targeting particular
groups of residents. EU migrants in Tendring tend to be categorised under the broad label of ‘immigrants’. They are pitted against British working-class people, rather than against other migrants. In contrast, Newham residents often refer to negative community narratives about EU migrants being promoted by settled, second or third generation migrant communities. This is similar to how the Leave campaign emphasises that freedom of movement is unfair for non-EU migrants in Newham (see Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2). Matt presents the community narrative in his area:

What you get in Newham [...] is a sense that you get in lots of places, that somebody who is from Bangladesh, who is from Nigeria, who is from Ghana can say, ‘I don’t want any EU immigration, there are too many people here.’ And that’s an argument you hear a lot.

David, whose parents migrated to the UK from the Commonwealth, speaks about his family members who voted Leave in the hope to reduce EU migration. In his experience, Newham ‘has probably moved on’ from the debate on refugees and ‘European migrants became the new scapegoats.’ In Tendring, most participants hear negative views about migration in general, rather than particular categories. But they also observe how the narrative shifts depending on the demographics of different towns and villages. While canvassing in Frinton, Michael listened to voters’ concerns that the ‘welfare state can't support migrants’, whereas:

When we were out in Clacton[-on-Sea], it was more about, you know, they’re coming over here, sort of taking our jobs, and sort of breaking our door too, it was a lot more sort of visceral and yes, people were very dismissive of what we were trying to say.

There are mixed opinions on whether ‘local myths’ remain mere ‘gossip’ (as some participants put it) or have significant impacts on local community cohesion. Jacob believes that negative community narratives about Muslims in Clacton already had unfavourable outcomes for ethnic and religious minorities. He mentions local residents’ protests, which resulted in blocking plans to open a community centre:

There were protests going around, about ‘we don’t want a mosque in Clacton’, I mean, that’s just absolute proof that people just are not educated, they don't really want to educate themselves. It wasn’t even a mosque, it was
a community centre opened by Muslim people, but actually open for everybody and, and that’s just, oh, it was absolutely bonkers.

While Michael tries to counter negative community narratives when canvassing and Jacob is deeply concerned about the welfare of minorities, other participants welcome discussing immigration locally, including with those who hold negative views. Fred thinks that ‘people are quite shy about talking about those kinds of things, unless you encourage them’, because ‘they have quite strong views and they’re embarrassed to start talking about it.’ Although he had little success in changing people’s views on EU migration, he still believes that discussing this topic opens the possibility of reflection and challenging people’s attitudes.

During the year of fieldwork, the interview setting sometimes became a two-way conversation about migration. Particularly at the end, but often during the interview as well, some participants asked me questions about research on migration. They were also curious to hear my personal views on immigration policy or my experiences as a migrant. Sam and Sarah are among the few participants who expressed overwhelmingly negative views on migration during the recorded interview. They also asked me several questions throughout the almost three hours of conversation. Before I left their house, Sarah told me that ‘it was good to talk to a foreigner’, claiming I was the first Romanian she spoke to for more than a few minutes. Sam appreciated that he had an opportunity to express his views on migration. He stated that the interview ‘made us reflect about things’. The direct contact with me as a migrant and sharing our (different) views facilitated this space for reflection. We do not know whether Sarah and Sam would express different views on migrants (or Romanians) if interviewed again. But the interview data clearly shows that the participants who changed or challenged their attitudes primarily did so through direct local-level contact with migrants.
7.3. **Localised direct contact in shaping attitudes towards migrants**

Like Mădălina and Liam, Jack heard Nigel Farage’s comments about Romanians. He paraphrases the politician’s statements and immediately adds: ‘Well, I live two doors down from a Romanian person and it’s great!’ Jack’s positive encounters with a Romanian neighbour (localised direct contact) contradicted Farage’s suggestion that some may be concerned living next to Romanians (political narrative). The vast majority of participants use one or a few anecdotal examples from their personal experiences when rejecting certain political, media or community narratives. Those who have extensive local contact with migrants give detailed examples when justifying their attitudes towards migration. But they also acknowledge the impact that political, mediated and community narratives have had on their own views or those of other people they know. Bobby’s comment summarises the dominant perspective in the interviews: ‘If they’re your neighbour, they are alright, you know, *if you speak to them, if you know them and actually talk to them*, then, they’re probably gonna be alright, aren’t they?’

Participants mainly speak about their experiences with migrants in Newham and Tendring. Some also refer to contact with migrants in other UK areas and abroad. Interviewees’ narratives show that it’s not only people who are on the move, but also their attitudes. Moreover, migrants’ and British people’s attitudes at the local level do not exist in isolation. They influence each other; hence this research considers them together. The nature of migration in an area shapes attitudes towards migrants. For example, some participants reflect on British residents’ views shifting after an increase in East European migration, which has been broadly perceived as ‘lower skilled’ (Chapter 5, Section 5.1.2), compared to the more strictly ‘controlled’ non-EU migration. Nevertheless, attitudes change when British people themselves become migrants. Some participants consider that living and working in different parts of the UK challenged their views on migration. Others similarly draw on their experiences of international migration or travel outside the UK.
This latter point is illustrated when participants discuss their attitudes towards East Europeans in comparison to Western counterparts. These are often explained in reference to travelling abroad. In addition to being contingent on participants’ knowledge of the scale of migration and how the welfare system operates (Chapter 6, Section 6.2.2), attitudes are also shaped by prior knowledge of migrants’ countries of origin. Oliwia claims that British people have disproportionate negative attitudes towards Romanians (and Poles, to a lesser extent). She believes that people are more likely to accept negative mediated attitudes as fact if they have limited or no direct contact with migrants and also lack travel experiences in the countries from where migrants come. She concludes: ‘people just don’t go there; they don’t know your culture and people always think about Romanians as gypsies.’

While many British participants travelled to Western Europe, particularly to Spain and France for holidays, very few spoke about visiting Eastern Europe. Carol is fluent in French and speaks intermediate Spanish due to her experiences spending holidays and studying abroad. She thinks that East European migrants tend to be more visible partly because British people are more ‘used to’ interacting with West Europeans, facilitated by travelling in those countries. Some participants make statements like Alfred’s, referring to Western European states: ‘I went to Belgium in 2016 and oh, what a wonderful country, I love Belgium […] all the transport was so efficient, the people were so nice.’ The few British participants who travelled to Eastern Europe use these experiences to contradict some of the negative narratives they heard about those countries. Bobby speaks about integration as a two-way process. He visits the local Polish sklep to buy food products that are reminiscent of his travels to Poland from thirty years ago.

Most interviewees, including those with little or no experience travelling abroad, speak about direct contact with migrants in the UK. As Jack’s example about Romanians shows, anecdotes can be aimed at disproving some of the political, media or community narratives. Nonetheless, other participants use local-level contact to confirm the ‘truth’ behind some mediated attitudes. Sam recognises that there are Romanian ‘contributors’ but is still convinced Romanians are ‘number one’ on criminality. This conclusion is not only based on the TV
programmes he mentioned, but also on his direct experiences in prison, where he met Romanians convicted of theft and fraud, the crimes that the media emphasised in relation to this migrant group.

The extent to which direct contact shapes attitudes is highly localised. Some participants speak about both positive and negative experiences with the same migrant group when living in different areas. For example, Robert had mixed views towards Romanian conationalists when living in west London. His views have become more negative after moving to Newham and witnessing an increasing number of Romanian homeless people on his daily commute to work. After the interview, Robert and I walked together to the underground station. On the way there, he pointed at all Romanian rough sleepers as we walked past them. We stopped in front of the station to speak more, while a group of Romanians started playing loud instruments and singing in Romanian near us. Robert uses these localised examples to justify why he thinks that Brexit is a ‘necessary evil’.

Episodic contact with migrants can lead both to negative and positive generalisations. Jo’s example is perhaps extreme, but illustrates how a single experience can be used in a conversation to justify why someone voted Leave because of immigration:

We definitely had a few Leave voters on my little estate. One guy voted Leave because his neighbour’s dog, his neighbour was Polish, his neighbour’s dog was keeping him awake, so he’s voting Leave so that the Polish person would have to go home with the dog. This is literally the reason they voted Leave. He’s the same kind of thing, you know, white, East End, local, retired, so, you know, I guess he’s got a lot of time for himself to see the local area change. And I totally get that, especially as you get older, observing change can be quite scary and the most obvious signs of change is like new people with new faces and new skin colours and new, you know, languages and that kind of stuff.

Jo explains how his neighbour lived in an uncertain context, observing rapid changes in the local area. An unpleasant experience with his Polish neighbour added to this situation, influencing his views on immigration that informed his vote in 2016. Theresa’s mother also voted Leave hoping to limit East European migration. In contrast to Jo’s neighbour, she had a positive episodic contact with
Polish migrants, which challenged her views. Her Polish neighbours re-wired her house for an affordable price and then offered some Polish food:

She said to the two lads, ‘what kind of food do you eat in Poland?’. And they said, ‘we’ll bring you something tomorrow’. And their wives made mum a big picnic basket, all different foods and my mum was like, ‘oh, those people, they were so lovely, I don’t particularly like Polish people or Romanian people, but they are just...’. That’s why I like them, that’s why I prefer to spend time with East European people because nobody around where she lives, no English people could have thought of doing that to my mum, to bring her food.

After having an initial positive experience with the Polish neighbours (re-wiring her house), Theresa’s mother was perhaps more likely to start a conversation with them (asking about Polish cuisine). This prompted a second positive contact, when the Polish neighbours brought her food. Theresa uses this example to argue she prefers to spend time with East European migrants than with British people. Her mother’s conclusion is different: she did not ‘particularly like Polish people or Romanian people’, but the Polish neighbours were ‘lovely’ and therefore become an exception to the rule. Sometimes, direct contact challenges previous views, but it is not sufficient to lead to positive attitudes towards an entire migrant group.

For other participants, limited direct contact can lead to positive generalisations about certain migrant groups by nationality or all migration. Dominika was surprised to read negative media stories about Romanians. She does not believe such mediated narratives because of her positive experiences with a Romanian migrant:

They [media] were saying ‘the Romanians are coming’, ‘they’re gonna steal from you’, ‘you can’t trust them’, ‘they’re horrible people’ and all of that. And I’m thinking, oh my God, I know only one Romanian person, but she can speak five different languages and she’s absolutely amazing, what the hell are they talking about?

Dominika depicts her close Romanian friend as a desirable, highly skilled migrant who does not fit within the negative stereotypes presented in the media. The relevant question for contact theory is whether Dominika would have the same views if the direct contact with Romanians was not through a close friend, but a
neighbour such as Jack’s or an even more distant acquaintance. The next section elaborates on how views are justified through direct local-level contact. It looks at sudden change through episodic contact, as opposed to more progressive change through interactions over a longer period.

7.3.1. Key moments of (progressive) change in attitudes towards migrants

The literature review discussed how extended, ‘meaningful’ contact is more likely to reduce prejudice than episodic contact (Allport, 1954). In other words, Dominika’s close friendship with the Romanian migrant would be a more effective form of contact than the two short episodes between the Polish neighbours and Theresa’s mother. But there is a range of other variables to be considered. The earlier in life contact with the ‘other’ occurs, the more impactful it is on shaping people’s attitudes (Pettigrew, 1998). Moreover, for direct contact to happen, it needs to be desired and encouraged by both parties. While some assume that living in multiethnic areas leads to more frequent contact with migrants, Putnam’s (2007) constrict theory suggests that this may not necessarily be the case. To illustrate, Emily and other participants observe the erosion of social cohesion in Newham following a rapid increase in migration to the area. This depiction contrasts with how some British participants in monoethnic areas, like Dan from Jaywick, praise their neighbourhoods for having a strong ‘community spirit’.

Participants refer to both sudden and more progressive changes in their attitudes towards migrants. They identify key moments when their views have been impacted. Those include going to university, working in an international environment, living abroad and building personal relationships with migrants. For instance, a few participants comment that education per se does not shape views towards migrants. Others, like Theresa, mention that critical thinking learnt through further studies impacts their attitudes towards certain topics. However, most agree that it is the international character of university campuses in the UK that enabled contact with the ‘other’, which challenged their previously held views. This observation relates to recent research showing a larger gap in attitudes towards migrants when comparing highly and lower educated people in
the UK, contrasting to other countries (Eick, 2019). Interacting with foreign students is a particular circumstance, given that most participants categorise students as desirable migrants, with some even advocating not counting students in the net migration figures. Many of those key moments are a starting point for more meaningful or at least more frequent contact. Most participants describe progressive changes. They use anecdotal examples to show how their attitudes shifted over a longer period or repeated instances of contact. This qualitative fieldwork explores the nuances behind what participants perceive as meaningful contact affecting attitude change.

Going to university or working in a multiethnic environment are the most common examples discussed by participants. Interviewees also speak about moving from monoethnic areas to more ethnically diverse towns and cities. These changes often occur at the same time. For instance, Bobby left home to study in a multiethnic area. This challenged his attitudes, which were based on community narratives:

When I was younger, I used to go along with the general crowds, say, ‘I hate the French.’ I don’t know why, but we’re supposed to hate the French […] French, they eat snails, they’re terrible people, and I didn’t know anyone from France, until later, when I, you know, I went to university and then nearly all of the people on my physics course were white English […] But there were a lot of different students, a lot of agricultural students from Africa and Asia and Middle East, so I did meet people […] then I worked in Clacton [school] for a long time and that was, and there were people, they were nearly all white, but then there’ll be, a Black guy would turn up, and people would say ‘there’s a Black guy, there’s a Black kid there!’ and, and I would say, ‘yeah, give him, you know, he haven’t done anything wrong, what’s the matter with him?’ But it wasn’t until […] I got work at [London University] teaching computing…on the way, you know, they gave me a print out of their students, a hundred and sixty of them, and the names, and I thought, ‘can’t say these names’, I don’t know, you know, like I say, they were Chinese, they were Russian, there were a lot of Indian and I thought, ‘Wow!’; you know, and you look at them and the whole place is cosmopolitan and I loved it!

This extract from Bobby’s lengthy account includes progressive moments of change. His attitudes are first challenged when going to university and meeting students from other continents. Returning to work in Clacton, he finds himself speaking against others’ prejudice towards a Black student in his classroom.
However, his attitudes towards migrants became even more positive after working in a London multiethnic university later in life, before retiring to Clacton.

Some other participants speak about how their first job in an international team involved moving out of less diverse areas. Jacob left Clacton-on-Sea for work and lived in several multiethnic, larger towns before returning to a managerial position in a Tendring village. He positions his views on migration as different from those of his colleagues who accept ‘what they read in the Daily Mail, Daily Express and The Sun’ as fact:

It’s because I’ve moved out of Clacton and I’ve seen a little bit more of the world and particularly around, working around the country, London, Glasgow and all sorts and I’ve met and worked with so many people from diverse cultures and backgrounds that, you know, I’ve seen the reality.

Jacob’s ‘reality’ consists of his observations working in the NHS with migrants in London, Glasgow and other areas. His personal experiences do not match the media portrayals of migrants embraced by some of his friends in Clacton. For some participants like Jacob, contact with migrants as work colleagues is sufficient to challenge negative views. Others see the work context as a facilitator for more meaningful friendships with migrants. Theresa describes her parents’ ‘racist ideas’ about Ugandan Asians and why she did not adopt those views:

I went to work in a bank. This was in the late 1970s, early 1980s, and who was working as accountants? The Ugandan Asian people that’ve been chucked out, there were many of them working there as accountants, and I got to know them and I got to know their stories about what happened in Uganda and then, I got invited to their houses, and they invited me to try their food, so I tried their foods and I was invited to festivals […]

Positive encounters with these migrants at work represented a stepping-stone for more meaningful relationships later, when Theresa visited their homes and joined them for ethnic celebrations.

These experiences would not have occurred if Theresa was not willing to participate. Other interviewees also describe the need to have initiative to experience the types of contact that will challenge negative stereotypes. Otilia recognises she had limited knowledge of India and no direct contact with Indian
people before she moved to the UK from Romania. The process of migration enabled her to have certain experiences that changed her views:

Yes, I was actually curious to see how they pray, what they say in their prayers, what happens in an Indian Temple, because, well, Muslims and those ones are kind of close to us, I mean, I had a few acquaintances, but Hindu, I did not have any acquaintances […] when I was in Romania, if you mentioned Indians to me, Hindus, I only knew about Maitreyi, […] and Calcutta, I remembered it was something in India, but India is huge and while I remembered some of those bits from Maitreyi and a bit of their culture, I did not know very much at all.

In Romania, Otilia’s knowledge of India was based on one of the core Romanian Literature college readings, Maitreyi by Mircea Eliade. In the UK, she has an Indian manager at work. This prompted her ‘curiosity’ to learn more about Indian culture and even visit the local Temple with her manager. Before migrating to the UK, Otilia’s views towards Indians were not necessarily negative. Yet the direct local-level contact in Newham improved her understanding of Indian culture and left her with an openly positive attitude towards this group: ‘I got to know many Indians over here who are very smart, and we had great discussions on this theme of spirituality and religion.’

Otilia mentions her Muslim acquaintances in Romania and her current Muslim partner in the UK. She is an exception in the migrant sample, where some participants express anti-Muslim prejudice. Islamophobia in the UK has been particularly found in areas where locals have little contact with Muslims (Ballinger et al., 2019: 11). Several Romanian and Polish participants emphasise they met a Muslim for the first time after moving to the UK. Unlike with other minority groups, direct positive contact with Muslims did not seem to reverse previously held negative views. Some migrant participants note becoming more ‘tolerant’ and ‘accepting’ rather than positive. For example, Zofia claims that wearing a burqa is ‘not normal’, but then explains how her views shifted from being ‘a bit racist’ to more ‘accepting’:

It’s all about knowing […] ‘cos like, I was a bit racist as well when it comes to a Muslim […] I try to accept them and tolerate, so when they’re very nice, especially working in this environment, where you have to do…you have to, you know, help everyone, so you kind of like, if you want to help, you are that
sort of personality, you don’t mind whatever the country they come from, you
don’t even ask.

Zofia’s daughter has a Muslim best friend from school. Therefore, she spends
time with the girl’s family, in addition to working in a charity where some of the
clients are Muslim. In contrast to Otilia, who proactively enjoys speaking to the
‘other’ (Indians in her case), Zofia maintains there are significant differences
between her and the Muslims she met, which she cannot overcome. Like Zofia,
Klara worked in a charity when she first had contact with Muslims. She positions
herself as being ‘very against’ them initially, ‘as almost all Polish people’, in her
view. But seeing the ‘human face’ of Muslim people made her realise it’s not ‘so
black and white always’. Her views became ‘softer’, although not positive. EU
migrants’ attitudes towards ‘others’ cannot be isolated from British people’s
attitudes towards them. A few British participants noticed racist attitudes
(particularly towards Muslims and different types of non-EU migrants) among
East European migrants they met in the UK.

Most examples of direct contact refer to ‘contributing’ migrants (towards whom
there are more positive views to start with), such as Bobby’s students, or the
accountants and NHS staff in Theresa and Jacob’s work experiences. To change
views towards the less desirable categories of migrants, more extended contact
is usually needed. During his first few years in the UK, Darius worked in a factory.
He observed that Romanian workers like himself were subject to negative
attitudes and hateful comments. Later on, the British workers had more contact
with Romanians and their attitudes gradually became more positive:

They still disconsider us and think that we have to do 4-5 jobs as Romanians,
but _slowly, slowly, they accept us within their society_. Working daily with a
person, you know them relatively well, there are those who accept it, there
are those who don’t, but I say it’s became easier since we have the full right
to work.

After Romanians were granted full rights to work in 2014, they became more
visible in the lower paid workplaces such as the factory where Darius was
employed. This was not only due to an increase in the number of Romanian
workers, but also because they had equal workers’ rights and were less at risk of
exploitation. This observation links to Allport’s theory, according to which one of the conditions for positive contact is an ‘equal status’ shared by participants. Once Darius and his British colleagues had equal rights in the factory, the nature of their interaction changed, and he had fewer negative experiences than in the past. Finally, a few participants note how their attitudes changed even towards the migrants portrayed as most undesirable. Michael speaks about a Romanian Big Issue seller in his town:

She knows a lot of people now, she knows that she has sort of like established rapport with a lot of local people, I could imagine that she had a very difficult time starting up. Because that sort of picture of, you know, somebody who is coming from abroad who is begging, and it's not begging, but I think that would be what the perception would be.

Michael explains how attitudes towards this Romanian woman are expected to be negative, influenced by media portrayals of Romanian beggars. Yet he is convinced that after local residents speak to her, they understand her motives and change their initial views. Nevertheless, while in many cases direct contact challenges mediated attitudes, other times, mediated contact prevails.

7.3.2. Mediated vs. direct contact: which one prevails and when

Participants mix mediated and direct contact when speaking about their attitudes towards migrants. While there has been extensive research looking at mediated (vicarious) and direct contact separately, the interaction between those two is overlooked. My interviewees give more examples of how direct contact challenges mediated attitudes, than the opposite. However, there are two types of outcomes: when direct contact is more powerful than mediated contact and when direct contact fails to challenge attitudes previously shaped by mediated contact. Before discussing these situations in turn, it has to be acknowledged that there’s no ‘one size fits all’ model of attitude change. Participants’ accounts are complex and while direct contact challenges particular views on certain groups of migrants, it can simultaneously have little or no effect on attitudes towards other categories of migrants.
Figures 5 and 6 draw on two participant narratives to give an overview of the various factors and experiences that influence attitudes towards migration. Theresa and Sam are both white British, in their 50s and grew up in the East End in white working-class families, before moving to Clacton-on-Sea. Nevertheless, their views on migration are situated at opposite ends of the spectrum in the sample. Sam voted Leave to substantially reduce immigration and believes migrants have an overall negative impact. Theresa cherishes the overall positive impact of migration and wishes the UK would continue the freedom of movement policies and even extend them to other migrants. The main difference between Theresa and Sam’s accounts is not the regularity of direct contact with migrants. They both had early life and frequent contact with migrants when living in east London. After moving to Clacton, they interact with migrants less often, but still have contact with various migrants at the local level. Moreover, they mention being exposed to similar (and overwhelmingly negative) community, political and media narratives.

The difference is found in how direct contact relates to their mediated attitudes. Theresa’s experiences with migrants contradict mediated narratives, whereas some of Sam’s negative experiences are validated by what he hears from politicians or TV programmes. By way of illustration, both Theresa and Sam hear negative stories about East European migrants in the media and politics. Theresa only specifies positive direct contact with East Europeans, such as when her mother’s Polish neighbours offered her food or when she became friends with the Russian taxi driver in Clacton. Contrastingly, while Sam admits that some of his migrant friends are welcome contributors, this positive attitude does not extend towards the majority of migrants. His experiences in prison meeting East European convicts and direct contact with migrants abusing the welfare system support media and political narratives of migrant criminality and ‘benefit tourism’. Sam and Theresa represent two contrasting case studies. For Theresa, positive direct contact with migrants prevails over negative media and political narratives. Sam has mixed (more inclined towards negative) direct contact, which confirms negative mediated attitudes, while also rejecting some positive stereotypes. There are no two interviews which follow a clear, exact model, but there are some trends.
Figure 5: Case A – Theresa
Figure 6: Case B - Sam
Positive direct contact does not always have to be extensive to challenge negative attitudes. Participants tend to use examples from a few, sometimes even one migrant they met. They usually present their views using the following structure: describing a mediated attitude, then summarising their direct local contact and, finally, expanding on one or a few anecdotes illustrating how these (e.g. usually positive) experiences do not fit the (e.g. usually negative) mediated narratives. Lorna justifies her positive attitudes towards EU migrants in this fashion:

*community narrative*

I think it was similar for them, I don’t think they really made a distinction between immigrants from the EU and immigrants from elsewhere, they just felt that there were too many people who were taking from this country and not contributing.

*direct localised contact*

whereas, I’ve not seen that, that’s not my experience with the people that I know.

*one anecdotal example*

our next-door neighbours, but one, are from Eastern Europe and you know, they bought a house that was practically derelict, they practically rebuilt it in their weekends, you know, they are hardworking, industrious people.

Lorna’s direct contact with ‘hardworking, industrious’ East European neighbours directly challenges the community narrative adopted by some of her family members, according to which migrants do not contribute. Instead of detailing one particular instance of contact, other participants list a number of experiences that do not correspond to the mediated narratives. For example, Matt enumerates his positive encounters with Romanians, which all contradict the negative stereotypes he mentions earlier in the interview:

*media narrative*

I think there is a distinction between the kind of Good EU and the Bad EU and the idea that oh yeah, France is fine, but not Romania.
*direct localised contact*

Personally, Romania is lovely.

*enumeration of anecdotal examples*

I've got many good friends who are Romanian, I worked with a Romanian, I set up a [business] with a Romanian.

While most participants use positive localised contact to challenge negative mediated attitudes, direct contact can also be used to reject positive narratives. For instance, Sam mentions hearing from others that migrants positively contribute to the UK economy. His direct contact with migrants does not support that (albeit infrequent) depiction:

*community narrative*

People say that people have come from other countries and they put back into the Government, and when they're earning, they pay their taxes et cetera, they pay back into the country,

*direct localised contact*

but my experience.

*anecdotal examples*

I've got a vast amount of people, that I'm very friendly with, from Lithuania and from Romania and many of them I find [...] they send an awful lot of money back to their families, so, and this is the vast majority of them, and therefore that's not going back in the UK economy like people are saying.

Sam also describes his migrant acquaintances as ‘hardworking’. However, he concludes they are not contributing overall, given they send their savings to family members in another country. The positive community narrative is rejected by direct experiences.

Sometimes, mediated contact prevails over direct experiences. Contact with migrants that contradicts certain media, political or community narratives does
not always lead to a change in attitudes. One of the reasons for John’s Leave vote in 2016 was EU migrant criminality. He details:

*political and media narratives*

(mainly based on his reading of UKIP and Leave websites)

As far as European culture is concerned, the only downside is basically European crime, it seems to be a lot easier recently [...] there’s a lot of crime over here that the EU [...] don’t wish to address.

*direct localised contact*

As far as I’ve come across, I mean, I haven’t had any issues with EU migrants in that respect.

John had broadly positive contact with EU migrants. But not meeting any EU migrant involved in criminal activities is not sufficient to dismiss what he read from online sources. Moreover, mediated attitudes tend to be more powerful than direct contact when speaking about welfare benefits. Most participants who wish to see stricter restrictions on migrants’ access to welfare (Chapter 6, Section 6.3.3) do not have direct contact with migrants using the welfare system. Statements like Otilia’s are particularly common among migrant participants:

*direct localised contact*

No one among my friends applied for benefits, I don’t know what to say about this.

*media narrative*

Yes, but in Newham many are on benefits. I know this, I have seen documentaries on the television.

*repeating direct localised contact*

but not among my friends.
On other topics, such as whether low skilled migrants can be ‘contributors’, localised direct experiences appear to be more impactful than when discussing crime or welfare, issues on which participants have stronger negative views.

Whether mediated or direct contact prevails also depends on participants’ reflexivity. Direct interaction with migrants, but also the practices of reflection and evaluation, are more effective in challenging mediated narratives, than countering them with facts (Ballinger et al., 2019: 24). Several interviewees consider that the Brexit context opened a space to think about immigration. For some migrants, it is a chance to discuss their personal experiences in more detail. Many participants situated themselves ‘in the middle’ before the referendum, without having particularly strong positive or negative views on immigration. The referendum result was a key moment of change in their thinking about this topic. For instance, Jo notes he has become ‘more pro-immigration’ since 2016, a trend which is accurate for the UK public as a whole (Kaur-Ballagan, 2019): ‘I think I’m more pro it, like I think I didn’t have a reason to think about it before, but now I have, it’s like, it’s quite clearly a positive thing.’ Claudia illustrates the dilemma posed by the process of reflection, which prevents her from rushing to conclusions when expressing her views on Asian migrants in this example:

It’s a bit difficult to answer this, because I’m a sociologist by training and for years I was told to try to see both sides of the coin, you know. One part of me wants to be against and say the Chinamen ['orezarii’ in Romanian, a slur, directly translated as ‘people who grow rice’] are stupid, but, on the other hand, I think, ‘why am I like this? Why do I think this way? Where do these stereotypes come from? Who came up with these stereotypes? How many out of how many are this way?’

Reflecting on one’s attitudes can challenge both mediated and direct forms of contact, leading to more balanced views. Part of this process is being open to ask the ‘other’ questions. Dominika concludes with an analogy after explaining how her views changed:

Let’s say I’m doing sky dive, yeah, and someone will tell me ‘oh, sky dive? you can die and this and this and so many people died’, I was like, ‘yeah, but actually, I know lots about it, I know you have to have a parachute […]’ and people are like ‘no, no, no, because I heard from someone’, and it’s just like, ‘you know what, it’s not like that!’ You have to be open; you have to educate yourself, and if you’re curious, read about it or speak to a person from, you
know, [a] different culture or whatever, whatever, just ask questions, 'cos that helps!

7.4. Conclusion

All participants are exposed to a range of factors shaping their attitudes towards migrants. The presence (or absence) of localised direct contact with migrants is situated within a context of mediated attitudes through political, media and community narratives. Interviewees usually identify narrow, broadly negative narratives about migration. The ‘loudest voices’ in politics tend to sceptical of migration, while alternative views are seen as almost silent or not as persuasive. These predominantly negative political narratives receive disproportionate media exposure. The media also focus on sensationalistic case studies of migrants, especially on the issues of criminality and ‘benefit tourism’. The media narratives are even further distorted by residents at the local level who construct community narratives. Participants observe a cycle of interconnected political, media and community narratives which build an overall negative picture of migration in the UK, including of EU migrants.

Despite acknowledging these mediated attitudes, the vast majority justify their views in reference to their personal experiences with migrants. Community narratives are often adapted to the demographic characteristics of a location (similarly to how the Leave campaign targeted messages on immigration in specific areas). Negative narratives in Tendring tend to be pointed at ‘immigrants’ as a broad category and supported by British residents. In Newham, several interviewees observe negative attitudes towards EU migrants more specifically being promoted by some ethnic minority communities as well. However, living in the multiethnic Newham (as opposed to the monoethnic Tendring) does not automatically mean more frequent direct localised contact with migrants. For interaction to occur, both parties need to be willing to listen to each other.

Participants in both locations speak about similar key moments of change in their attitudes. As illustrated by Bobby and Theresa’s experiences, attending university or working in an international team can represent a starting point for more meaningful relations with migrants, which may impact views even further.
Attitudes are often challenged through the process of migration, both internally in the UK and internationally. Some British participants, such as Jacob, note how their views changed after living in other towns and cities, or as a result of travelling or living abroad. Migrant participants met certain ‘others’ only after moving to the UK, such as Indians in Otilia’s case, or Muslims in Dominika and Zofia’s accounts. Moreover, migrant participants, like Robert and Flaviu, tend to be particularly sensitive to negative encounters with conationalists. Participants’ socio-economic backgrounds also influence the types of migrants they meet. Most refer to positive experiences with highly skilled, ‘contributing’ migrants. But there are also some who describe positive encounters with migrants who are less desirable in mediated narratives, such as the Big Issue Romanian seller in Michael’s example.

Participants’ responses show a complex and sometimes contradictory picture of their attitudes towards migration. They reflect Esin’s (2017) conclusion that storytellers are ‘mobile, multiple and sometimes contradictory’. This sample cannot allow for generalisations, but it provides nuance and context on how episodic and more sustained direct localised contact challenges and changes views. It also analyses the overlooked interplay between mediated and direct contact. For Matt and Lorna, direct positive contact trumps negative mediated narratives. Sam’s negative direct contact with migrants confirms his negative mediated attitudes. John’s lack of direct contact supporting the negative mediated narratives is insufficient to change his views.

Most participants comment on how their views have become more positive over time in certain respects. However, having positive experiences with EU migrants does not necessarily result in being positive towards (EU) migration in general. Some participants use ‘it’s not you, it’s the others’ as a phrase to describe how people with negative views on migration react following a positive encounter. The influence of direct localised contact on changing attitudes towards migrants can be limited, especially in the absence of reflection on the topic of immigration. The UK has been witnessing a softening in public attitudes towards EU migrants since the referendum in 2016. It is thus both timely and relevant to discuss the role and limitations of local-level direct contact in the context of mediated attitudes.
Chapter 8. Conclusions: Shaping local-level attitudes towards EU migrants

This thesis started by situating the research subject (Section 1.2) and arguing why studying British, Romanian and Polish attitudes (Section 1.3) towards EU migrants in Newham and Tendring (Section 1.4) is a relevant and timely topic adding to the literature on attitudes towards migration. Brexit is an ideal context to examine attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK, especially given that attitudes towards immigration are a partial explanation for the 2016 result (Section 2.3.1). The referendum campaign represents a period in which the topic of EU migration has been made more salient in the national-level debate (Section 2.3.2). This research is original in capturing ordinary residents’ and local politicians’ attitudes in 2017-2018, in the midst of UK-EU Brexit negotiations and within a changing pattern of attitudes towards migration, which have significantly softened since the referendum (Blinder and Richards, 2020). It is a particularly suitable background to analyse the extent to which national-level narratives appeal at the local level and how attitudes are influenced by direct experiences as well as media, political and community narratives.

Each chapter drew its own conclusions and this final concluding chapter summarises the findings and contributions of this thesis. The original insights of this research can be grouped in three categories. First, the interview analysis conducted for this thesis identified five underpinning and interlinked narratives in the construction of attitudes towards migrants – contribution, community (Chapter 5), certainty, control (Chapter 6) and change (Chapter 7). Figures 1 to 3 at the beginning of Chapters 5 to 7 present how these connect. Participants’ understanding of these themes in relation to the topic of migration is shaped by mediated (political, media and community narratives) and direct forms of contact, which can lead to different outcomes in attitude change. This is illustrated in the attitude shaping model developed based on the qualitative interview analysis in Figure 4 at the start Chapter 7.
Second, this research highlighted the role of the local level in shaping attitudes, including direct contact with migrants in Newham and Tendring. It argued that national-level narratives of migration (Section 4.1) often mismatch with local-level interpretations. The fieldwork brought original insight into the nuances of how attitudes towards EU migrants differ in Newham and Tendring and what types of contact local residents have with migrants in those two areas.

Third, by juxtaposing the qualitative interview data from both British and migrant participants in the two fieldsites, this thesis demonstrates how the socio-psychological and economic explanations of attitudes towards migrants which are usually separated in theory (Chapter 2, Section 2.1.3) are difficult to disentangle in practice. Skill and origin-based hierarchies of migrants are intertwined (Chapter 5, Sections 5.1.2 and 5.2.2). The common association of ‘low skilled’ with ‘East European’ has consequences for everyday interaction between migrants and non-migrants. British attitudes can impact migrants’ experiences in the UK, which in turn can shape migrants’ own attitudes towards the British, but also their self-positioning in relation to conationalists or other migrant groups.

8.1. Summary of key findings

8.1.1. The five C’s in constructing attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK

My participants’ attitudes towards EU migrants are structured around four themes: contribution, community, control and certainty. These are placed within an overarching theme of change – a change in the local resident population, as well as other changes in participants’ everyday lives, which lead to feelings of uncertainty. As shown in the figures at the beginning of Chapters 5 to 7, all these themes are connected and shape participants’ views about EU migration.

The more migrants are perceived as contributors, the more welcome they are in local communities. Migrants become commodified communities when participants speak about the expected economic contribution of migrants, although this is mostly described without referring to specific economic input, such as salary thresholds (Section 5.1). Migrants are also expected to ‘integrate’.
Participants’ subjective definitions of integration vary, but they broadly agree on certain aspects, such as being able to communicate in English (Section 5.2). Although interviewees mention economic aspects of integration more frequently, the identity-based arguments are more detailed and linked to the local level (Section 5.2.2.2).

The more certainty an individual has in their everyday life, the more they tend to feel part of the local community and the less control they want to see on migration. The less migrants are perceived to contribute to the economy and society, the more controls participants want on immigration. Some participants’ preference for increased ‘control’ over immigration is situated within a sense of lost control at the local level or in their individual lives. This loss of control is usually blamed on governments and politicians who are seen to have mismanaged migration policies, while migrants themselves are rarely held to account (Section 6.2).

The interviewees are inclined to want more control on migration if they witnessed significant changes in their local areas, and particularly if these changes are seen as negatively impacting their lives. Rapid changes, including a steep increase in migration, are associated with weaker communities and an increased sense of uncertainty, which, in turn, prompts a desire for more control. These uncertainties are exacerbated by the impact of certain policies, such as in the areas of housing and healthcare. Uncertainty is also linked with the broader impact of the austerity measures which have been felt by many participants at the local level (Chapter 6, Section 6.1.1). This is a simplified picture, because each participant, as shown in the case studies in Chapter 7 (Section 7.3.2), is influenced by various factors when presenting their attitudes towards migrants. Yet this narrative structure – contribution, community, certainty, control and change - is present to different extents and to various effects in all interviewees’ accounts.

8.1.2. The relationship between the national and local level in shaping attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK

This thesis sheds light on the extent to which location can determine attitudes towards migrants in the UK (one of the main theoretical contributions detailed in Section 8.2.1). The empirical part of this thesis first analysed the national-level
narratives on EU migration in Chapter 4, to contextualise my local-level qualitative study in Chapters 5-7. The unique analysis of 120 EU referendum ephemera reveals how EU migrants were spoken about at the national level. It illustrates how ‘the brightest and the best’ EU migrants, praised in Remain materials, were constructed as different from ‘the rest’ of migrants about whom little information was supplied (Section 4.1.1). The ‘rest’ of EU migrants were entirely spoken about by the Leave campaign, who positioned these ‘low skilled’ migrants from ‘poorer European countries’ lower in the hierarchy of migrants compared to Commonwealth migrants, who were attributed the role of ‘the brightest and the best’, highly skilled migrants, in some referendum ephemera (Section 4.1.2.). Still, some non-EU migrants, such as the ‘future migration’ from Turkey, were negatively depicted and attracted mixed reactions from participants, depending on their personal contact with these migrant groups (as illustrated in Section 4.2.1).

One central contribution of this research is its emphasis on how these national-level narratives of migration are interpreted by participants at the local level. The empirical chapters illustrate how national-level arguments about migration are most effective in shaping attitudes if they can relate to local-level experiences and interpretations in the two areas studied. The participants' reactions to the EU referendum ephemera discussed in Chapter 4 show how the messages on immigration in the Leave campaign were more effectively constructed to appeal to the local imagination. By contrast, in both Tendring and Newham, the participants who voted in the EU referendum found it difficult to notice positive portrayals of immigration during the campaign. The ephemera analysis indeed shows how freedom of movement was depicted in Remain materials as a 'one way street' (instead of a reciprocal set of rights), almost solely underlining the benefits that this gives to British people who can work, study and travel in EU countries (Section 4.1.1). Moreover, a few voters mentioned how the benefits of EU migration were not necessarily apparent at the local level, so they distrusted the (infrequent) national-level messages about the positive economic contribution of migration (Section 4.2.1). Aware of this context of mistrust and that immigration is a sensitive topic for many, local Remain campaigners also tended to avoid
having detailed discussions on immigration with local residents during the campaign (Section 4.2.3).

Place-based knowledge matters in how national-level messages on immigration are received and perceived by residents. A negative narrative about ‘the rest’ of EU migrants, coupled with a more positive narrative of Commonwealth migration, resonated particularly well in Newham (Section 4.2.2), but was less relevant in Tendring. In Clacton, participants identified a local narrative which was more negative towards particular ethnic or religious groups, such as Romanians and Muslims, but overall rather concerned with the ‘numbers game’ for all types of migration. These nuances are reflected when interviewees speak about community narratives (one of the mediated forms of contact discussed in Chapter 7, Section 7.3.2). As shown throughout Chapters 5 and 6, participants connect the national-level narratives with their local-level experiences, which determine how the national-level portrayals of migrants are interpreted. Chapter 7 answered the main research question of this thesis, ‘How does local-level contact shape attitudes towards EU migrants?’ In interviews, attitudes towards EU migrants are primarily expressed using anecdotal evidence of direct contact at the local level. The findings of this thesis focus on how attitudes are expressed, explained and justified, from a constructivist point of view, rather than attempting to identify mechanisms of attitude formation as would be attempted in a positivist research study.

A simplistic assumption, based on contact theory, would be that views are likely to be more positive in Newham than Tendring due to the multiethnic character of the former local authority area, which would lead to more contact between in-groups and out-groups. This study shows how attitude formation is more complex. The interview analysis emphasises how direct contact with migrants does not always soften or change negative stereotypes about migrants. For some participants, negative views can be reinforced when interpersonal contact confirms their previously negative attitudes which were shaped by political, media or community narratives. For other participants, their positive experiences with migrants locally lead to rejecting negative mediated attitudes (Section 7.3.2). Although participants’ initial assessments of the impact of migration could be
more negative in Tendring, when discussing the topic in detail, interviewees express similar views within the spectrum of attitudes (from participants having overwhelmingly positive or negative views towards migrants in both locations, with most participants situated in the middle). In both fieldsites, attitudes are constructed in reference to the same main themes summarised in Section 8.1.1.

The empirical analysis also sheds light on some differences between how British participants express their attitudes towards migrants compared to Romanian and Polish interviewees. Negative attitudes towards non-EU migrants were also more prevalent among Romanian and Polish participants, who often positioned themselves in opposition to the less ‘contributing’ non-EU counterparts. They also expressed some negative attitudes towards those conationalists who were perceived as less contributing than them (Section 5.2.2.2). In contrast, British participants’ scepticism was rather towards migration as a phenomenon, which was seen as mismanaged by successive Governments who failed to accurately predict the number of migrants and plan infrastructure accordingly (Section 6.2.2). These differences impact participants’ immigration policy preferences discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.3 – while British respondents are mostly concerned with having more accurate data on the number of EU migrants in the UK and a broad interpretation of ‘contribution’, migrant participants tend to have stronger preferences for restricting welfare support for migrants.

Although not intended when planning this research, internal migration has become relevant through the fieldwork (as detailed in Section 8.2.1 from a theoretical and conceptual point of view). Perhaps as a form of establishing rapport with myself as a migrant interviewer, or to empathise or differentiate themselves from the experiences of international migrants, some participants self-identify as migrants to London or to the towns and villages in Tendring. British internal migrants in both Newham and Tendring are part of the narrative of change. While older East Enders have been moving out of areas like Newham to retire on the east coast in towns like Clacton-on-Sea, Newham has been increasingly populated not only by EU (and non-EU) migrants, but also by younger British residents. Although most research on migration is concerned with the changes brought by international migration, this study also reflected on how
British-born participants speak about their own experiences of migration, usually within the UK. A familiarity with personal experiences of migration, even among some participants with generally negative views on migration, may be one of the reasons underlying the fact that overwhelmingly British participants blame governments mismanaging policy, rather than migrants themselves, when they identify negative impacts of migration (Section 6.2).

8.1.3. The intersection between economic and socio-psychological explanations of attitudes towards migrants

Most literature explains attitudes towards migration either in terms of economics (interest) or socio-psychological (identity) factors. This thesis shows how these perspectives cannot be neatly separated in participants’ qualitative accounts. Section 5.1.2. shows how, when asked about different categories of migrants by skill, British participants racialise these hierarchies. When speaking about EU migration, they invariably consider (or mention that other British people would consider) East Europeans as lower skilled, and therefore lower contributing migrants (Section 5.1.2.1). Migrant participants recognise the stereotypes of East Europeans as ‘low skilled’, often challenging these representations by pointing at their experiences of downskilling in the UK labour market (Section 5.1.2.2).

Similarly, when participants start commenting on different migrant nationalities or regions of origin, it is not long before these hierarchies include an element of socio-economic status (Section 5.2.2.1). Those identified as less desirable EU migrants in Newham and Tendring are sometimes also the most visible in everyday fleeting interactions, such as when using public spaces or transport, for example East European men dressed as manual workers talking with one another in their native language or drinking on the streets (Section 5.2.2.2).

This overlap between skill and origin is also seen when participants discuss the meaning of contribution. While contribution is mostly framed in fiscal terms in political debates, participants speak about integration as part of their narrative on contribution. Migrants are welcome ‘as long as they pay tax’ (Section 5.1), but also ‘as long as they integrate’ (Section 5.2). These conclusions are crucial in the UK Brexit context, where the post-Brexit policy perhaps overplays the economic
dimension of contribution: it focusses narrowly on welcoming ‘the brightest and the best’ depicted in the EU referendum ephemera analysed in Chapter 4 (Section 4.1), while controlling ‘the rest’, namely lower skilled migrants. The finding that participants generally do not affix a specific threshold to economic ‘contribution’ when asked openly to describe their ideal policies, as opposed to having to choose among set survey answer options, questions the extent of public support for the salary thresholds needed by migrants to be able to come to the UK after 2021 (HM Government, 2020a).

8.2. Contributions of the thesis

This research contributes to the fields of Political Sociology and Migration Studies and more specifically to the literature on attitudes towards migrants in the rapidly expanding Brexit-related field. It develops a localised model of contact theory where mediated and direct experiences intersect and where attitudes are shaped according to people’s subjective interpretations of contribution, community, control, certainty and change, as illustrated in the figures presented in Chapters 5 to 7. It adds to the qualitative literature on EU migrants’ experiences following the 2016 referendum, while nuancing the overwhelmingly quantitative literature on British attitudes towards migration. It applies a critical lens to a UK migration policy which is primarily influenced by quantitative evidence that often misses the complexity of public views on migration, e.g. on how the term ‘low skilled’ had different meanings for my participants, diverging from policy definitions (Section 5.1.2).

The contributions of this thesis can be grouped in three categories. First, this thesis adds to the literature on the construction of attitudes towards migrants and to conflict and constrict theory in explaining these attitudes. Second, it contributes to the empirical literature on EU migration in the UK, in particular to the small number of qualitative studies on British attitudes towards migrants and to the larger qualitative scholarship on Polish migration, but also the smaller literature on Romanian migrants in the UK. Finally, this research has implications for UK immigration policymaking and political messaging on immigration. The findings from the interviews question the extent to which the current post-Brexit policy
reflects public opinion. Analysing participants’ reactions to the EU referendum campaign messages on immigration also show how arguments targeted at the local level are more effective than delocalised statements about immigration.

8.2.1. *Theoretical and conceptual contributions (on the construction of attitudes towards migrants, conflict and constrict theory type explanations of attitudes and how location influences attitude formation on migration)*

This thesis makes contributions that go beyond the specificities of the participant groups and locations researched or the Brexit context in the UK. The findings develop on several theories and concepts detailed in Chapter 2, in particular Section 2.1, reflecting the qualitative nature of this study and its emphasis on the local level. This thesis further develops the concepts of attitudes, (im)migration and (im)migrant and adds to knowledge on the role of the local level in attitude formation and on the construction of hierarchies of migrants within those attitudes. It shows how economic and identity-based explanations of attitudes intersect when people express their views on migration. Most importantly, the in-depth interview study develops on constrict and conflict theories in explaining attitudes towards migrants.

The thematic analysis identifying the five ‘C’s’ in narratives about immigration adds to the understanding of constrict theory. As outlined in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.2, constrict theory (Putnam, 2007) suggests that a more diverse area does not necessarily lead to more contact between groups, but rather could have the opposite effect. This explanation is supported by the findings from multiethnic Newham fieldsite, where many participants felt there was a low level of social cohesion, compared to areas such as monoethnic Jaywick where all interviewees praised the ‘community spirit’ (Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1). It is not necessarily high migration in Newham that is held responsible for infrequent contact between groups (although a few do link the rapid change in population, including increased migration from the EU, with a change in community cohesion). Many participants speak about uncertainties in their everyday lives that lead to a situation where they have limited time and resources to have the types of local interactions which were possible in a (distant) past or in other locations.
On contact theory, the interview findings develop on the conceptualisation of ‘meaningful’ contact. Chapter 7, Section 7.3.1 in particular (but also throughout the examples in Chapters 5 and 6) shows that attitude changing contact can take place in a variety of situations and does not necessarily have to be ‘meaningful’. Often episodic contact, which is usually seen as less likely to reduce prejudice (Allport, 1954), can prompt reflection on individual attitudes which can then change previously held beliefs. The findings support the studies showing how ‘fleeting’ encounters with difference can influence attitudes (Peterson, 2017). Nevertheless, some superficial encounters can also reproduce negative stereotypes (e.g. Matejskova and Leitner, 2011), such as illustrated in the examples of distant contact with ‘hypervisible’ East European migrants (Section 5.2.2.2). Moreover, the interview analysis also identifies the types of contact that are mostly spoken about by participants when they describe attitude change. These findings are similar to previous research showing how workplaces can facilitate encounters that affect attitudes towards migrants (e.g. Rzepnikowska, 2019).

The findings of this thesis demonstrate how attitudes are constructed while people express their views (cf. Potter and Wetherell, 1987). The research process itself impacts attitude formation; for example, some participants comment that the interview made them reflect on their views towards migrants (Section 7.2.3). Others refer to how conversations with friends or family members shaped their views, either challenging existing attitudes or reinforcing them (Section 7.3.1). The examples participants use to support their views on migration are not randomly chosen, but within the context of the interview setting and various positionalities (Section 3.3.5.1) influencing it. For instance, the fact that British participants overall give more examples of their interactions with Romanians compared to other EU national groups may indeed be due to more frequent contact (especially given the size of the Romanian population in the UK), but may also be determined by their assumption or knowledge that I am Romanian.

Moreover, the researcher using follow-up questions prompting participants to illustrate their attitudes with examples can shape which instances of contact are
remembered in that moment. The experiences that interviewees speak about are reinterpreted in the present and thus construct attitudes during the research process. The discussion between Dan and the passer-by in Jaywick (Section 5.2) is one example showing how views about migration (broadly negative, in this case) can emerge in everyday conversation even when there is no specific question about migration in the conversation. At the opposite end of the spectrum, views about migration can be shaped when asking direct questions on migration, particularly if participants have not thought about that question before, but still feel that they should give an answer to the interviewer.

The literature tends to separate mediated from direct contact when explaining attitude formation (Chapter 2, Section 2.1.5). Chapter 7 (in particular Section 7.3.2) highlights the interplay between mediated and direct forms of contact. Depending on the context of the interaction, direct and mediated contact can be equally powerful. The findings from the interviews show how the relationship between national-level narratives of migration and local-level experiences is relevant in how media, political and community narratives, as well as direct experiences, shape views towards migrants. This argument is the basis of the attitude shaping model built on participant narratives outlined in Figure 4 at the beginning of Chapter 7. This model implies that the formation of attitudes towards migration is layered (media, political, community narratives and various forms of localised contact and contextual factors) and these layers can involve both a national-level and a local-level dimension. For instance, national-level political narratives about migration can be influenced by local-level narratives from politicians and campaigners, as illustrated in the examples of how EU referendum arguments were adapted to the local level in Newham (Chapter 4, Section 4.2.2).

Another conceptual contribution is about how the terms (im)migration and (im)migrant are understood within individual narratives. The meaning participants attribute to these words shapes their views on EU migration (cf. Blinder, 2013) and impacts on the construction of hierarchies of migrants which combine skill and origin as classifiers. Interviewees’ attitudes towards migrants also depend on what types of phrases are used to describe this migration – for instance, participants have different reactions when thinking about ‘uncontrolled EU
migration’ compared to ‘EU migration’ (Section 4.2.1). EU migrants are not seen as a homogenous category in the hierarchy of migrants. Chapter 5 (Section 5.2.2.1) details how participants speak about three types of EU migrants according to how visible they are locally. I categorised them as invisible, visible and hypervisible EU migrants. The (in)visibility can be positive or negative. Chapter 5 illustrates that in the few instances when West Europeans are spoken about, they are invisible (indistinguishable from British-born people for some participants, who do not even ascribe them a ‘migrant’ label) or positively visible (such as when associated with highly skilled occupations). By contrast, East European EU migrants are often discussed as hypervisible in the local area. Chapter 5 shows how both local politicians and residents give similar examples of this hypervisibility (summarised in Section 8.1.3).

This research also adds to the conceptualisation of ‘integration’ (Section 2.1.4). Speaking in a language other than English in public was the most frequently mentioned marker of difference constructing hierarchies of EU migrants by local-level visibility. Some interviewees linked this with segregation, while some migrant participants commented on this aspect when describing ‘other’ conationalons whom they perceived as less integrated. Other practices such as socialising primarily with conationalons attracted mixed reception, from instances where it was seen as problematic (such as the Romanian men in front of East Ham station mentioned in Section 5.2.2.2) to contexts where this represented an opportunity for British people to engage more with migrant groups (as in Diana’s example of the Bulgarian restaurant in Section 5.2.1). This depended on whether integration was perceived primarily as migrants’ responsibility or as a shared task in which British residents have to participate (Section 5.2.1).

This study contributes to the small literature showing how internal and international migration interconnect. Participants’ personal experiences of internal or international migration influence their attitudes towards migrants. For interviewees living in less diverse areas, past experiences in multiethnic locations, frequent travel or translocal contacts can impact their attitudes even in absence of direct local-level contact with migrants. Section 4.2.2 exemplified how the participants who took advantage of the benefits of freedom of movement or
had close friends or family who did were more likely to list freedom of movement as a reason to support Remain in 2016. Internal migration also becomes relevant when considering how an individual’s attitudes towards migration can influence their decision to migrate themselves. This is illustrated at the end of Section 5.2.2.2 when some participants explain their move from multiethnic London to rather monoethnic Tendring referring to negative experiences and attitudes towards migrants when living in London. A few participants from Tendring constitute case studies of ‘white flight’ in the UK, a concept used primarily in the USA to describe the significant internal migration of white residents from multiethnic areas to predominantly ethnically white neighbourhoods.

While internal migration can result into more residents with negative views towards migrants living in certain locations, it can also challenge and change attitudes to become more positive. Chapter 7 discussed how attitudes are changed through what participants identify as key moments in their attitude formation. Section 7.3.1 analysed such defining moments, such as working in an international team and attending university in a multiethnic campus. These changes in participants’ lives usually involve internal migration, such as for Jacob and Bobby who extensively speak about the change in their attitudes through moving out of Clacton-on-Sea to work and study. Internal migration can therefore preserve negative views on migration or challenge existing attitudes (often making them more positive). This qualitative insight into internal migration contributes to another research puzzle in UK migration research, which asks why support for Brexit (which correlates with more negative views towards migrants in quantitative research) is common in many areas with low migration such as Tendring. Perhaps what is overlooked in the survey-based literature on attitudes is that living in a monoethnic area does not exclude the possibility of translocal contact with migrants or the impact of past experiences (when living in other areas) on current attitudes. In this sense, the thesis adds to the conceptualisation of social remittances showing how attitudes towards migrants do travel within the UK.

Another contribution, relating to how the term migration is defined by participants, is on the construction of ethnic and national hierarchies when people express
their attitudes towards migrants. Hierarchies of migrant groups by ethnicity cannot be separated from the construction of hierarchies by skill level. This finding problematises the literature explaining attitudes towards migrants, which generally differentiates between economic and socio-psychological explanations, corresponding to conflict and contact theories (Section 2.1.2 and 2.1.3). The thesis shows how ethnicity is more important in shaping attitudes in some situations than in others. On the one hand, ethnicity and nationality are reproduced through social interaction (Thompson, 2001) and are a way of constructing similarity and difference compared to oneself (Brubaker, 2009). This is illustrated for instance when Romanian and Polish participants position themselves as different from ‘other’ conationalists (Section 5.2.2.2), who are often criticised for being partly responsible for some of the negative British attitudes towards migrants.

On the other hand, ethnicity and nationality do not seem relevant in other situations, for instance when some participants speak about their ideal immigration policies, which are broadly about controlling numbers and access to welfare (Sections 6.3.2 and 6.3.3), regardless of migrants’ origin. This can be influenced by how comfortable participants feel about directly discussing ethnic and national identities. It seemed that migrant participants spoke on this topic more openly. Nevertheless, sometimes a debate about skill level is perceived as replacing a much more controversial conversation about ethnicity, nationality or race. As Section 5.1.2 shows, the term ‘low skilled’ is usually seen as or even directly used to refer to East EU migrants in the UK. While sometimes the references are to specific nationalities such as Romanians, at other times, East Europeans are seen as a homogenous category of low skilled migrants.

There is a large literature on how various socio-demographic characteristics, such as age and education correlate with higher or lower levels of tolerance towards the ‘other’, including migrants (Chapter 2, Section 2.2). This research focusses more on how attitudes towards migrants are presented and justified, rather than participants’ personal characteristics, such as their own education and skill level. Acquiring higher education was primarily spoken about as a key moment of change, especially in British participants’ attitudes, as it enabled
contact with a more diverse group of people (Section 7.3.1). Nevertheless, it was interesting to find that in most in-depth interviews conducted for this study, the salience of education as a factor explaining attitudes was less spoken about or relevant as one might assume at the start of the fieldwork. Many participant accounts seem to support more recent critiques of education as a factor that reduces prejudice or Eurosceptic attitudes (Eick, 2019; Kunst et al., 2019). The findings presented in this thesis bring a level of complexity to often binary analyses of ‘left behind’, lower educated Leave voters, as opposed to highly educated ‘metropolitan elites’ voting Remain. It also supports the critiques of ‘left behind’ stereotypes by showing there are different varieties of ‘left behind’ places (Furlong, 2019; Gordon, 2018) and similar narratives of uncertainty and loss of control in areas in the capital such as Newham and in small towns and villages in Tendring.

8.2.2. Empirical contributions to studies of migration in the UK today

Quantitative studies on EU migration tend to involve British respondents, while qualitative literature is mainly based on interviews with migrants, in particular Polish and, to a lesser extent, Romanians. The main empirical contribution of this thesis is adding to the small qualitative literature about British attitudes towards contemporary EU migration, which questions the terms and findings of quantitative, survey-based literature. Throughout the thesis, participants’ narratives show the variety of meanings attached to widely used terms and phrases such as low skilled, as opposed to highly skilled (Chapter 5, Section 5.1.2.1), ‘contribution’ (Chapter 5, Sections 5.1.1 and 5.2.1) or ‘control’ of migration (Chapter 6, Section 6.3).

This research also contributes empirically to understanding how EU migrant hierarchies are constructed by both migrant and non-migrant participants. The positive depictions of EU migrants are shaped in reference to other migrant groups. More positive portrayals of West Europeans are situated in reference to more negative narratives about their Eastern counterparts (Section 5.2.2.1), supporting the existing small body of scholarly research evidencing the construction of a ‘hierarchy of whiteness’ in EU migration (e.g. Halej, 2014;
Moore, 2013). Even when East Europeans were framed positively, for instance using the common ‘hardworking’ stereotype, this was also constructed in reference to another group – usually the ‘lazy Brit’ stereotype (Section 5.2.1), perpetuated by both migrant and non-migrant participants. Usually, interviewees’ self-identification as migrants also assumed the existence of ‘other’, less desirable migrants. This is most notable in the ‘discursive complicity’ (McGhee et al., 2019) among Romanian and Polish participants distancing themselves from some conationals who are framed as ‘failed’ citizens (Anderson, 2013). These findings on how migrants self-position in a hierarchy of desirability contribute to the empirical literature on Romanian and Polish migration in the UK, which finds similar narratives among East Europeans, in particular on negative attitudes towards other migrant groups or conationals from lower (and more visible) socio-economic backgrounds (e.g. Garapich, 2006; Vicol, 2019).

By presenting British and migrant attitudes alongside each other, this study makes another important empirical contribution – it shows how these attitudes connect and impact everyday interaction. British attitudes can influence migrants’ attitudes and the inverse. For instance, stereotypes about East Europeans at the national level can shape British participants’ attitudes and their reactions when meeting East Europeans who do not fit (or do) with stereotypical representations. At the same time, migrants can be made aware of British attitudes towards migrants in everyday interactions. This is illustrated by examples in the interviews, such as Doriana who commented on how being both a Romanian and a lawyer (thus, a ‘highly skilled’ migrant) contradicted some British interlocutors’ expectations of how a Romanian should be. These interactions, in turn, impact the attitudes of participants like Doriana towards the British, but also how they position themselves in relation to conationals and other migrant groups (Chapter 5, Section 5.2.1).

On a methodological note, the focus on the local level contributes to understanding the differences and similarities between the two types of location, which are extreme case studies in terms of their ethnic composition. The interview based study adds to the existing local-level research on social cohesion and integration (Robinson and Walshaw, 2011), in particular Chapter 5 which...
discussed what ‘economic’ and ‘cultural’ integration means for local residents in Newham and Tendring. The choice of an in-depth, qualitative, interview study with 63 British, Romanian and Polish residents and 15 local politicians and activists contributes to unpacking how a diverse group of residents understand relationships between different groups at the local level. By including both local politician and resident voices with different political persuasions and none, this study presents a more comprehensive picture of local-level attitudes towards migration than previous studies focusing on only one of those groups. The study contributes to the analysis of national-level narratives of EU migration through the original study of 120 EU referendum ephemera, discussed in Section 8.1.2.

8.2.3. Contributions to UK immigration policymaking and political messaging on immigration

Immigration policy is often decided with little input from members of the public. The evidence behind policy on immigration in the UK tends to be based on large scale surveys, focus groups and often even journalistic vox pops which lead to a superficial understanding of public attitudes, for instance on how the public differentiate between highly and low skilled migration. This thesis contributes to debates on UK immigration policymaking by providing in-depth interview data on how residents in the UK make sense of immigration and immigration policies. Chapter 6 shows the disconnect between politicians and the people they represent as part of the picture of lost control and uncertainty at the national level. On the one hand, participants generally felt politicians did not listen to people’s concerns and that policies, such as the austerity measures affecting some participants’ lives, were decided with little input from ordinary people (Section 6.1.1 and 6.1.2). The 2016 vote represented an opportunity for some participants to aspire for more certainty over their lives, although, for some, Brexit brought more uncertainty (Section 6.1.3). The opposition to ‘elites’ in the Brexit context (Clarke and Newman, 2017) when discussing migration could be seen when most participants blame governments and political leaders for a ‘mismanaged migration’ policy, which led to some negative impacts, instead of blaming migrants directly (Section 6.2).
This thesis asks both local politicians and residents how migration policy should look after Brexit. Moreover, it involves people directly affected by UK immigration policies – Romanian and Polish residents, whose voices were not heard in the EU referendum campaign (Section 4.1.3). Chapter 6 (Section 6.3) analysed interviewees’ expectations from post-Brexit immigration policy. Including EU migrant voices is particularly relevant considering the post-Brexit context where over 3 million applications were made to the EU Settlement Scheme. The new ‘settled status’ is a pathway to citizenship and the number of British citizenship applications from EU migrants have significantly increased since the referendum (Section 2.3.3). Many more EU migrants are likely to become British in the near future and therefore part of the electorate and able to impact UK national-level politics through voting.

Participants’ views on policy challenge generalisations based on survey data that a more restrictive system is consistently preferred by the public. On a superficial level, many want ‘more control’, but this means different things in policy terms. For some participants, more control is simply having a clearer idea about the number of EU migrants in the UK, to enable more efficient planning of public services. For others, the desired controls solely concerned welfare access, not necessarily restricting the overall number of migrants. Participants’ nuanced views on which migrants ‘contribute’ (and therefore are welcome) add detail to usually simplified public debates on post-Brexit policy. Arbitrary targets such as the now dropped net migration ‘below 100,000’ initially proposed by David Cameron, or a tick box differentiation between the highly skilled welcomed after Brexit and the low skilled who need to be strictly controlled, show the failure of politicians to understand the complexity of views of both British and non-British UK residents. To illustrate, only one participant mentioned a salary threshold when describing what they would expect from post-Brexit policy or how policy would look if they were in charge. However, the new UK immigration policy extends a salary threshold to EU migrants post-2021 and puts an end to ‘low skilled’ EU migration for work (defined according to salary thresholds), with the exception of shortage occupations (HM Government, 2020a).
Since the 2016 vote, ‘Leavers’ and ‘Remainers’ became identities for many British people, and opinion on EU membership is still divided in the UK. One strategy to bring people together in the post-Brexit UK is involving a range of opinions when formulating policies, including working with those directly affected by future changes. Overall, as outlined in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.1), this research makes the case for listening, rather than speaking about those concerned. As shown in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2.3), most participants felt that a constructive debate on EU migration at the local level was lacking. Section 4.1.3 in the same chapter argued that migrant voices were absent in the campaign political ephemera. When explaining how attitudes towards migrants are shaped, having the space to discuss one’s views with others was considered important in facilitating reflection which challenged and even changed previous views, as Chapter 7 (Section 7.3) highlights. A more participative policymaking process, including migrants themselves, would not only promote direct contact between groups, but also provide space for discussion and reflection on individual attitudes.

Especially the second part of Chapter 4 can provide valuable insight to those working on political messaging on immigration. It demonstrates why the few positive arguments about freedom of movement from the Remain EU referendum campaign ephemera failed to persuade some of my participants, while the Leave materials were not only more visually attractive, but also more relatable to everyday experiences and the growing sense of uncertainty felt by many (detailed in Chapter 6, Section 6.1). Presenting a selection of ephemera to my participants during the interviews showed how a group of people reacted to a campaign two years after it happened, reflecting on which arguments could relate to their local-level experiences.

Finally, this thesis also represents a snapshot of the local history of attitudes towards migrants. As my PhD studies started three months after the 2016 referendum and finished after Parliament passed the UK’s Withdrawal Agreement from the EU (after over 3 years of negotiations, elections and changes) resulting in the UK officially leaving the EU on the 31st of January 2020 (making the start of an 11-month transition period), the attitudes I captured in the
2017-2018 fieldwork represent a picture of an important historical moment in the UK.

### 8.3. Limitations and further research

As referred to in various parts of the thesis, this research has several limitations. As in most doctoral studies, the fieldwork has been conducted in a short period (63 interviews with residents and 15 interviews with politicians and activists in one year) and within a small budget. Each main limitation opens up possibilities for future research on this topic. For example, one limitation outlined in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.5.3) is how this small-scale comparative study cannot generalise about attitudes towards migrants in the UK. It is a picture of local-level attitudes based on a purposive sample of local residents and politicians of three nationalities living in two English local authorities. This is why I paid particular attention in Chapter 3 to my positionality and ethics (Sections 3.3.4 and 3.3.5.1), as well as showing, in Chapter 1, how the focus of this thesis developed over time (Section 1.2). A possible extension of this study is a comparison of more local authorities, testing various differences between their characteristics, such as adding a case with high EU migration and comparatively lower non-EU migration, as suggested in Section 1.4.

Nevertheless, such extension would be problematic because this thesis also captures attitudes at a particular moment in time. As noted in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.5.3) and Chapter 6 (Section 6.3), key moments, such as the Windrush scandal widely reported in the year of the fieldwork, can influence participants’ views on immigration, as a form of mediated attitude (discussed in Chapter 7, Section 7.2.1). The fieldwork is set at a point when then Prime Minister May was negotiating the UK’s withdrawal from the EU and EU migrants’ rights were far from guaranteed. In late 2019, the balance of power has shifted in politics with Johnson’s majority Government. The Withdrawal Agreement, including provisions on citizens’ rights, passed in primary legislation in early 2020. At time of writing, the new Immigration Bill deciding post-Brexit migration policy is yet to be debated, but a policy paper published in February 2020 already confirmed the narratives of control, an end to ‘low skilled’ EU migration to welcome ‘highly
skilled' migration from across the world. A possible extension of this study would be to follow-up with the participants interviewed in 2017-2018 to examine the impact of this shifting political environment, but also whether and how their plans as migrants and non-migrants have been impacted by Brexit.

Another limitation is the participant group selection. Throughout this thesis, the negative views expressed towards EU migration are almost always about East Europeans. Romanian and Polish participants often speak about the negative stereotypes they personally encountered, while some use these negative portrayals to describe ‘other’ conationals. Comparing a Western EU migrant group with an Eastern one would be relevant, especially after Brexit, to see whether the hierarchies of migrants have shifted from their pre-Brexit manifestations. The fact that the vast majority of EU migrants in the UK have to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to be able to live in the UK opens up an entire series of research questions on migrants’ experiences of the scheme and wider implications on belonging and the links between settlement and possible naturalisation (and the impacts that a rising number of naturalised British citizens with full voting rights would have on UK political processes).

In this rapidly changing political context and with a growing literature on attitudes towards migrants and migration, there are many avenues for further inquiry, apart from the few directly linked to my study that I listed so far. Overall, it is crucial that future studies look in more detail at people’s attitudes towards migrants going beyond survey tick boxes, in order to understand the complexity of a debate resulting in policies that affect millions of individual lives.
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Appendices

A. Interview materials

1. General recruitment advertisement (English)

RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

Are you...
- An expert on migration?
- Finding yourself giving speeches on immigration to your mates every single Friday night at the pub?
- Trying to avoid talking about migration as much as possible?
- A migrant yourself? Or perhaps a friend, family member, neighbour of a migrant?
- Still totally confused about what ‘EU migration’ actually means?

Whether you follow every single debate on migration or you avoid them altogether, I am interested to speak to you.

My name is Alexandra, research student at University College London (UCL) and I am researching attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK for my PhD thesis. I would like to have conversations with people born in the UK, in Romania, or in Poland, who currently live in Newham or Tendring.

I'm not seeking right or wrong answers on migration. I'm interested to listen to your all your views, whatever they are. I wish to learn more about the area you live in and your everyday experiences. I would like our conversation to be more like a friendly discussion in a coffee shop or pub, rather than a stressful job interview. If you wish, we can also walk together in the local area so I can understand more about how it is to live in different parts of the UK.

If you can help me with my project, please take the email address from the bottom of the page and drop me a line. I'll then reply to you with more details about the research project (information sheet), and we can decide together when and where we can meet.
2. Targeted recruitment advertisement (English, Clacton)

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

- Were you born in the UK, Romania or Poland and now live in Clacton?

- Would you like to help with a university research project looking at views on migration and Brexit?

My name is Alexandra, a student at University College London (UCL) and I am researching attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK for my PhD thesis. I would like to have conversations with people born in the UK, in Romania, or in Poland, who currently live in Clacton.

*I’m not seeking right or wrong answers on migration. I’m interested to listen to your all your views, whatever they are.*

If you can help me with my project, please email or text me (details at the bottom of the page). I’ll then reply to you with more details about the research project and we can decide together when and where we can meet.
3. Targeted recruitment advertisement (Polish, Newham)

POZIOMI WOLONTARIUSZE DO UDZIAŁU W PROJEKCIE O BREXICIE

- Urodziłeś/aś się w Polsce, a obecnie mieszkasz w Newham (East Ham, West Ham)?
- Chciałbyś/chciałaśbyś pomóc w uniwersyteckim projekcie badawczym dotyczącym poglądów na temat migracji i Brexitu?

Poszukuję uczestników i uczestniczek do mojego doktoranckiego projektu badawczego na University College London (UCL). Wywiady prowadzone są w języku angielskim i trwają nie dłużej niż godzinę (lub tyle czasu, ile możesz poświęcić), a wszystkie Twoje opinie pozostaną anonimowe. Jeśli chcesz podzielić się swoimi poglądami na temat Brexitu i migracji, napisz do mnie - mój adres mail: [adres email]. Dziękuję!
4. Informed consent form (English)

Title of project: Attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK

Ethical approval: University College London (UCL) Research Ethics Committee

It is important you give your informed consent, so I can include your anonymised responses in my analysis of the interview data. Please tick the statements (X) accordingly to give your informed consent.

I understand the purpose of this research and had the opportunity to ask questions if anything was unclear for me.
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. Withdrawing from participating will have no negative repercussions.
I understand that my responses will be anonymised and treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.
I consent to the audio recording of the interview.
I consent to notes being taken for research purposes.
I consent to the processing of my anonymised responses for research purposes.

Name of participant: ____________________________  Name of researcher: Alexandra Bulat
Signature: ____________________________           Signature: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________               Date: ____________________________

If you wish to keep in touch and find out about the results of this research project, please email me: ____________________________ At the end of my PhD studies, I can stay in touch via my personal email address: ____________________________

Thank You!
5. Information sheet (English)

Title of project: Attitudes towards EU migrants in the UK

Researcher: Alexandra Bulat

Ethical approval: University College London (UCL) Research Ethics Committee

You are being invited to take part in my research study. To decide whether or not to participate, it is important to understand the purposes of this research and what it will involve for you.

What is the project’s purpose?

I would like to understand people’s views towards EU migration in the UK, their experiences of migration or with migration and to what extent migration affects their everyday lives.

Why have I been chosen?

I speak to people who were born in the United Kingdom, in Romania, or in Poland, who currently live in either Newham or Tendring local authority areas.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign an informed consent form. You can withdraw at any time during the process without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

What will happen to me if I take part?

I will have some key topics to cover in every research interview, lasting normally an hour. We will have a free discussion on topics such as your experience with migration, your friends, your local area, and what do you think future migration to the UK should be like. I would like this interview to feel more like a real conversation people have in everyday life, rather than a job interview where I get to ask all the questions and expect all the answers.

Will the interview be recorded and what will happen to the recording?

If you give consent to record the interview, an audio file will be used for me to transcribe our discussion and then for analysis for research purposes. The transcripts will be anonymised. Recordings will be destroyed after the project completes. No other use will be made of recordings without your written permission.
What are the possible disadvantages and benefits of taking part?

Talking about migration can be sensitive for some and I acknowledge that. This is why, should any question feel uncomfortable or inappropriate for you, you are perfectly entitled to refuse answering it. Whilst there are no immediate benefits (apart from having a nice cup of tea in or a walk in the local area) for those participating in this research, I hope that my findings will provide context for migration policies.

Will what I tell you be kept confidential?

Yes. All the information I collect about you will be kept confidential. You will not be able to be identified in my PhD thesis or any reports and publications based on the analysis of these interviews.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The data from these interviews will be used for my PhD thesis in the first instance, and further publications.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is carried out part of my PhD studies at University College London (UCL) and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC).

Contact for further information

Project supervisor: Prof Anne White, UCL. Email: [Redacted]
6. Interview topic guide

This is a guide of topics that will be covered in all interviews. The questions outlined here will not necessarily be asked exactly in the same form in each interview. This is because the idea of this project is to have interviews about attitudes towards migration that resemble, as much as possible, conversations that people have in their everyday lives, without unnecessary formalities. Moreover, the questions will be slightly different when asking British born people and people not born in the UK, in order to adapt to their particular experiences. However, the broad topics listed will make the interviews comparable and relevant for the aims of the project and the research questions.

For the purpose of this interview I will use the term ‘EU migrants’ to describe non-UK-born EU citizens living in the UK, as a shorter phrase and also to match the quotes I will show during the interview and avoid confusion.

Pre-recording exercise: ‘Think about the EU referendum campaign. Please write the first thing that comes through your mind on a record card.’

ATTITUDES TO BREXIT

- Did you vote in the EU referendum? [non-UK participants didn’t; follow up, regardless whether able or not to vote] Which side of the debate were you on at the time, Leave or Remain? How about now, anything changed in your views?
- What were your main reasons for your Leave/Remain position?
- What are your thoughts on how campaigners spoke about EU migrants? Was it close to your own experiences and views? Could you say migration was fairly represented? Did you feel you or people like you had a voice in the debates?

Stimulus material: show EU referendum ephemera (Leave, Remain, HM Government leaflet) and the 6 newspaper headlines.

Please comment anything that comes through your mind when reading these.

KNOWLEDGE OF EU MIGRATION

- What is the first thing that comes to your mind when I say, ‘EU migration’? How about ‘unlimited EU migration’? Does ‘EU citizens’ mean anything different?
- Am I an EU migrant? / How do you define EU migration?
- Have a guess how many EU migrants are in the UK?
- Are there any EU migrants in your local area? Can you describe them?
- Where do you think EU migrants come from? What do they usually do in the UK? Follow-up in detail if any countries, nationalities, ethnicities are mentioned.
- Did you follow any media speaking about EU migration? Which ones? TV, newspapers, social media (discuss detail, what have they seen, whether they believe it or not)
- Can you recognize an EU migrant on your street just by looking at them? By speaking to them? If yes, how? What makes you think they are an EU migrant?
ATTITUDES TO EU MIGRATION
- What are your general views on EU migration? What do you think about the scale of EU migration?
- How does it compare with views towards non-EU migration? Similar views/different views & why?
- Would you say that overall EU migrants are integrated in Britain? What does integration mean for you?
- If you were in charge of migration policies after Brexit, how would they look like?

MIGRANT CONTACT - FAMILY AND FRIENDS, WORK AND STUDY
- Do you have anyone with a migrant background [or anyone British-born, for the non-UK born participants] in your family?
- How about your friends? Do you have any friends who are EU migrants [British-born people for the non-UK born participants]? Acquaintances? How often do you speak? Have you ever spoken about your views towards migration?
  *Follow-ups: e.g. Can you give me an example of [situation]?
- [depending on the participant employment status] Do you work/study/[other activity] with any EU migrants [British-born people for the non-UK born participants]?
- How would you describe your contacts with EU migrants [British-born people for the non-UK born participants] in work/study/[other activity]?
  *Follow-ups: e.g. Can you give me an example of [situation]?

LOCAL MATTERS
- Can you tell me more about the area you live in?
- Have you noticed an increase in the immigrant population in your location? If yes, where do you think they come from?
- How does immigration affect your area? [discuss any answers, not only in terms of clear positives or negatives]
- What do you think about the local MP? Other politicians? Do you feel your views on immigration are represented?
- [for the non-UK born participants] Do you feel at home living in this area? What makes you feel/not feel at home?

ANY OTHER TOPICS THE PARTICIPANT WANTS TO SPEAK ABOUT
- Is there anything I have not covered that you would like to add? Any story, experience, or views on migration you feel it’s important to be heard?

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS
- A questionnaire will be given to every participant, asking them to state their place of birth, age, education level, gender, ethnic and religious identification (if any).
7. Demographics questionnaire

This questionnaire is anonymous and voluntary. It would be very helpful for the research to contextualise your interview answers if you can answer the following questions:

Q: Where were you born?
A:

Q: What is your latest educational qualification (e.g. university degree, A levels, high school, BTEC etc.)?
A:

Q: What gender do you identify as?
A:

Q: How old are you?
A:

Q: Do you identify with a race, ethnicity or nationality?
A: Race: Ethnicity: Nationality:

Q: Do you identify with any religion or religious group? If yes, please mention it.
A:

Q: Do you support any political party in the UK? If yes, which one?
A:
UK doesn't need Brexit to curb EU immigration, says former PM Blair

Leaked document reveals UK Brexit plan to deter EU immigrants

390,000 reasons to stop uncontrolled EU immigration now

Low skilled EU workers will still be allowed to come to UK for ‘seasonal’ jobs post-Brexit, Gove says

Brexit deal: 3 million EU citizens allowed to stay in UK permanently - and will get same rights as Britons

One in three EU migrants claim tax credits ['fake news' example]
## B. Research samples

### 1. EU referendum ephemera samples

Table 3: EU referendum ephemera - LSE/BL sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 ways the EU helps the south east</td>
<td>Anneliese Dodds MEP</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notice to all immigrants: regarding the ‘vote leave’ campaign</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain’s EU referendum: yes or no?</td>
<td>Another Europe</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is Britain getting too crowded?</td>
<td>Better Off Out</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your household could be £933 per year better if the UK left the European Union</td>
<td>Better Off Out</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More jobs lower prices</td>
<td>Britain Stronger in Europe</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and you: South East</td>
<td>Britain Stronger in Europe</td>
<td>newsletter</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe and you: London</td>
<td>Britain Stronger in Europe</td>
<td>newsletter</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your future at risk: vote remain on June 23rd</td>
<td>Britain Stronger in Europe</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For every £1 we put into the EU, we get almost £10 back</td>
<td>Britain Stronger in Europe</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote remain on June 23rd</td>
<td>Britain Stronger in Europe</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 days to secure our future</td>
<td>Britain Stronger in Europe</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 mistaken assumptions of the EU referendum battle</td>
<td>Campaign for an Independent Britain</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear resident</td>
<td>Chiltern Remain</td>
<td>letter</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vote to leave</td>
<td>EU referendum campaign</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who governs Britain?</td>
<td>EU referendum campaign</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU basics: your guide to the referendum</td>
<td>European Movement UK</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Publisher</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Position</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Join our cross-party campaign today!</td>
<td>Grassroots Out</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We want to leave the EU. Do you?</td>
<td>Grassroots Out</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our independence day!</td>
<td>Grassroots Out</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave EU to revive our fishing industry!</td>
<td>Grassroots Out</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We want to leave the EU</td>
<td>Grassroots Out</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes to Europe</td>
<td>Green Party / Greens for Europe</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear voter</td>
<td>Green Party / Greens for Europe</td>
<td>letter</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We're fairer, safer and greener in Europe</td>
<td>Green Party / Greens for Europe</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
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<td>Why the Government believes that voting to remain in the European Union is the best decision for the UK</td>
<td>HM Government</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Christian perspective on the European Union and the referendum</td>
<td>Intercessors for Britain</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's time to leave the EU and join the world</td>
<td>Labour Leave</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know the facts</td>
<td>Leave.eu</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's time to... Leave.EU</td>
<td>Leave.eu</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dear [voter], The most important vote in your life!</td>
<td>Leave.eu</td>
<td>letter</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know the facts: there are debates and there are facts</td>
<td>Leave.eu</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best for our future</td>
<td>People’s In; Laurence Durnan on behalf of Best for Our Future Ltd.</td>
<td>leaflet</td>
<td>Remain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the future of Wales</td>
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2. Interviews

Table 6: British residents’ sample, Newham

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*participants who did not disclose their exact age
Table 8: Romanian and Polish residents’ sample, Newham and Tendring

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Interviews: Romanian and Polish residents (unrecorded interviews)

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Table 9: Local politicians and activists’ sample, Newham and Tendring

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<td>Conservative</td>
<td>Leave</td>
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<tr>
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Table 10: Selection of other key informants

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C. Data analysis

1. NVivo Codebook – interview analysis

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2. Example fieldnotes

Unedited fieldnotes

[notes start]

August 2018 in Jaywick

Today I had a full day in Jaywick, the most deprived place in the UK, situated in the Clacton constituency.

Most houses are mobile homes or caravans, the roads are not paved properly and there is lots of furniture, wood, and other items left outside houses. It is very different to anywhere else in the UK. It’s “Costa del Jaywick” - a deprived area where people live from today to tomorrow, but they live in strong community spirit and desire to help each other.

Dan, a local community leader who knows almost everyone in Jaywick, whom I interviewed last week, picked me up from Clacton-on-Sea station. Loud music, windows open, driving way over the speed limit.

We first stopped in the middle of a green space because Dan wanted to make a video. He posted it on Facebook, us saying that we are working together today, listening to people’s views about Brexit and immigration.

On the way, Dan used the horn excessively to signal his buddies walking along the narrow, bumpy Jaywick roads. ‘How are you bruv’, he stopped, window down, and spoke to a young guy. ‘Wan’a ride?’, ‘Later’, the guy said, and we were back on our way.

Then he drove to his house, on a narrow street with mainly small and what looked like mobile houses. His neighbours, a Polish couple with children, the only Europeans in Jaywick, as Dan says. The Polish woman was at home with children, but she was busy cleaning. As Dan approached her, she was carrying some black large rubbish bags from the house to the garden. ‘I’m kinda busy now’, she excused herself, ‘and my husband is sleeping’. Her husband works night shifts in a factory nearby and she takes care of the children at home. Dan said we'll come back later, and off we went back in the car and he drove to a local off-license.

‘There is a French lady owning this off-license, you should speak to her. We went in and Dan asked the woman at the till where the owner is. ‘She’ll be back in a few minutes, I texted her now’. Meanwhile Dan kindly bought me a can of orange Lucozade and a Nestle Aero mint chocolate. ‘What would you like to drink?’, he asked, and before I even said my answer, he said he will choose a nice drink for me.

While Dan was chatting to the woman at the till, I had a 20-30-minute conversation, unrecorded, with the French-born shop owner. A lady in her 60s, still with a noticeable French accent, she has been living in the UK for decades and in Jaywick for many years. She tells me how she stopped following the news, because Brexit is very confusing, she does not know if it will happen. This seems to be the large majority view in Jaywick and Clacton in general. Her main concern was seasonal work, especially farms. There are no farms in Jaywick, but there are some about 5 miles away, she said and ‘English people don’t want to work these jobs’. ‘Back in the day’, she said, ‘when I was younger, students tended to do these jobs in the summer. Now it’s EU migrants, East Europeans, Polish, Romanians and so on’. ‘You should speak to some of those people because they are affected more by Brexit, us around here are not really, there are very few migrants’. She said people ‘get on’ with each other in Jaywick, and, as every other person whom I spoke to in Jaywick, praised the community spirit in the area, people helping each other more than in any other place they’ve lived before.
In front of the shop, Dan says hello to a middle-aged couple. ‘You’ve got very nice sunglasses’; the blonde lady compliments me. Then Dan explains he’s with me that day as I am doing some research on Brexit and migration in Jaywick. ‘What’s your opinion on Brexit and immigration?’, Dan asks them. The woman says, ‘kick them all out, unless they behave’ and laughs. Dan, who previously expressed positive views towards migrants, approved “yeah, right”. I smiled uncomfortably, but probably seemed like a genuine smile as I was wearing loud blue sunglasses, matching my loud shiny gold shoes, which were complimented in the local community as well.

Next, we went to the local pub. Dan went in and introduced me to everyone in the pub. He spoke very loudly so everyone could hear. Everyone was drinking pints of various beer, lager and cider from opening ‘til close. When Dan and I arrived, it was around 3pm. Happy Club, a monthly meeting Dan set up for the people of Jaywick, was starting at 6pm, and the founders of the Happy Club were all at the pub: a woman and a man from East Ham, who spend a lot of time in Jaywick, Dan, and later on another local man.

There seemed to be no rules in Jaywick, from driving on the pavement to putting a pub table on the side of the street, to parking on double yellows. The people at the pub loved the sunshine, they were all tanned, and we spent hours in the hot sun at the outside table. The table was moving as the sun was moving, until it ended up on the street, as the shade covered the pub garden and later the pavement.

My first ‘proper’ interviewee was one of the people working at the pub. When we started speaking, he was still serving pints and the interview was interrupted all the time, including by Dan who said his phone number on the recording, a joke everyone laughed at. Dan prefaced my conversation with Tom [pseudonym], by saying him and Tom disagree on many things, but they are still good friends.

Tom indeed was not ‘typical’ of Jaywick, I thought since the first minutes, when he described travelling around the world and appreciating meeting new cultures. “I try to tell them they’ve been lied to [in the referendum]”, but he fails to persuade the majority of the pub clients.

Tom is an electrician by trade. He left school with no qualifications and got his technical qualifications later in life. He worked in a variety of jobs across the world. His two sons live on a boat in London. They all have a ‘travelling lifestyle’ and interacted with migrants of various cultures along their way in the waters and land.

While I interview Tom, Patrick [pseudonym], who lives in West Ham with Olivia [pseudonym], intervenes in the conversation every so often. Olivia says at one point, ‘Romanians everywhere’, when mentioning London.

This was not the best environment to interview, or certainly not the ‘middle class’ interview style where the interviewer sits in a quiet location with the interviewee and goes through the topic guide while the participant patiently offers answers and understands all the questions.

In Jaywick I realised that the demographic question asking whether someone identifies with a race, ethnicity or nationality is only straightforward for some people. ‘What do you mean’, several asked me, first being Dan. ‘For example, some people say English, some British. You can have a British passport, but you can identify as, say, English, Scottish, Welsh, European’. It was English when the football was on, British otherwise for Dan. I realised the ethnicity, nationality and race aware minds are taken for granted in research. In the same way as the meaning of the words ‘migrant’, ‘low skilled’ and ‘integration’ differs from participant to participant, the ideas of ethnicity and nationality require different degrees of explanation and can take various interpretations. ‘I identify with Nationality’, said another participant, and circled ‘nationality’ on the form, even if it had a colon, prompting the participant to write their nationality.

Off the record, Tom mentioned his correspondence with Clacton’s previous UKIP MP, Douglas Carswell. He did not have a good opinion of him. ‘Oh really?’, I asked, genuinely surprised, ‘most people told me he was a good constituency MP.’ “Yeah unlike the new one, he at least came to Jaywick to see us.”
What upset Tom was the response he got to an email he wrote about some local issues in Jaywick. Apparently, Carswell praised the ability of the email sender to spell properly. Tom felt he was insulted. ‘As if you cannot spell if you’re from Jaywick. He did not answer our questions though. I still kept those emails’.

Another man, who wondered on and off at our outdoors table to smoke cigarettes, told me “I don’t really follow politics, what is this Brexit?”, after I explain to him, he is left confused. Then I explain some concepts in politics. “You see, I am not interested in politics, but I could listen to you all day speaking about it”.

Dan came back from the beach bar, where he spent about an hour while I was interviewing Tom. The bar was broken into and about £3,000 worth of stuff stolen, so it was not his best day. ‘I told you I won’t leave you alone, I take care of you’, said Dan when he was back. As Dan knows almost everyone in Jaywick, he tried to stop some people walking past our pub table to ask if they want to be interviewed. Some expressed short opinions on Brexit.

I had a shorter interview, recorded, with Emma, who used to be homeless before she came to Jaywick.

Now she works and can provide a roof over the head of her five girls, ‘the only Black children in Jaywick’. I could see from Emma’s face she had a tough life: she seemed much older than her age, she had a few teeth left and she seemed very tired, but at the same time happy her story is listened to. We spoke as she smoked a few straight cigarettes at a table at the same pub. She had takeaway coffee and two of her girls were waiting. If her children were not waiting, probably she would have said way more.

Dan tries to persuade one of his friends to be interviewed. ‘It’s not TV, it’s just for university, come on’, he tries to persuade but without success. A rather scary looking, tall, tanned man, likely in his 40s comes to our table and looks me in the eye (lucky I had the sunglasses so he could not see my rather uncomfortable expression): “We voted out right???” he yells. “Yes, we did”, I said. “Then we are out! Nothing else to say!”, he yelled again and turned his back.

“Not everyone wants to speak”, Dan said, “Don’t worry, we’ll find other people”.

We returned to the group table with Olivia, Patrick, Tom and we were joined by a couple we’ve seen passing by before: Dean and his partner. I asked them whether they would agree to express their views on the recording and Dean agreed, but his partner said, ‘keep me out of it’. We had a conversation while Dean and his partner were sipping some cocktails they really enjoy. “It’s rum and WKD, really good.” Dean and I had to cut the interview short because they needed to leave. Same as many others, Dean also asked me to “explain what Brexit is in layman’s words”.

We are approaching 6pm, the time when Jaywick Happy Sands Club has its meeting. Patrick and Olivia go in their car to go to the venue, a church in Jaywick. I go in the car with Dan, and on the way, we stop at his house.

I’m surprised how everyone in Jaywick kisses each other on one cheek. Even strangers, like one of the women I interviewed did that. This did not happen to me ever when doing fieldwork in the UK, apart from that moment when I interviewed John, UKIP supporter back in the winter and he hugged and kissed me at the end. Jaywick seems to have such good community spirit, as everyone around mentions as well. If there was a theory that solidarity erodes when people are living in harsh conditions of poverty, Jaywick would be an exception?

Mick [pseudonym], one of Dan’s friends, came from the North of England to Jaywick for a wedding that week. He is waiting in front of Dan’s house, visibly hot from the toasty weather. Meanwhile, Dan shouts the Polish couple’s names again and a little girl appears in the window, smiling at me. A bit later, the Polish woman appears and says she is still busy and “Anyway I do not know anything about Brexit, maybe my husband does”. She really does not seem willing to speak and I tell Dan “maybe another day” and later on I tell him that I do not think the Polish woman is willing to speak about her views.
“How do I look?” Dan asks me. He was wearing tracksuit bottoms, an opened shirt, several chains around his neck and sports shoes. “Wonderful”, I say and he gives me a hug.

Mick gets in the car, Dan puts a box of ‘music for the club’ in the boot of the car and asks me to hold ‘the book’, a notebook which records what has been happening at every meeting. In the book, he has printed on waterproof material [plastic paper?] an article from a German magazine who interviewed him some years ago. I ask Dan if I could take photos of the pages and he is very happy for me to do that. He also gives me a flyer with ‘news from Jaywick Club’: “this may be useful for you”.

At the Church, some people are waiting. I notice a pale young boy dressed in an unusually pale green coloured tracksuit. There are a few people waiting inside and Dan and a few other volunteers start piling bags of free clothes on the tables. There is also free tea and coffee for the guests.

Before the meeting starts, I speak about three minutes with Olivia, whose main message is that life has become more difficult and it makes her sad.

Then I have a longer but unrecorded conversation with Rory [pseudonym], one of Dan’s best friends, a Remainer, who does a lot of community work in Jaywick to help people. Similar to other people in Jaywick, he had a positive attitude towards refugees, that I did not expect. I also feel that people are generally conflating refugees with migrants, and when I ask about ‘EU migration’ they think of refugees.

‘To those people who oppose it [migration], I tell them, what would you do if it was war in your country? Those people risk their lives, their children’s lives, they come here for a reason. When you put it like this, people understand.” UKIP and its materials during the campaign is what fuelled anti-immigration feeling in Clacton in Rory’s view. I had a friendly chat with Rory, also sharing a lot about myself, in particular about my partner and our disagreements regarding the Leave-Remain argument.

The meeting at the Happy Club starts with a visit from two Essex health representatives who give an interactive talk about HIV and also give away free contraception and tests for those who wanted to take one. The people there were engaged and interacted well with the presenters. Everyone learnt something, including myself, who did not know all the information about HIV they presented.

During the discussion, I sit next to Bred [pseudonym], another Remainer (at this stage I am truly surprised how many Remainer I encountered in one day in the most deprived area of the UK). He used to work closely with the council but retired early because he was “fed up with the anti-immigration rhetoric from UKIPpers in the council”. He has worked with Romanian and Polish people. He tells me “but you already know why we employ Romanians and Poles”. Why, I ask? “Because they work hard, they won’t take a break every hour and so on. We need this work ethic”. Most people in Clacton cannot be persuaded to think differently about migration. “I tried”, but with no results. He now works a part time job while being retired and has Polish colleagues. Attitudes have always been negative in this area, he reflects. One time, he invited an ethnic minority cricket player to sleep over at his house, and some of his British friends asked him after “what do you do with the bedsheets?”. “What do you mean?”, he asked them. They suggested he should burn the bedsheets in which the “dirty” ethnic minority person stayed.

After the talk about HIV, Dan takes over the floor and asks the participants to raise local issues. He is taking notes. One main issue raised was the lack of a children’s club where children could play games and be less likely to engage in deviant behaviour. There were other issues about car speeds and pavements in Jaywick.

Dan Casey, ex-councillor of Jaywick was present but I did not get a chance to speak to him. Rory briefly introduced me to him outside the church, but Dan was carrying some boxes for the meeting, but then, once he was in, Jaywick residents queued to ask him questions.
After all the time spent in the pub and in the sun, I was not feeling well, so when Dan asked me after the meeting, when some gathered to smoke outside, whether I want to speak to more people, I thanked him and said that is enough for one day. He offered to drive me back to Clacton-on-Sea station. But before he needed to pack the stuff inside the meeting, so I was left with Mick who was also smoking a cigarette. “So what do you think of Brexit?” I ask Mick, to have some small talk, as the silence was rather awkward. “I don’t really follow politics. I don’t even know who the Prime Minister is, apart from the fact she’s a woman”, he laughs. I try to explain but he continues with his thoughts “I only follow a guy called Tommy Robinson, do you know him?”. I paused for a second as I found myself in an ethical dilemma. Yes, I knew whom he was speaking about and I knew what the guy did. He was recently released from prison after an eventful summer of far-right marches and being portrayed as a working-class hero. I wanted to know why the only ‘politics’ Mick follows is Tommy Robinson so I said “Hmm, I think I heard of him, but I do not recall exactly what happened”. “He was sent to jail because of free speech”, Mick says. “What do you mean? What did he say?”, I ask. “You know he is from the area where there is a lot of Muslim rape and crime and so on and he just told the truth and he was jailed for free speech”. “I didn’t know you can go to jail for speaking”, I said and finished the conversation as it was getting quite uncomfortable and I was not sure I could hold my neutrality much longer.

"Are you coming back? We like people from London and pretty girls", one old man standing next to Mick and I asked, and I told him I may well be back to speak to more people soon.

Dan was ready, the car was loaded, and Dan, Mick and I drove to Clacton-on-Sea station. I was asked on the way whether I enjoyed my day, I thanked them for the hospitality and discussed a bit about disengagement with politics in Jaywick. “It’s politricks, not politics!” Dan started to shout around and Mick finally got the joke and laughed with us. “They make the money disappear!”.

“Have you seen anything like the Happy Club, Alex?”, Dan asked, and I said no. “Probably not like your politics clubs, here we help people with drug and alcohol addiction get a bit better. We do what we can.”

Approaching the station, Mick confessed he has an addiction to Pepsi Max Cherry - he drinks 6 litres a day. Dan did not understand how that was possible and they went into a long conversation.

Dan parked the car at the station, I shook Tommy Robinson’s fan hand, and Dan got out of the car to hug and kiss me on the cheeks and wish me a safe journey and best of luck. “Any time you come back, let me know”. “I will, have fun at the pub!”, I tell them, knowing they will return to the pub and drink until the early hours. “Most people here only care when they have sex next and when they drink next”, I remember Dan’s insight from earlier on, when we drove from Clacton to Jaywick.

[notes end]
3. Example of case description

Emily, British, Newham, Leave

“The thing I found in Newham over the years...no one really talks to anyone, you know.”

Emily is a 47-year-old white British woman, employed full-time and degree educated in the UK. She is not religious. She voted Leave in the 2016 referendum and still strongly supports Leave. She is a Conservative, but voted Green in the last elections, being disappointed with how Brexit is approached by the Conservatives. I recruited Emily via a Twitter advert and met in a coffee chain in East Ham. The recorded interview lasted an hour and we spoke some more after, while finishing a tea. Emily lived in Newham all her life but says she is unhappy and plans to move out of London once she finds a swap opportunity for her social housing.

Emily wants to take control of her life, but also of immigration. She voted Leave mainly because of immigration and thinks the ‘country is pretty much full’. She states that she is not someone who will have any positive story about immigration and her opinions have become more negative over time. While she admits there are some positives of being in the EU, for her, it is about what the UK ‘gives up in return for those great things’. The price is not worth it, in her view. Her generally negative views towards immigration are supported with anecdotal evidence from the local level, but also mediated through the press and community narratives. She used to work in the NHS and witnessed an overcrowded service, for which migrants do hold some responsibility (for instance, by ‘wasting taxpayer money’ through the interpreting services that are sometimes required). Migrants are also seen as putting pressure on other services: although Emily lives in social housing and does not think it’s easy to get a place, the media narratives of migrants taking advantage of free housing take are given credibility.

Newham is described as a ‘dumping area’ and is compared to wealthier boroughs which experience lower immigration. Emily has seen changes locally: a high level of immigration from India, followed by East Europeans in the late 1990s. The pattern of migration depends on the area of Newham. Emily lives in one mainly populated by Indian and East European people. Emily is opposed to the more ‘visible’ aspects of migration, referencing ‘centres’ which only cater to a specific nationality, religious or ethnic group. The hierarchy of migrants has refugees at the bottom (who are thought to mostly be ‘economic migrants’), followed by non-EU migrants and then East Europeans. East Europeans are seen by Emily to be more likely to be in work and to speak English, based on experiences with her East European clients, whereas non-EU migrants are more likely not to ‘integrate’ and not learn English, even after decades of living in the UK. However, East Europeans are also situated within a criminality and antisocial behaviour frame. The main local issue Emily is concerned about is crime and, based on community narratives as well as direct experience seeing men drinking on the streets, East Europeans are seen as contributing to criminality in the area. Referring to increased immigration and ‘segmented’ migrant areas, Emily comments that Newham has lost its sense of community and some British people do not feel they can express themselves openly anymore.

Emily expected migration to be lower after Brexit when she voted Leave, but now she thinks it won’t make much difference, because of the way Theresa May is handling it. She supports an ‘Australian points system’, underlining that she does not advocate for ‘stopping people coming into the country’, but instead for ‘having tighter controls’. These controls involve limiting access to welfare and also lowering the number of low skilled migrants, giving preference to UK-born workers in the labour market. She also points out that East Europeans are often paid below minimum wage and believes that if wages were set at the right level, perhaps there would be no skills shortage as British people would be more likely to work. Emily recognises that her knowledge of migration is based on local experiences, describing how someone like her from Newham may overestimate the overall number of migrants, compared to someone living in a low migration area.
4. Example of full transcript

**Theresa, British, Tendring (who also lived in Newham), Remain**

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>00:00:00.0</td>
<td>00:00:06.5</td>
<td>Ok, so first of all, did you vote in the EU referendum?</td>
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<td>And which way and why?</td>
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<td>I did</td>
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<td>00:00:37.3</td>
<td>I voted Remain because I remember what things were like before we were in the EU and they were absolutely awful. I voted to retain freedom of movement, I wanted to retain close links with Europe, with the European Union, I want to be part of the European Union, not an isolated country.</td>
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<td>00:00:37.3</td>
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<td>Do you remember any of the arguments about immigration?</td>
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<td>00:00:46.7</td>
<td>Yes, I do, I remember lots of them. Which ones do I remember?</td>
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<td>00:00:46.7</td>
<td>00:00:46.8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>00:00:46.7</td>
<td>00:01:57.2</td>
<td>One word: rapefugees, that’s all we heard, people speaking about refugees coming over raping our women, because women are possessions of these men, we don’t have our own agency, so they are defending their women from being raped. I remember mainly anti-Muslim sentiment, I remember lies about European people coming over here bringing wages down, I remember, and people just saying ridiculous things, absolutely ridiculous things, like my sister in law who voted, who said she was going to vote Leave because the company she works for threatened to leave the UK if we Brexit and she wanted to call their bluff because she just thinks they’re liars, and that was her reason for voting to leave.</td>
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<td>00:01:59.4</td>
<td>00:02:01.6</td>
<td>And how about in this area in Clacton?</td>
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<td>It was appalling, it was absolutely appalling. You had people open in the street, people started conversations with you, talking about immigrants, and just being hateful, really hateful, especially towards Muslims, for some reason it was a massive anti-Muslim feeling so yes, on the streets as well, much more than it was before.</td>
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<td>It is because there is a Muslim minority here in Clacton or was it more general?</td>
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<td>00:03:41.0</td>
<td>No, I think, just before the referendum, BBC News 24 picked up a story about some rapes in Cologne at New Year, they suddenly rehearsed this story for no reason and started playing this story back to back 24 hours a day every day so I think that didn’t help, people started talking about that as well, but yeah, the racism, it was appalling, the racism and hatred.</td>
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<td>Do you think people in this area were generally persuaded by that kind of argument?</td>
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<td>Yes, I do think they were, only because it’s scapegoating.</td>
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<td>00:04:21.4</td>
<td>And do you hear anything about migration from inside the European Union in Clacton specifically</td>
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<td>00:04:21.4</td>
<td>00:04:21.4</td>
<td>No. Never, no, it is about immigration generally, so I never hear anybody talking about the EU immigration, it’s always just about immigration and it’s usually about Muslims.</td>
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<td>00:04:20.0</td>
<td>So, nothing about Europeans?</td>
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<td>00:04:20.7</td>
<td>No, no, not here, no.</td>
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<td>00:04:34.3</td>
<td>I read quite a lot of negative press about people from Eastern Europe but</td>
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<td>00:05:33.8</td>
<td>So, his price was too expensive and then people from Eastern Europe had better prices?</td>
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<td>00:07:45.7</td>
<td>Do you have any East European neighbours here in this area?</td>
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<td>00:07:47.1</td>
<td>Not in this area. I don’t drive so I get lots of taxis and my son’s autistic so we have to get lots of taxis because he’s not very good going out and about and the taxi driver that used to pick us up, he was, I’m not sure if he was from Russia or one of the countries that came off of Russia but anyway, his wife is Polish and we used to have such interesting conversations and he became a friend and bought the company, the taxi firm, so he owns that now. [name], she lives in Harwich, not in Clacton.</td>
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<td>00:08:48.1</td>
<td>Some people say that there are a lot of migrants coming in, that you don’t recognise Clacton anymore.</td>
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<td>00:08:54.3</td>
<td>Oh, they are right, there are migrants from London, that’s who is coming in.</td>
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<td>00:09:02.9</td>
<td>So, it’s not so much EU migrants?</td>
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| 00:09:32.8 | No, you have to walk around Clacton and look around, there are no migrants, listen to accents, there are no migrants, in fact there are no
accents that are not East London, you don’t get any Scottish accents, you don’t get Welsh accents here, let alone anything else.

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<td>00:14:07.8</td>
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| 00:14:07.0 | 00:14:44.4 | [prompting about the difference between Western vs Eastern Europeans] That’s an incredibly interesting question actually, why? Because they were other, and I think it might be to do with geography, even though people in Eastern Europe are white European, geographically they are further away from England so they are other people, and often, they are dark, it may have to do with the fact that Eastern Europe was under the Iron Curtain for many years and, you’re young, you don’t remember this, but we had the propaganda that came out, that everyone under the Iron Curtain, was that these were
robots, these people were our enemies, and I think that was because Russia was so close, so everyone who was under the Iron Curtain was like something to be feared, and that still carried on.

00:15:52.2 00:17:04.0 [Asking about Commonwealth people and why some argue for a preference for Commonwealth migrants] Rubbish, they are lying to you, they don't like them, that's an excuse, they wouldn't like them either. [...] Look what they've done with Windrush, they loved them so much, they kicked them out of the country, absolutely disgusting. [...] With Australians, they are a racist country as well, awful people, actually, that's wrong, they are not awful people, but there is this awful racist attitude. [...] 

00:17:04.0 00:19:25.2 [EU referendum leaflets section] This is the thing, controlling our borders, we were not even in Schengen, we have control of borders, but anyway. [...] I know it's controlled; this is why I voted Remain. [...] That is such loaded language, so they are saying people from the EU come here for our benefits system, but we would stop them, this is what they are saying. [...] I stood behind a group of [people], someone says they're Polish, how do you know they are Polish? Oh, because they are speaking like that. How do you know the difference between Polish and Romanian and Lithuanian and Russian? You don't know the difference, you just heard someone speaking a different language, that's what you've heard, so you assumed that they speak Polish.

00:19:25.2 00:19:48.4 [continuing commenting on the Government leaflet] Drawing their child benefit and then sending it home, I just heard it so many times from people, as if they have seen it happen, of course they haven't seen this happen, it's an urban myth [...] 

00:19:48.4 00:20:48.0 [can you identify an EU migrant just by looking at them?] No, of course I can't [tell who's an EU migrant]. [So why can others tell?] Because that's what they want to believe and I never heard...people having a go at Eastern Europeans or Europe, they will use the word Polish, the Polish, you'll never hear them say the Lithuanians, the Romanians, it's the Polish, that's what they have the thing about.

00:20:48.0 00:21:17.6 [Why Polish?] I think it's when the wall came down, I remember all that as well [...] lots of Polish people, they were the first people to come over here, and I think that stuck in people's heads.

00:21:17.6 00:22:43.8 [Vote Leave leaflet reaction] Oh, what do I think about it? You know what I'm gonna say don't you? Bloody thing, 60 million Turks, oh no, that was about the Romanians, 76 million Romanians coming over here, then the Turks coming over here, of course, they are Muslim, aren't they, so they are all going to come over here and rape, this is what I noticed from that, Turkey joining the EU. [Have you heard people mentioning Turkey?] No, not around here, because they were general, apart from Muslims, so apart from Muslims and the Polish, those were the two things, so they weren't, but I heard about Turkey joining, and that was all over social media as well.

00:22:43.8 00:28:23.5 [explaining how some Leave supporters felt about the map presented in the leaflet] My grandfather is Jewish, so we happened to be born in West Ham because my mum's family is from there, we're from all over the East End, grandfather was Jewish and I remember as a child, being brought up in the East End, 18 years after the war ended, after the Blitz, those people were traumatised, the East End was absolutely traumatised. As I grew up in the 60s-70s, this is all they talked about, the war, Hitler, the Nazis, the Blitz, for obvious reasons, because they have been so traumatised, especially my grandfather who was Jewish. So, I was brought up with a big sense of understanding how bad the Nazis were. And yes, I was also brought up in a racist family,
yes, I would have been alright if I married a Jewish person [laughing], and my grandfather said to me, it’s your generation who has to make sure that this never happens again, this is where hatred leads. I didn’t take that seriously, I only took that to heart when the Berlin Wall came down, we had people [from Poland] starting to come here, it was absolutely wonderful, but then all of the sudden, you’ll see documentaries and newspapers of young people coming out from behind the Iron Curtain doing Nazi marches, and this was kind of, a bit shocking, and it worried me because it seemed to me that those people that were under Nazi occupation, that then went behind the Iron Curtain, it was almost as is people of a certain age, not so much the young people but people who have been young during the war and had been indoctrinated by the Nazi ideology which had invaded their country, somehow they [...] came out still with that Nazi, and I started to see the marches and it concerned me, I kept an eye on that, and I have been shouting, I have been telling anyone that would listen since the mid 1990s, the Nazis are on the rise again, they are rising again and they are rising in Europe and I’ve been fighting Farage, I’ve been fighting here as well, they wouldn’t let me near him down here, his minders won’t let me near him, I was putting out leaflets about who Farage was, what UKIP was, I was putting them through the doors, the leaflets, I was just having abuse given to me from people on the street because Farage is a Nazi and I’m trying to tell people he is coordinating, he is one of the big coordinators throughout Europe, the Nazis are coordinating, for God’s sake, and today, what happened, we hear in Austria, they are now putting Jewish people on a list, you have to, to actually register to get kosher meat, have you seen that? [...] They come for the Jews, they will come for me because I’m also a feminist, I’m a liberal, I’m a woman, I’m part Jewish.

00:28:23.5 00:29:55.5 [speaking about her campaigning against Farage in the local area] These stupid people believe him, that the multimillionaire elite is a man of the people, just because he smokes and drinks beer and you look at him and you know, behind closed doors, he calls anybody from Asia the p word, people of African Caribbean origin, you can just see it, and these people, they know, this is what they are attracted to, they know what he is and what he is like. I’ll just [wait?] until this generation is dead, and I’ve said that to my mum as well, [...] these selfish, racist, nasty, bigoted baby boomers [...].

00:29:55.5 00:31:30.6 When I was at school in the 1970s, [...] in the mid 1970s we had German exchange students come over. It was so embarrassing, awful, when they came over, they were greeted with Nazi salutes and heil Hitler and “we won the war” and every time they came in, you know, not so much the girls, but the boys would stand there and do Nazi salutes, that’s how it was like, I’m not joking, it is shocking, that is how it was like in the 1970s.

00:31:30.6 00:33:14.0 My older son is 29 and last year he went to, him and his friends, he has a number of German friends and he went over to Octoberfest [...] and he learnt German drinking songs so he could integrate with the young German people and I just thought, oh thank God, you know what, if I did one thing that was right in my life, it’s that I brought up this amazing young man, both of my sons are amazing. So we’ve gone from doing Nazi salutes to German people, to integrating, going over to Germany, looking forward to going Germany, having relationships with young German people, you know, getting into the spirit of things, that is why I voted Remain, and I think that’s a perfect example of where we were, and as far I am concerned, this lot are dragging us back to these days where we do Nazi salutes to people, where we could call people, I can’t even say it, the p word, where you
could go up to a woman and say, “oi slag”, because this is what I had [describing her negative experiences at work as a 16 year old].

00:33:14.2 00:36:34.1 [What does integration mean?] I can understand, I struggle with these two generations really. I was brought up in West Ham when it was white, just all white English, lots of Jewish people, but Jewish people were kind of, at the time, people accepted Jewish people, and then we had [the army] in Uganda throwing out all the Asian people, they had absolutely nowhere to go, so they came here. I remember people at Heathrow airport with signs saying “fuck off, go home”, not wanting them, and I remember those people with signs greeting those people [...] they were abused, they had even faeces put through their door, all of the sudden where we lived then, in Plaistow, there were a lot of Ugandan, Asian people coming into the area. They didn’t speak English, all of the sudden, people had gone from having just a white English area to an area they didn’t recognise, they didn’t understand what people were taking about, so I can understand why that upset people and I think integration in this country has been badly managed, I think it’s been, people have been told you must accept these people, you must accept them, but no attempt to help people integrate at all. So, I do have some sympathy, I do understand it, but then again, I kind of like different cultures so I quite like visiting mosques and I quite like sari [...] silk and all that sort of thing.

00:36:34.1 00:37:45.7 [explaining various ways integration is referred to by politicians] I would think people have to speak English, that’s the language of the country, but then most people do. There are pockets of people who prefer not to speak English, but they just tend to speak to their own community, so they are not out forcing everybody to speak Punjabi or Urdu or anything else. Yes, some people don’t want to speak English though, they shouldn’t be forced to, but then you are limited, you don’t have access to lots of things.

00:37:45.7 00:39:34.1 [Remain leaflet comments] This is what lost us the referendum. The Remain campaign lost us the referendum and I was working with them, volunteering with them, and in the end...not in Clacton, I wouldn’t do this in Clacton, because actually I was quite fearful, because of my son, fearful of violent retributions, [...] so I went to London to Basingstoke, and in the end I had to stop because I disagreed with their “talk to grandma”, it was the Stronger In campaign [...] and I was like, you know what, how patronising, how awful, actually I think it’s more than that. [Any thoughts on the argument on freedom of movement?] It is, and people over here coming and starting businesses and this is why I don’t understand this argument, yeah, we only want these skilled people coming in, what about those people who had no skills coming over here and now they do great businesses, you wouldn’t have had them here, you would just have chucked them out.

00:39:34.1 00:44:48.5 [Prompt on what “low skilled” means] Yeah but why would they want to come here? See, all this, they will still be allowed to come here, like we have this power, they don’t want to come here, why would they [...] they don’t want to come here and pick the fruit anyone, why would they, when they can go elsewhere? [...] Low skilled EU workers [...] I just think it’s awful, it’s just like, allowed low skilled, allowed seasonal jobs, it’s talking about these people as if they are lower forms of life [What kind of jobs they refer to?] Fruit picking, hospital cleaning, that sort of thing. [...] Low skilled means manual work that you need no training for [...] What these idiots don’t understand is high skilled workers.... if people were after benefits, they wouldn’t come here, because our benefits system is not the highest, they would go to somewhere like Germany. [...] People with high skills are not banging
at the door from Europe to get into this country because it’s just so wonderful, if you have a degree, a high degree, after Brexit, why would they want to come here? What about this country would be appealing, rather than go to Germany, or Italy, or Spain, or Austria, why would they want to come to little England? They won’t, but because there is this arrogance, this colonial arrogance we never got rid of, that they want to come here, of course, they would want to come here because we’re British, they love us, they admire us and they all want to come here, and it’s a fantasy they have in this country.

00:44:48.5 I don’t wanna live here. [...] I’m thinking to live in Scotland and I hope they get independence, but even if they don’t, 70% of Scotland voted Remain, Scotland welcomes immigrants so there is a massive European community in Scotland who are working [there], Nicola Sturgeon keeps saying we want immigrants, please, we want you here, so that’s why I want to go there.

00:45:32.2 [What do you think about local politics in Clacton?] I’m a member of the Liberal Democrat party who do really, really bad in here, in Clacton, it’s a battle between Labour and the Tories, so Liberal Democrats don’t even try really, why would they? [...] [local politician] He blocked me on Twitter, I was his constituent and he blocked me because someone said to me, until you go live in his constituency and know him, shut up, and I said well I am a constituent of his, I know him, and he said that he works really hard, no, he doesn’t work very hard [more negative comments about local politicians]

00:48:10.8 [Did you do any local campaigning, and did you hear anything about migration?] I did, but when I do campaigning, I do the leaflet drop, because I’ve said to the local Liberal Democrats, I don’t want to knock on doors [difficult to engage in conversations]. And I get really angry, so I don’t go out and knock on doors and talk to people. [The main arguments about immigration during campaigning] Immigrants? It’s about Muslims. [...] How many Indian takeaways have we got? Three, so probably about 9 people.

00:49:14.0 [I say that I also observe very little migration when I walk in Clacton] My son, it’s interesting, so he has no understanding about the impact of his words, and both my sons are anti-racist, I brought them up to be like that, so they are wonderful and, when we had a UKIP visit here and I was going around to talk to people, [...] we were on a bus and I think it was during the UKIP campaign here [...] Sky News was outside [...] and my son asked why are there cameras here, mum? And I said, oh, UKIP probably. The bus stopped, he got off, walked up to the camera and he went “fuck UKIP, they are racists” [...] and he is a very tall boy, he is 15, he looks 19-20, [...] at the time he was 13 [...] and I told the TV staff this is my son who is 13 years of age, please do not put that ok TV, he is young, he is vulnerable, he is autistic, he is just doing what he sees me doing, he is saying what he sees me saying and they said don’t worry, this is all recorded, we won’t put him on TV. But the bloke who was holding the camera said but he is right though, they are all racists. [...]
not going to, I am not going near ‘em, I am not going to work in a care home.

[headline on the 390,000 number] 390,000? Why is that so specific, is that something, that’s the amount of people who are coming here on benefits? [...] Uncontrolled, you see, uncontrolled, means chaos, it’s all subliminal messaging, it’s all subliminal, what uncontrolled means, chaotic, that’s what that means. [EU migrant number?] From the EU? 65 million in the UK, maybe less than half a million? [speaking about ID cards and why is hard to estimate migrant numbers from the EU] 3 million estimates Oh, I thought it was much less than that! [...] I think it does [depend where you live]. My mum, there are a lot of Polish people in Basingstoke, the Polish community there, and my mum goes, oh, they are all in there, jabbering in their own language, you can’t understand a word they are saying, when you are in the queue in Sainsbury’s, and I say, why do you listen, why are you nosey about people’s conversations anyway, honestly, why? So they speak in another language, I don’t notice who is speaking what in the queue because I am not listening in [both laughing] it’s true, I don’t notice languages mainly because I am not listening [...] if I go to Colchester, not here, and somebody has an accent, I will ask them where is the accent from because I am interested in trying to identify different accents. [Farage and his comment about people speaking in foreign languages on the trains] Yes, why are you listening to people’s conversations in the first place and why are you upset because you cannot understand what their conversation is about? [...] And my mum would say, you know, they could be plotting a bomb attack, you never know, and British people join ISIS for God’s sake.

[prompting about the links of the migration debate to the refugee crisis] And like I say, the BBC [story about refugees and rape] and after the referendum that story, they didn’t speak any more about the Cologne attack, they stopped, and I just think, it was all loaded, our own state TV was working for Leave and they still are. I am horrified by it, they’ve got Nigel Farage on Question Time [...] and they are allowing him to speak [...] Newsnight last night they had Gerard Batten on there and Tommy Robinson and all of that, and I just think, it’s just become a fascist mouthpiece now, it’s appalling.

[comments about Gerard Batten] [comments about Douglas Carswell]

[newspaper headline about deterring EU migrants post-Brexit] I don’t know. [...] On the one hand, I think yes, that a leaked document probably did come out saying to deter EU migrants but whether there is a plan to deter EU migrants is a different thing, because ultimately, the Government are aware, economically they need migrants in this country, but deliberately having this leaked document to keep their base going, to keep the hate going, to keep the anti-immigrant sentiment going.

[What do you think migration policy would look like post-Brexit?] I don’t think it will look any different, but I think we will keep having these leaked documents to make people think that he Government are stopping migration [...] they will try to persuade the people, this lot. [Is it persuasive?] Yes, because they are stupid, they believe what they are told about migration, does not matter [...] if the Government told we now got rid of 38 million migrants from this country, does not matter if they are from the Windrush generation, then people will believe it.

[continuing the conversation about migration after Brexit] The problem that you’ve got is lots of those people will be dead, my mum would be dead, my mum is 78, 79, she’s not going to live much longer so she won’t even notice. So I think after Brexit, attitudes will change anyway,
young people, like my son, who has never been political, is not political
because he [fights?] about Brexit, so he has started voting, he started
talking to people about leaving or about remaining, he started [...] we
will be back in the EU. [...] We’ll do it, one treaty at the time [...] and
then we will be, in all but name, we will be back in.

01:02:44.1 01:05:31.8 [news headline about the status of EU migrants after Brexit] People
come over here, and pay taxes all of their lives, for decades, 40 years,
30 years, pay taxes and [...] they have to fill in the form, and they just
got one thing wrong or there is a six months period in these 40 years
where they were looking after their mother or something [...] and they
are not allowed to stay here. Voters, some people who never worked
a day in their lives, who never paid taxes in this country, Leave voters,
my family who are Leavers, they are lazy. They have never had jobs;
they are sitting and smoking weed and talking about how all these
immigrants are taking their jobs and it’s not their fault and that they
can’t get a job because these immigrants. [...] I think the country is
split on this and I think it’s split down the same lines as the
referendum, those who voted Remain think it’s appalling, those who
voted Leave think they should just be chucked out. [comments on the
campaign leaflets presenting Leave being about future immigration
controls rather than those already here] See, I don’t know because I
am not in a Leave voting mindset, so I cannot really say [...] I don’t
want to get into their [family] mindset because I may get corrupted.

01:05:31.8 01:08:17.8 [How should migration policy look like after Brexit in your view?] If I
was in there? I don’t see what was wrong with migration policy
anyway. The issue is not the EU in migration, it was with the UN
because we had signed up to UN agreements that we would accept
certain amount of refugees into this country from all over the world,
those who are in danger so any issues people had with immigration
are to do with refugees, not with the EU migration, which is a UN thing
not so much an EU thing. [Any refugees in Clacton?] I don’t think they
are, I know there are in Colchester, Syrian refugees. [...] A number of
years ago, about 10-15 years ago, I am trying to think where they
came from, it wasn’t Syria, there were a number of refugees housed
in Clacton and they were housed in a hotel on the seafront. And for a
while, you saw, in the town, on the seafront, you saw a lot of, they
were men, men who didn’t speak English who were quite dark, Middle
Eastern, not Syria, wherever it was 10 years ago, there were about
300 of them in the hotel and they were put there for 6 months, and I
don’t think after any of them chose to live here. Once they got their
status, they went off to live in the communities, there are communities.

01:08:17.8 01:12:06.6 [Commenting on low migration in Clacton] There are very few. [Why?] Why
would anyone want to come here? I think two things, one, there
is no community here because people are very aggressive, it is an
elderly town, young people, young migrants, why would they want to
live here? Why would you and your young children live here? Would
you? No, of course you wouldn’t. If I was a migrant, I don’t even want
to live with these people. [So why did you choose to live here then?] I
came here 18 years ago, actually it might have been 19 years ago,
my sons are both autistic, we lived in east London, my son would walk
taking to himself, he’s quite vulnerable because he did not understand
socialisation, it was about the time, I don’t know if you heard about
Damilola Taylor, he was a young man who was murdered by some
young people, he was very studious, his parents were from Nigeria I
think and [...] he used to go to the public library to school and he was
coming back and he was murdered. And my son had just won a
scholarship to [London school], which was on the other side of the
river, so he would have to get a tube on his own and I was terrified of
him doing that. So I just wanted to move somewhere which was quiet to get him through school, that was the reason, because it was quiet, and I meant to move out, but then I got married to an idiot, awful man [...] I had my young son, and I got divorced, and now I am just waiting for my young boy to leave school, he is at the autistic school, so this time next year we will be going to live on a boat and I am self-employed, I am a jewellery maker, and I sell online so I have a small income stream and we will go live up in Scotland, I can’t wait. [chatter]

01:12:06.6  01:15:13.8  [Where do you get your news from?] I suppose yes, social media, I look at various persons on social media, I am fed up with the media. [...] I hear people saying two things after the referendum, a lot of Remainers kind of banded together on social media and I just rob my eyes, some, a lot of these people say we must reach out to these leavers, well I said to them, you can’t. [Those saying] we mustn’t accuse, we must reach out to these leavers, find a way, I said to them, you can’t, don’t tell me about Leave voters, I was brought up with the media. And the other thing is, they would say it’s all the fault of the Daily Mail, getting into people’s heads, no, my family never bought the Daily Mail, they were racist and hate filled without the newspapers. The newspapers don’t turn racist, they just bring out whom they were anyway. [So, what is it then, if not the media influence?] I think people are trained to scapegoat other people, people who are brought up in families, low achieving families who have been told to scapegoat other people, where the racist talk is normal, they have racist ideas. Why don’t I like that? Why, because, I was, until I went to work, I went to work in a bank. This was in the late 1970s, early 1980s, and who was working as accountants? The Ugandan Asian people that’ve been chucked out, they were many of them working there as accountants, and I got to know them and I got to know their stories about what happened in Uganda and then I got invited to their houses, and they invited me to try their food, so I tried their foods and I was invited to festivals, I have a degree, that’s why. [I mention about contact with the other]

01:15:13.8  01:22:34.8  My mum would go on about Muslim people and I say to her, how many Muslim people do you know, how many Muslim people’s houses have you been to? None, in your life, absolutely nothing. Oh, and my son had this silly awful girlfriend in Basingstoke and in Basingstoke, there are some Muslims over there, but very few and she said to me, what you have to understand, she is only about 20, talking to me like I am a child, what you have to understand is, it’s so difficult for young people, especially Muslim girls in this country because they are forced to wear hijabs at home and they have this very confused identity, and I said, I lived nearly all my life in mixed communities, let me tell you, these girls have no problem, they wear hijab at home and they have this very confused identity, and I said, I lived nearly all my life in mixed communities, let me tell you, these girls have no problem, they wear hijab at home and they take it off when they are not at home, they don’t have to be conflicted, there does not need to be a conflict of identity, they just get on with it, and they are not forced. [...] They wear a hijab at home for the same reason that we wear a top, we don’t walk around naked, we don’t walk around topless at home. And for them, it is the same thing, they wear hijab at home because it’s about modesty and it is about respect. We wouldn’t sit at the table at home topless and eating dinner with your family, over say going to the beach topless. You have no conflict of identity there, I wear it there, I don’t wear it there. [...] But I think there is this idea that there is this terrible conflict within British Muslims, people who have been born here, have this divided loyalty but then, they don’t. Generally, they don’t have a problem. [Bringing it back to how some of the reasons to vote Leave were linked to the Muslim population discussion] Of course, Turkey joining, all the Muslims in and all the refugees. I was not surprised really, on social media, and
out on the streets, and I've heard this out on the streets in Clacton as well, people laughing and cheering at pictures of children, drowned migrant children, babies, drowned, you know them, and I don't understand it, how can you cheer and say good, when you see a child that's drowned, I was trying to explain this to my mum who said [...] “it's always men who come over isn’t it?” and how could you just send your child on a boat, just think about it. As a parent, you have to choose between a certain death for your child where you are or the chance, there is a chance that they may be able to live if you put them on a boat, because I would do that, in that situation, because I adore my children, I would risk putting them on a boat. One, why is it men over here? Because, in places like Syria, women are let into refugee camps. What happens to the young men? They are taken into the army, there are no places for these young men, they will abuse the children and the women, but they want the young men to fight for them. It is the women who are saying to these young men, go, leave us here, we're alright here because we're in a camp, go, because either the Syrian Government or someone, or ISIS would grab you, that is why there are so many men over here, because they came here with the blessings of their mothers. [...] But there are women and children. [I draw some parallels with EU migration and how sometimes men arrive first and then bring families] And if you've got a family of a mother, a 22 year old son, a 40 year old mother and three young children, which one of them has the best chance of getting a job here and starting a life here, of course it's the young man [...] with refugees, people think of Calais, and of course there are economic migrants, people just thinking I fancy coming over, let's try over there, why not, it's a nice country, lots of beaches there, the benefits system, of course there are some people, but this is what they concentrate on, Calais. [...] I make a lot of and I collect clothes, I make hats and scarves and got them to Calais and Greece where the refugees are.

[commenting on the current Brexit negotiations] I find it laughable; you've got Dominic Raab, you've got all of these Brexitters saying it's not fair the EU is stopping us doing that, they are bullying us, no. You decided to stick two fingers, you said we don’t wanna be a part of you anymore, and now you’re complaining that you’re not getting all the benefits, I think it’s going appallingly [...] and on the 24th of December 2016 I made my decision to move to Scotland, when my son would have left school, I also started stockpiling food [...] and I have a massive big stockpile of food now, rice, pasta, tins, and they are all upstairs in my spare bedroom [...] and now all of the sudden people are speaking about stockpiling and I said, I’ve been doing that for ages, why didn’t you realise then that we will be going to crash out with no deal? [...] I'm happy to share some of that [stockpiled food] with people, but you have to go through this criteria, proof that you didn’t vote Leave, because I would see them starve, apart from my mum, but I would not help one of them [commenting about the people sitting in the busy cafe where we were sat] I come here at a lot and I usually sit over there away from people, because I look around, and this is my first thought, who voted Leave, who voted Remain? [Can you tell?] Yes. [How?] I'd say 90% of the time, it's elderly, you can just see, yeah, elderly. There is something nasty in their faces. [...] There’s two men there, two men in shirts sat there, I would question, I am not sure if they voted Leave, they possibly voted Remain because they look professional. [commenting on the demographics of the 2016 referendum vote]

[Comments on the Leave vote and education] When I went to work, I am the only person in my family to have got a degree, I am the only person in my family who had a job that was not a manual job. My
father was professional, he was an aircraft engineer, he’s done really well, so he had skills, but he didn’t have degree, very highly skilled but without a degree. I am the only person with a degree, and I am the only person who is not racist in my family. [Coincidence?] No, I think that is the reason. I was taught to think. I decided to do a degree because I had that kind of brain that would think critically, that would absorb information, that is able to disseminate, that is able to do an essay about a subject, for, against, conclusion, my mind pattern does that, this is why I was able to get a degree [...] so during the referendum, instinctively, I did an essay in my head, for, against, conclusion, and my conclusion was that the EU is really frustrating, it is not worth it, I am really, really annoyed with the EU about the refugee crisis, its inability to deal with that, it is condescending, it is slow to change, it is not fluid and dynamic because it is democratic, it is so democratic that it takes ages [...] so I don’t think the EU is a wonderful thing, it's frustrating and it's annoying, but we should be in. [prompting about her campaigning for Stronger In] Basingstoke voted Leave, only just and it was ridiculous, I was hearing ridiculous things from Leavers, which has proven a few of my prejudices against them. This couple, this young couple said, oh, we’ve got a bet on, each put £20 each in a pot, she was gonna vote Remain, he was gonna vote Leave, whichever won, had £40. And our country is being destroyed for that [...] my mum, my family are not the brightest people, not only academically, but generally, they are a bit thick. My mum thinks Angela Merkel is Hitler’s secret child [...] when I said to her, you know what, she wasn’t even born until after Hitler was and she was like I don’t know how they’ve done it, but they’ve done it. They’ve managed to do it. And I just looked at her and she really believes that, and this is why she voted Leave because Angela Merkel is Hitler’s child. [more comments on this topic and how these false claims spread on social media, how her mother believes the EU has a “Nazi plan”] [off topic conversation about watching TV and Love Island - she does not watch TV] [comments on how her mum believes the EU is funded by George Soros as well, comments on contradictory beliefs of the leave voters she speaks to] [off topic conversation about social media and antisemitic insults and conspiracy theories she observed online, including such language being used during the referendum] [conversation goes off topic and I disclose some of my experiences with similar issues]

01:34:50.4 01:39:27.2

The Jews have always been the number one target. And I’ve been screaming to people about this, I’ve been laughed at, I’ve been ridiculed, absolutely ridiculed and now it’s coming, and I just say to people, do you know what, it’s too late, it’s too late to stop it [...] you should have done it years ago when I told you to. [I try to bring back the conversation to speaking about Clacton] I find it very difficult to have a conversation, how can you have a conversation with those people about anything except Love Island [TV programme], they don’t understand. They just don’t understand, you can’t talk to them. During the referendum, 25,000 people in Tendring voted Remain, that’s a lot of people, 25,000 people, not just in Clacton, in Tendring, where are those people? I talk to people from Clacton who are in the Liberal Democrats, some, I talk to the Labour Party, some of them are in the Labour Party, but very few of them, so I talk to people that I know, who are Remain, about these issues, but [Leavers] they don’t listen, they don’t listen. [The Labour vote in Clacton] got slightly bigger, but then, I was in the Labour Party. I was a Labour Party activist for a lot of years. One thing I noticed was the racism in the Labour Party, just general, casual racism [prompted, where?] Locally, when I was in Basingstoke, in there, so when Labour voters went over to UKIP, I
wasn't surprised. My father was a Labour voter, my father was a trade unionist, my father was a trade union leader, he was dreadfully racist. [...] I left the Labour party when Jeremy Corbyn was voted in, he is antisemitic [a few minutes on what antisemitism means and why people contest the definitions in the Labour party, the differences between being against certain policies of Israel and being against the state of Israel]

| 01:39:27.2 | 01:41:34.5 | I am estranged from my family, I have nothing to do with any of them, my father died two years ago, just before the referendum, now, he was Remain, but he was racist. That was because my father was brought up in the Blitz, [...] he understands the need for unity within the EU, so he was very, very pro-Remain, but he passed away. At my father’s funeral, one of my father's brothers came up to me and said, you got rid of me on Facebook, you blocked me off Facebook and I said yes, I am well aware of that, and he said why, and I said, it’s because you are a Nazi, you post Nazi propaganda and I don’t want anything to do with Nazis, I don’t want to have anything to do with you, and he just said to me, silly, and I just walked away [off topic conversation about free speech, both share some thoughts]

| 01:41:34.5 | 01:43:00.7 | This is another thing, people who have lived here, who are naturalised, who have citizenship in this country, have paid taxes for years, are apparently now, they have no right to a say in anything [...] All of this stuff, all of these oh, PC, it’s all gone too far, freedom of speech, it's always said by people who want to call people the p word, the n word. I remember a time when people, Afro-Caribbean heritage, the Windrush generation, had to endure people in their workplace, people doing monkey noises at them, running around doing monkey impressions, putting bananas around, that was legal, that was acceptable, that was stopped, quite rightly, people who are complaining about this PC stuff, they want to go back to it, they have never gone over not being allowed to do things like that [...] [some questions about the PhD research]

| 01:43:00.7 | 01:46:58.3 | Have you interviewed anybody like me in Clacton? [I interviewed someone who votes for the Green Party who was very Remain, I interviewed some UKIP supporters, but generally it’s a lot of people in the middle [...] ] [some questions about the PhD research] I have to say that probably today my views have been excessive, simply because I don’t get a chance too often to openly talk about these issues in my own town. So, I may be just... on another day my views might be kind of, so this interview has been started by my delight being able to express my views in my own town. [Me: Oh, that’s really interesting, because people on the UKIP side said they can’t express their view because they would be accused of being racist. And then people on the Lib Dem and Green party side, they also can’t express their views because then the people who are on the UKIP side won’t accept what they say or won’t listen to them] I don’t think they are all racist, half of them are just stupid [laughing] [Me: Yes, not every single person who voted leave voted for immigration, I met a couple of people who said different things, also on the left, there are some left Brexit arguments as well, that’s not the same as the UKIP argument [...] Lexit, yeah that’s another bonkers thing, this is disaster socialism, let’s come out and then the country would crash and then suddenly socialism will rise up and comrade Corbyn will be able to live happily on a flat rate working for the state, what’s not to like? [conversation goes off topic to Labour and Corbyn]

| 01:46:58.3 | 01:50:12.5 | Who do I vote for? The Conservatives, who have led the most appalling dog whistle hate campaign or Jeremy Corbyn who wants us to be Venezuela? Which one? I don’t want either of those, thank you. I’m just going to live on my boat and live in a commune of one. I’m a
hippy so, ultimately, especially when I get my boat, I will live completely off grid, I will sell my goods [chat about self-sufficiency and how she grows her own vegetables on free land which no one uses] The country can go bankrupt, I couldn’t care less. [chat about food and potential food shortages after Brexit] Why can’t we grow our own? Well, one, who is going to pick then, cos you won’t, you won’t get off your backside and pick them, and two, to feed this country, we would have to take up over half of the free land [...] people will have to bring immigrants in [...] I don’t understand why can’t they see it.

01:50:12.5 01:54:18.6 [I try to bring back the conversation to post-Brexit migration policy mentioning non-EU migration and future trade deals] And they will be brown people. To be really honest, before my plan was, when I get my boat, was to be as self-sufficient as possible [...] but I had plans in the summer months to make some extra money fruit picking [...] my sister who also was not racist, she was exactly like me, she was diagnosed at 39 with breast cancer [...] but she died when she was 48, before she died, she divorced her husband of 20 odd years and she married a man 15 years younger than her [...] and she moved to Spain [...] and they used to pick olives and this is how they lived, they worked their way around [...] and this is the other thing, people saying oh they come over here and they get our free healthcare, yeah, if you go over to another EU country you have to pay for it all, no - my sister died in Spain, she was given the most incredible end of live care by the Spanish nurses and doctors, they were wonderful to her. We didn’t pay a penny; she didn’t pay a thing. All she had to do was her passport, that’s all she had to do [continuing conversation about her sister] But yeah, people think you have to pay, in Spain you don’t. [I put forward the argument I heard from some Leave supporters that British migrants in Spain are rich and supporting the economy] Lots of people in Spain voted Leave, how mad. My friend [...] said that a good friend of hers lives in France and voted leave and when she asked why did you vote leave, she said oh, it’s because of all the paperwork, and she said, oh, all the paperwork you have to fill in for the EU, you know, I voted to come out of it, so I don’t have a referendum anyway.

01:54:18.6 01:56:32.9 And the other thing, I was arguing on Twitter for 10 minutes with some idiot boy, Leave voter, who said [...] I don’t remember you protesting when we were dragged against our will, we joined the EEC, when John Major dragged us in the EU and I said, I’m 55 right, I was there, you are 18, you’ve got no clue what you’re talking about, we were not dragged into it. In 1992, John Major went to have a general election, he had signed the Maastricht Treaty, which took us into the EU, his election manifesto was fought on that Maastricht Treaty [...] if you vote for me, that is a ratification, that would be taken as you accept the Maastricht Treaty, he was duly returned, I remember the time and it was the only time in my life when I voted Conservative. I voted Conservative to ratify that Maastricht Treaty [continuing chat about that election and Labour’s position]

01:56:32.9 01:59:30.0 [final part of discussion about how she knew the EEC was to become the EU] We agree with things that benefit us, but we don’t agree with things where we have to give anybody anything, that’s basically what it comes down to. [chat about sovereignty, she claims the UK never lost sovereignty, then the conversation moves to speaking about Jean Claude Junker and Guy Verhofstadt and why she thinks the UK will be back in the EU] [participant announces she has to leave and recording stops]